



hms school news

HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy • Founded 1882
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania • OCTOBER 2019

A Message from our new President, Tom Quinn

After an exhaustive search, the HMS board of directors has chosen Tom Quinn, an individual whose expertise encompasses traditional academics and expressive arts education, to be the new president of HMS. Tom brings not only a wealth of educational, non-profit and arts leadership experience, but 15 years of partnership with HMS, working to build our award-winning Expressive Arts Program. During these many years, he developed a powerful connection to our students and our mission, and will use his skills and experiences to lead us into our next chapter. Please join me in welcoming Tom to HMS. —Marie Logue, HMS Board Chair



When I first entered the doors of HMS 15 years ago as a teaching artist with the Walnut Street Theatre, and later as its director of education, I never dreamt that I would one day serve here as President. What I did know though, was that HMS is a unique and special place. The students, the staff and the quality of the school itself made an immediate, indelible impression on me that touched my heart. To this day, my experiences at HMS remain the best of my entire career. Driving my enthusiasm for this challenging new role is the desire to positively impact the lives of our students.

My long history of involvement here is the foundation of my commitment to our students and an important complement to my background as a teacher, academic administrator and business leader. In my role as teacher and educational administrator, I have spoken fluent education-ese, and have been in IEP meetings as both a teacher and a district representative. In addition, my political experience informs my ability to serve as an effective advocate.

...Continued on page 7

Also In This Issue

Parent's Corner	2
Dance Movement Therapy	3
Extended School Year Program	4
HMS Happenings	5
Driving to Learn	6



Parent's Corner

The Torres Family: Kim, Denice and Sierra



Sierra "on air" during our Fox 29 Kelly's Classroom broadcast.



Sierra during a theatre workshop.

Our daughter, Sierra, came to HMS at the age of 18. Previously, she attended a wonderful school for children with special needs, and although the staff and teachers there were terrific, Sierra was not getting what she really needed: a focus on everyday communication skills. Like many children with cerebral palsy, Sierra is nonverbal. From the age of one, we introduced her to touchscreens and then communication devices. She became a whiz at finding items on her communication device when asked, but rarely used it to tell us what she wanted, either proactively or when prompted with a question.

Last year, when we first visited HMS, we were impressed that students were constantly encouraged to use their "voices." It began with the expectation to say, "Good morning," or another greeting. After Sierra started at HMS, over just a few months, she began

to proactively say things like, "I have to go to the bathroom" or "I want to go on the train." After just one year, not only is she communicating more, but she actually wants to *do* more! Last Saturday, we went on a train ride, shopped at Costco, and then went out for dinner. In the past, doing just *one* of those activities would have been too challenging.

We live over an hour away from HMS so commuting is not easy. But, this sacrifice pales in comparison to the many benefits and the progress we have seen in Sierra in just one year.

Our daughter is thriving at HMS. Her teacher, Kevin Rafferty, and the entire staff are dedicated, caring, and passionate about what they do. Our daughter is so proud of herself and there are no words to describe how happy and proud we are of her. We are so grateful we made the decision for Sierra to attend HMS!

More than fun and games

Dance Movement Therapy at HMS

“I’ve got a song in my tummy and it wants to come out...” At the sound of this familiar tune, joy spreads through special education teacher Caroline Curtis’ classroom. Her seven- to nine-year-old students know that a great time is in store with dance movement therapist Rachel Morales, and they can’t wait to use the scarves, colored ropes and ribbon-trimmed hoops that she brings.

This session is much more than a good time, however. During the weekly class, students are challenged to stretch, reach, balance, straighten and hold their heads up for extended periods—formidable tasks for those living with movement disorders. And although exercise is good therapy for everyone, it’s particularly crucial for people living with chronic muscle tightness, spasticity or pain. Dance movement therapy also has social and emotional benefits. They include practice following directions, sustaining eye contact, contributing to a group activity and improvements in confidence and self-esteem. All HMS students participate in dance movement therapy weekly, and may also have individual, one-on-one sessions. Some older students perform with Drexel University’s Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts and Design, and also dance with semi-professional high school-age dancers of Philadelphia’s Fusion 2. (see photo)

Rachel, a masters-level, certified dance movement therapist, is a clinician who focuses on the correlation between motion and emotion, and recognizes movement as a way of communicating and expressing. “I design each class based on the group’s developmental level, chronological age, physical capabilities and emotional responsiveness,” she says. “After the session, each student is evaluated and progress is formally reported to parents four times a year.”

