



hms school **news**

HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy • Founded 1882
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania • WINTER 2020



We're in this together

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President's Message

First off, I hope you and your family are safe and well during this challenging time for our world. To say these are unprecedented times is to use a well-worn cliché at this point. Since March, all of our lives have been changing on a daily basis. Our first priority from the beginning has been the health and safety of all HMS students and staff and each and every one of their family members. The potential reach of the virus into our school and our homes has been on all of our minds.



After our forced closure in March we spent the spring and summer making physical changes to the building to allow for more space. We also researched and purchased the needed protective equipment to keep students and staff safe. After creating a plan to bring students back in a hybrid model—with some students attending each day—we made the very difficult decision to recognize that due to the continued danger of COVID-19, and the unique nature of our school, the best course of action was to remain in a virtual format for the first half of the school year. Our current hope—depending on the state of the virus—is to offer in-person instruction and therapy for students starting on February 1, 2021. Until then, we continue to offer our programming virtually. It is incredibly disappointing to not experience the hustle and bustle of our school building each day, but the decision was made to remain virtual for now so that no student or staff member is in danger because they came to school.

Despite the challenges we have faced in the past seven months, I am very proud to share with you how the staff of HMS have responded to this crisis. Since mid-March when the order was given to close all PA schools, our staff has jumped in to provide a steadily-increasing level of virtual education and therapy. March and April were all about responding to the emergency and making sure we maintained contact with students and beginning to meet their needs virtually. Our summer

Extended School Year program increased both our proficiency and connection with students and this start to the school year has seen our virtual offerings to students more than double from the summer. All of us know that virtual learning is far from ideal for our students, but the creativity and resiliency of our staff and students has been inspiring (see story on page 6). We continue to do our jobs in now providing education, therapy, music, art and social opportunities virtually for our students.

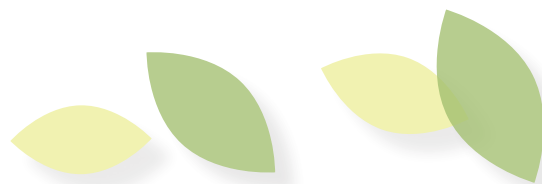
Friday activities continue, plans for holiday celebrations and even our morning announcements as various staff members—myself included—take turns recording messages to be played at the start of each day. Mine feature a special guest star—all nine pounds of our dog Fettuccine! The spirit of HMS and the commitment to our community is as strong as ever and I thank each of you for your support.

These are difficult times, but I have always believed in hope. One of my favorite quotes is from President Obama when he spoke at the 2004 Democratic Convention. He said,

“Hope—Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope! In the end, that is God’s greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation. A belief in things not seen. A belief that there are better days ahead.”

I don’t just have “hope” for both our present and our future. I have a certainty that better days are ahead and look forward to sharing those days with all of you.

—Tom Quinn



On our cover

Special education teacher, Courtney Grimes welcomes students to her virtual classroom.

Dear Friend of HMS,

This December marks the end of my tenure on the Board of HMS School, which has been an incredibly fulfilling experience for me on many levels. I joined the Board in 2010 and have had the privilege of serving as Chair of the Board for the past six years. My service has given me an opportunity to work closely with the dedicated and talented men and women on the Board and with both Diane Gallagher, our long-time President, and Tom Quinn, the current President. The work has been challenging, particularly this year, as HMS School (and the entire world) faced the many challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. At times, it seemed as though we faced insurmountable odds at almost every turn, but the HMS community never lost sight of the needs of the children and families we serve, and we adapted, persevered and remained true to our mission.

I have always had (and will have) a strong personal connection with the students at HMS School, as my late, older brother, Stephen, had cerebral palsy and growing up, I witnessed firsthand the challenges our students and their families face each and every day. I 'see' Stephen every time I am on campus and have a chance to interact with our students, delight in their achievements and marvel at the way they embrace every day. I know that the work we do on behalf of the HMS students and their families has a meaningful and positive impact on their lives.



Marie enjoys a moment with alum Gregory Viola and student Ashley Overton.

It is difficult for me to choose my "favorite thing" about HMS because the list is long and I love everything about the school. However, I will always cherish my memories of the annual holiday show and our graduation ceremony. In the first instance, the celebration of the holiday season at HMS and the pure joy displayed by our students as they perform fills my heart with gratitude and warmth. Similarly, our annual graduation ceremony affords all who attend a chance to delight in the achievements of our graduates as they leave HMS for the next phase of their lives, acknowledge the commitment and hard work of our faculty and staff, and reflect on all that the HMS community at-large does to make the work we do possible.

In closing, I want to thank Tom Quinn, the senior team, the faculty and staff, and my fellow Board members for their hard work, partnership and friendship. You set a high bar for yourselves, each other and all of us. This is challenging and stressful work, but you press ahead and challenge us (and each other) to do better at every turn. It is a testament to

you and a wonderful example to all of how great things happen here at HMS School.

My heartfelt thanks to all of you,

— Marie T. Logue, Chair



Congratulations to our 2020 graduates!