Support in Action

Dance movement therapy at HMS School would not exist without the generosity of our donors or substantial foundation support. HMS School’s Dance Movement Therapy program is partially funded by a grant from the Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation. Money from this grant and our donors enables HMS to provide enhanced programs and services like Dance Movement Therapy that go beyond the traditional scope of our special education core services.



HMS students perform with the high school-age dancers of Fusion 2, a program directed and choreographed by Katie Bank, DMT of HMS. “Performing is very empowering,” says HMS dance/movement therapist Rachel Federman-Morales. “The students feel the adrenalin rush, the nerves, the pride. Like any student in a school show, they’re showing what they can do. For a child whose life is spent in a wheelchair, that is an amazing accomplishment.”



Left: Rachel at a dance movement therapy session with students.

Below: Student Zaden Jones enjoys a relaxing stretch during a Dance Movement Therapy yoga class. At right is Kerri Hanlon of Yoga Home in Conshohocken, PA.



Extended School Year blends learning with summer fun

Summer breaks are a time for barbecues, fun with friends and long, lazy days. But during an extended school vacation, some children with special needs can easily lose the social, physical, communication and academic skills they've worked so hard to acquire.

HMS' Extended School Year (ESY) program helps students maintain these skills...and does it with fun, summer-themed activities that typically include outings and musical performances, as well as expressive arts programs and traditional speech, occupational and physical therapy. The ESY program is open to all students with complex physical disabilities, even those who are not enrolled at HMS during the regular school year.

Anahoe O'Connell first came to HMS as a pre-teen ESY student and was helped to learn how to use an augmentative communication device. "ESY taught us what Anahoe really could do and what we should expect from his education," says his mom, Ashana O'Connell. Today Anahoe is 17 years old and a full-time residential student. "HMS is a place where Anahoe is not made to fit in to be like other kids because everyone there is just like him. It was a leap of faith, and we've had the best possible outcome," she says.

The first ESY session, which begins in June soon after the end of the regular school year, includes a day program and a boarding option. Some families of teenagers find this to be an ideal way to try out a short-term residential program, getting an experience similar to that of "going away to college" while benefitting from the expertise of our educators and therapists. The second ESY session begins in mid-July and is a day-only program.

If you know a child between the ages of 5 and 21 who could benefit from our ESY program, it's not too early to begin planning now. For more information, please contact Diane Taylor, Admissions Coordinator at 215-222-2566 or at dtaylor@hmschool.org.



ESY students practice their social and communication skills by running an Alex's Lemonade Stand over the summer months. This year, they raised \$2049.19 to help combat childhood cancer. Pictured above are ESY participants Andrew Burkley at left and Kevin Dall.



Anahoe O'Connell came to HMS as an Extended Year student. Anahoe and his family were so pleased with his experience that he is now a boarding student. Above, Anahoe receives the special device made for him by the students of Temple University's Occupational Therapy program. He enjoys delivering mail throughout the school building, and this adapted mailbox allows him to do it more easily.



ESY student Mary Grace Sheaffer and recreation aide Gianna Gambuti, RT, enjoy a performance by Ryan Nelson of Gooch and the Motion.





HMS HAPPENINGS



Left, top: The 2018-19 school year closed with an awards program. Student Gabriela Buentello receives her award from special education teacher Kristin McKeown, at left, and teaching assistant Dianna Smith.



Left, middle: Spring Dance attendees Ashley Overton and Aaron Kuhns.

Left, bottom: Student Kristin Stauffer and personal care assistant Tiffany Hoggard dance up a storm at our Spring Dance, themed, "Out of this World."

Right, top: The HMS Fourth of July Parade is a festive event. Special education teacher Courtney Grimes celebrates with student Damir Brown.

Right, bottom: Meteorologist Katie Fehlinger of CBS3 visited HMS as a guest reader and treated us to a recitation of *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*.



Driving to Learn

When students propel themselves, learning is enhanced

HMS student Eddie Verrati loves movement. Routinely his therapists secure him into a specially-outfitted power wheelchair and using his head to access a switch on its headpiece, Eddie moves the chair to deliver a package from his classroom to an adjacent one.

Eddie is a participant in HMS' *Driving to Learn* program, which gives students supervised driving experience in a power wheelchair in order to gain developmental benefits, language skills and improved tool use, as well as a deeper understanding of cause and effect.

Children typically benefit from this kind of learning as infants when they discover that their bodies can move and that they can control where they are. Their understanding of movement, space and language is enhanced when they realize they can purposefully move towards a beloved parent or pet. Words like "here," "there," "come," "stop," "near" and "far" gain meaning. Children who cannot walk often gain these skills by learning to drive a wheelchair, as many HMS students do, but some with very complex disabilities lack the opportunity to learn this goal-directed movement. That's where HMS uses *Driving to Learn*.