We are immensely proud of each of our eight graduates, and the outstanding work they've done to further their communication, social, mobility and cognitive skills. Our teachers, staff and fellow students wish them all the very best as they continue to hone their abilities and pursue their special interests.

Aaron Kuhns

Says his teacher, Courtney Grimes: "Aaron has been at HMS for just under two years, but has learned and taught us so much. He is an active member of his Bethlehem, PA, community and quickly became a part of our HMS community. He was voted sheriff for this school year and has done a tremendous job. He uses his communication device to advocate for himself and participate in school activities. He is the head "social butterfly" in class, and loves to show off his smile and laugh with all of us. He is a great classmate, student and friend to so many at HMS."



Danny also loves stretching and relaxing during yoga, and has many friendships at HMS."

Ryan Law

Says his teacher Paige Knowles: "Ryan has developed such a love of learning during his years at HMS. He consistently says "Yes," to school—always rising to the occasion to try new activities, socialize using his speech generating device, and build relationships with peers and staff. Ryan is resilient! He is a great role model to others on how to face and overcome challenges with strength and positivity. Not to mention, Ryan and his family have tremendous school spirit, and fully participate in all HMS dress-up days and Halloween celebrations!"



Danny Lauria

Says his teacher, Courtney: "Danny is always ready for class with a smile. He loves to be social and talk in his British accent using a communication device. Danny's family are big fans of musicals, and he brings his love of these shows to class with Musical Mondays when he and teaching assistant, Holly, play songs and videos on the computer."



Brett March

Says Brett's teacher Courtney, "Brett is a young man who knows what he wants and is not afraid to ask and advocate for himself. He and his close circle at HMS have worked hard over the years to build trust and an understanding of who Brett is. He loves his



family and talking about his dog, Sulley. Brett enjoys being connected with his family through Skype, and getting mail. His smile and continuous drive will be missed. Best of Luck, Brett!”

George McLin

Says his teacher, Paige: “George brings so much life, happiness and excitement to HMS! He has an infectious smile that can turn anyone’s day around. George is a constant source of motivation and positive energy for his peers. He encourages them using his speech-generating device, and is often the first to volunteer, showing his friends that it can be fun to try something new. George also puts everyone at ease when things don’t go as planned and his flexibility, patience and wonderful sense of humor are all admirable attributes that have taught us how to be more comfortable and accepting when mistakes are made. Additionally, George shares his love of music with the entire HMS community by playing his favorite songs using his device, inspiring mini dance parties for all within ear-shot!”



Diana Rich

Says her teacher Kevin Rafferty: “Diana, or D as she likes to be known, continues to push herself to new achievements in communication. She works on journal entries that she saves in her communication device.” Diana says: “My name is Diana. I have a disability called cerebral palsy but I can do it all. I am not selfish and I am a beautiful person inside and out. I love to use sentences and I love to have conversations. I love to have my device on 24/7. My favorite colors are black and pink. My favorite foods are banana pancakes, Boston baked



beans, and mud pie. I have a lot of best buds for life.” Congratulations, Diana and best wishes!

Selina Valentin

Teacher Kevin says, “When Selina settled into HMS School as a seven-day resident, she quickly won a host of admirers among staff and students who warmed to her independence, drive and sense of humor. During her time with us, she independently organized a large holiday gift distribution drive and multiple charity drives. Selina raised money for these causes by selling her fantastic artwork and custom-decorated fashion items. She also served two terms in student government as Speaker of the House and Vice President, and has DJ’d at school functions. Selina will be remembered at HMS as an outstanding role model for independence and self-advocacy.”



Kendyll Wiemer

Says her teacher Paige: “Kendyll lights up the classroom and halls of HMS! She has an amazing ability to draw people in. Her laughter can transform anyone’s day, and often inspires giant chain reactions of giggles amongst her classmates. Throughout her years at HMS, Kendyll’s engagement and participation has skyrocketed. She works hard to keep her head up, be observant and show that she is ready to take advantage of all that HMS has to offer. Some of Kendyll’s favorite things at school include controlling colorful lights with her switch, dancing, exploring various sensory input, and cruising the halls to make deliveries and see familiar faces. Kendyll, thank you for all the smiles you’ve brought to HMS. We are all so proud of you!”



A Virtual Revelation

Teachers and therapists are discovering that interacting with students remotely has unforeseen benefits

While remaining at home during the pandemic, our staff is working hard to engage students and are having success doing it. Teacher Courtney Grimes says that converting to an online classroom has been a challenge, but also has some advantages. “Sometimes, I feel like a first-year teacher because I have to make all of my classroom activities computer-based to be accessible for our students. But there’s an upside too. It means that when we do return to the classroom, the programs will be even more awesome and interactive for them.”

Another aspect of virtual programming that few anticipated: Staff can see what kinds of equipment and materials students have at home, while parents can observe up close what their child does at school. One example is the presence of smart speakers in the home, like Amazon Alexa. “The use of smart technology would not always be my primary treatment goal if I were working with a student in-person,” says speech therapist Julie Conway. “But often, helping the student use it is an important family goal, and it can be very motivating for the student too. I’ve found it very productive to shift my goals to align more with the things that the family sees as useful and important in this moment.” Staff uniformly agree that an opportunity to view the home setting and see how the family interacts, leads to an exchange of ideas that can enhance therapy and education.

Zoom: A vehicle for greater independence and empowerment

Julie agrees with Courtney that although virtual sessions have been challenging, staff are finding creative ways to adapt. Interesting too, she says, is that some students have learned how to log onto Zoom independently. At the same time, parents can observe the sessions without distracting their student by signing in on another device. Seeing exactly what goes on in therapy enables them to continue building on the session with the student.

Julie says that students who can use Zoom without assistance gain a deep sense of pride and empowerment. “It also allows us to have the same kind of relationship that we would have at school: just the two of us working together...but with the added benefit of expanded family involvement,” she says. “Equally important is that this is happening across all of the therapies, and staff are able to trade tips and tricks to make the sessions even more successful.”

Some of our students have been so motivated by their involvement that they are even asking for homework, says Julie. “We might assign a meditation exercise from our dance-movement therapist, Rachel, as the various therapies are finding more and more ways to collaborate in this environment. Guided meditation is also an activity that some students can do independently. It’s a wonderful way for them to decompress and for us to encourage skills that students can use at home.”

Here are just a few of the ways our staff is helping students enjoy a positive virtual experience

All aboard the fire truck



Teacher Courtney’s student Sam Karp uses a communication device and loves fire engines. So during their Zoom class sessions, she will present a fire truck and ask . . .where should we go on the truck today, Sam? Who do you want to see and when

should we go? With prompting, Sam might respond that he wants to go to the dining room with Courtney on a Monday. After Courtney acts out the requested trip, Sam often responds with a heart-felt “thank you.” Courtney says she is having success encouraging Sam to use his communication device virtually. “Sam is navigating and using more vocabulary in his device, and is exploring ways to engage in conversations. It’s almost like language has an even greater value in our virtual activities,” she says. “That’s because Sam can’t rely on gestures, or on having me right there beside him to see what he is pointing at, or what he wants to direct your attention toward.”

The morning check-in



In Courtney’s class, each student “checks in” to Zoom by smiling, using their voice or their communication device. When they do, their zoom square enlarges on some of

their classmate’s screens, which has proven to be a great motivator. Students enjoy trading off during this activity, with exchanges like, “Leilany let me hear your voice so that Sam can see you bigger on his screen.”

Virtual bowling



Think you can’t enjoy a game of bowling virtually? Our creative staff have found a way! Each student pushes a ball towards their computer screen and when they do, Charlie, of the recreation therapy team, throws the same kind of ball at the pins. For participants, it almost looks as if their ball goes through the screen and into the pins in his home-based bowling alley, and is a big win for our students.

Health concerns call for new safety measures...and expenses



Our new covered walkway will allow students to enter and exit the building more safely.

When HMS began planning for a hybrid start to the school year in September, the school underwent significant renovations to allow for social distancing in the building. One of those renovations was to change the way students enter.

Students will enter HMS through the traditional bus lobby on our ground floor, but those whose classrooms are located one level up will now enter via a covered ramp leading to our assembly room, rather than having to take the elevator. The covered canopy was constructed over an existing ramp to enable students to enter and exit the building safely in all weather conditions.

Unfortunately, after staging several mock student days, we realized that due to the continued presence of the virus, in-person instruction would be postponed until February 1, 2021. At that time, we will make good use of the new canopy and other safety features that were purchased. These include plexiglass partitions in the dining room and the materials to create separate therapy areas and classrooms for greater social distancing. We have also purchased the appropriate amount of PPE—personal protective equipment—for our current, limited, on-site in-person therapies, and our hoped-for, planned in-person instruction, as well as computers and other equipment for families to use at home, and for staff who are now working from home.

All of these expenses were unplanned and difficult to budget for in this school year. **That is why we need your help.** Every year HMS relies on support from donors to allow us to offer our expressive arts therapy programs—music, art dance, and drama—as well as additional equipment and upgrades for students and staff. To continue to make these programs happen and for all of the expenses connected to COVID-19, we need your support now more than ever.

Please consider donating to HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy at hmsschool.org/donate, or by using the envelope included with this publication to mail a check.



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Marie Logue | *Chair of the Board of Trustees*

Tom Quinn | *HMS School President*

4400 Baltimore Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19104
215/222-2566; fax 215/222-1889

www.hmsschool.org

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.

Meet HMS student Sabina



Sabina (at right) with her best friend, Mary Grace.

Says Sabina's mom, Michelle: "Sabina loves school... loves to wake up for school... and loves the community she's found at HMS. We looked at quite a few schools, but once we were here, it was a game-changer. We couldn't *unsee* HMS."

To find out more about an HMS education, contact Diane Taylor, Admissions Coordinator at dtaylor@hmsschool.org.

To read more of Sabina's story, visit www.hmsschool.org/sabina