Our school tries to give every student experience using a power wheelchair whether independent power mobility is on the horizon in the near future or not. "Driving to Learn enables our students to move and direct their movement," says occupational therapist Janice Barbour. "It's a way for us to give them immediate, multi-sensory, full-body responses to their actions. When they hit the wheelchair switch, boom! They experience movement, their view changes, sounds change and they can better understand their place in the environment."

The learning associated with *Driving to Learn* takes place over years, not months. It's a complex process for both the student and staff. According to physical therapist Kate Paul, finding the best way for a child to access their environment in this way requires the expertise of a comprehensive team that includes a special education teacher, occupational therapist, physical thera-

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Eddie Verratti is thrilled to move in a power wheelchair. Although he is not in training to become an independent wheelchair driver, Eddie's teachers and therapists use these experiences to help him better understand words like, "stop" and "go"...words he doesn't normally hear because he doesn't need to.



Special Education teacher Ed Contaldi works with student Amir Epperson. Ed encourages Amir to follow him, creating an opportunity for the student to better learn cause and effect from his movement.

.DRIVING TO LEARN, Continued

pist, speech therapist and assistive technologist.

When the student first begins, the switch is placed where he or she is likely to hit it by accident, initiating motion. This reinforces that their actions can cause movement. The team then helps the student target the switch purposefully. Students are motivated to participate using things they enjoy, such as the opportunity to hear music or the sound of bubble wrap popping under the wheels of their chairs.

The program is also an effective way to help the student to learn how to use tools. In this case the tool is a switch—which can also be used engage in conversation using a communication device, or to play music, turn on a television or operate lights.



Student Abel Tyson loves music, so special education teacher Chris Stern plays the tambourine along with music from an iPod to encourage him to turn in that direction. This sensory experience motivates Abel to participate in the Driving to Learn Program.

“This is a critical skill for all of the kids here,” says special education teacher Chris Stern. “It contributes to their quality of life by giving them some element of control and a chance to actively engage.”

This article is an abridged version of one that originally appeared in the May 2019 issue of Exceptional Parent magazine. To read the full article, visit www.ep-magazine.com/archive.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, Continued from page 1

It's an honor and a huge responsibility to join HMS. As you are well aware, I've got an outstanding track record to uphold and build upon. Diane Gallagher and her wonderful team have made HMS the excellent school that it is today, one that is recognized as pre-eminent in the field.

I am eager to work with our board, staff, donors and volunteers, and look forward to helping to extend our reputation, not only as an exceptional place for the education and care of children with cerebral palsy, but as a premier resource for others who provide services to children with neurologically-based disabilities. I also look forward to helping our staff recruit children with the greatest potential to benefit from our programs.

HMS has enabled me to grow and progress in the field of special education and I am extremely grateful and excited by the opportunity to lead this wonderful school into the future.



HMS President Tom Quinn gets to know Student Council President Josh Johnson.

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Marie Logue | *President of the Board of Trustees*

Tom Quinn | *HMS School President*

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HMS School is nonsectarian, admitting/serving students from any locality without regard to race, color, religion, disability [except as limited by PDE program approvals], ancestry, national origin, including limited English proficiency, age [within school ages] or gender.

HMS School educates, nurtures, and cares for children and young adults with complex physical disabilities resulting from cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury or other neurological impairments, with the goal of enabling each to reach his or her maximum potential. We promote independence and improve the quality of life for youth in a safe and secure environment so each can lead a fulfilling, stimulating life now and as an adult.

Please consider a gift to HMS School through your organization's United Way campaign by designating HMS as the recipient. HMS is #00240 on the donor choice form for the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey and is listed on the UW website, www.uwsepa.org. HMS is also eligible to receive United Way funds from other regions.

Donate today to help our students achieve their communication, mobility and learning goals – and to make successful transitions into adulthood. Your donation will help to cover many program expenses not covered by public funding.

REASONS to support HMS School:

- ✓ **ur talented staff of experts** in education, assistive technology, healthcare, and the therapy disciplines
- ✓ **ur transition program** that helps to prepare students for adult life
- ✓ **ur nurturing learning environment**, tailored to each child's individual needs
- ✓ **ur boarding program**, where students enjoy peer activities that are essential for adult life, and 24-hour care
- ✓ **ur Extended School Year program** that helps students build on their goals in a stimulating summer learning environment
- ✓ **ur expert consultation services**, which benefit children with cerebral palsy in their local school districts

To make your gift, use the enclosed envelope, visit www.hmsschool.org/donate or contact Cheryl Molle, Development Manager via email at cmolle@hmsschool.org.