Welcome to the continuation of Ernie’s Blog in a more condensed format for the month of June, 2017.

The purpose of this blog is to provide a commentary in essays, visual organizers and poems on topics of interest that stem from the courses I teach at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). I hope that current students and reviewers of this blog can stay current on what I have to say on topics of mutual interest. I consider this outlet to be one of the main ways I can share my creative work with others.

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A Different Way to Sum Up My Experiences.

During a summer course I taught during a particularly hot number of weeks, I captured my overall experiences in the following manner and sent a note to my students:

- I did not enjoy the heat, but I did enjoy the warmth of the students.
- I did not enjoy the time [starting at 7:30 AM], but I did enjoy the timing.
- I did not enjoy the classroom, but I did enjoy the room of class.
- I did not enjoy the drive to work, but I did enjoy the drive to work.
- I did not enjoy the pages of reading, but I did enjoy the reading of pages.

Insights Into the Learning Process. This list was written twenty years ago and I think each one has withstood the test of time.

- You always learn more ... you don’t learn less from either a positive or negative experience.
- Each setback and success places you at a new starting point for your next challenge.
- Commonsense is uncommonly followed.
- Something positive can evolve from most setbacks - not always immediately, but with time.
- Setbacks are stepping stones to success.
- The positivity of your own thinking and mood increases the possibilities of positive outcomes.
- There is seldom one "right" way, but many alternatives and options from which to select one that appears to fit the current set of circumstances.
- Biographies are power tools to learn how others have faced adversity and triumphed. We incorporate other people’s best strategies into our own style of decision making.
- Looking at situations as a set of relationships to understand is more important than trying to immediately solve a problem.
- Keeping a journal is a powerful self-improvement activity to help clarify our thinking and advance our learning.
Spelling Quiz - Variable Scoring. Toward the beginning of one of my courses I present a spelling quiz to students. The object of the quiz is to determine how many English vocabulary words of different colors students can correctly spell in Spanish. I then present a list of correctly spelled Spanish words the the English equivalent names of colors. I request students to score their work in two ways: all-or-nothing vs. give credit where credit is due. In the "all-or-nothing" means of scoring all of the letters must be spelled correctly to earn 10 points for each of 10 words. However, for the "give credit where credit is due" means each word contains as many points as there are letters in the correct spelling of the word. In other words if a student spelled the Spanish word for green as v-e-r-d, no points would be awarded in the "all-or-nothing" approach but in the "give credit where credit is due" approach the student could earn 4 out of a possible 5 points. I provide an example of how a student’s score could range from 20% to 86.9% depending on which method of grading was used. It would be quite defeating to study for a quiz and only get 20% for one’s efforts.

<table>
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<th>Correct English</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
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<td>amarilo</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>azul</td>
<td>azol</td>
<td>3/4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
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<td>marron</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<td>nagro</td>
<td>4/5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>dorodo</td>
<td>5/6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>anaranjado</td>
<td>anarangado</td>
<td>9/10</td>
</tr>
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Results from a Spanish Vocabulary/Spelling Quiz

Observations on results:
- **Yellow**: Amarillo or Amarilo (100% for A, 20% for F) - 7 of 8
- **Blue**: Azul or Azol (100% for A, 20% for F) - 3 of 4
- **Brown**: Marron or Marron (100% for A, 20% for F) - 5 of 6
- **Black**: Negro or Nagro (100% for A, 20% for F) - 4 of 5
- **Gold**: Dorado or Dorodo (100% for A, 20% for F) - 5 of 6
- **Purple**: Morado (100% for A, 20% for F) - 6 of 6
- **Red**: Rojo (100% for A, 20% for F) - 4 of 4
- **Violet**: Violeta or Violet (100% for A, 20% for F) - 6 of 7
- **Green**: Verde or Verd (100% for A, 20% for F) - 4 of 5
- **Orange**: Anaranjado or Anarangado (100% for A, 20% for F) - 9 of 10
Hip Hop, Emdin and Urban Education.

I have been impressed by what I have read about Dr. Christopher Emdin and his work on bringing hip hop into schools. His emphasis on engagement is connecting the academic content with what students are listening to out-of-school interests; name, music. Here are some video clips well worth viewing:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKxyemtC_A4
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYpcqntL8O0
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Y9tVf_8fqo

The Composite Picture

One can twitter away the time drinking coffee or tea
Or view a Pollack painting and wonder – Can it be
Just the hierarchy of infinity out upon this wall
Or is it the filtering of our minds from all
The reflective learning on each and every day
When many of our colleagues have come to have their say.

Up above the sky is a NASA based station
A catalyst to our moral imagination
Shakespeare would be proud of CCS University
Mustard seeds abound to spread among the community
Including plastic welding joints and bio markers too
The creative ventures of our peers are never really through.

Take a ride upon the Amistad and look for your home town
Blog on Moodle when you can and you’ll be looking down
The face of a curious creature you didn’t know was there
Peeping out from among trees at you without a care
And Locke seems to conjecture from somewhere nearby
As a gender blender sender renders everyone to fly.
Labyrinth Summary Organizer. I have been fascinated by the image of a labyrinth path.

L earning to walk a path toward finding truths
A ctive listening to what the path provides
B e on the lookout for unexpected insights
Y ou walk the path alone - - - but in company with others
R esolve to ask better questions along the way
I nvolve all of your senses
N ow is the time to practice mindfulness
T ake a deep breath every now and again
H ear the message of the path and prepare to walk it again.

One summer, I charted a path through the course I was teaching by recording the following elements on a blank labyrinth.
Then, at the conclusion of the course I used the beginning letters of each member of three in-class teams to form an acrostic poem and the message I wanted to leave each of them as a parting reflection. The three groups named themselves Wishful Thinking, Eh!, and 6:30.

| Wishful Thinking | K         | nowning what to include this summer |
|                 | H         | ad to take into account the        |
|                 | L         | evels of experience of each        |
|                 | L         | earner in the course,              |
|                 | J         | ust as teachers need to            |
|                 | A         | ssess their own students’ experiences. |

| Eh!            | S         | uccess is measured                |
|                | C         | ompletely differently based on the |
|                | C         | riteria from each                 |
|                | P         | erson in this class to be         |
|                | R         | peated with students in our future classrooms. |

| 6:30           | J         | une was a month that              |
|                | C         | ontained significant learning that |
|                | N         | eeds to be reviewed and serve as a |
|                | G         | uide for                         |
|                | D         | ecisions that are made in the fall, |
|                | J         | ust as I hope everyone in the class will do as well. |
Little Known Facts About Presenting. During my time as a presenter at conferences, in-services and my university teaching, I have compiled a list of "little known" facts that are associated to this occupation. You can certainly add to this list based on your own experiences as a presenter or as a participant.

50 Ways to Learn From One Another. I like the rhythm and rhymes of the Paul Simon song "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover." At times, I have used this as a summary activity challenging the students in my course to develop a rhyme with their own first name (or nickname) that goes along with a chorus I write for the theme of that course. Here is one summary of the results of this practice. In another class I chose more of a poem format using the same practice of trying to include student names from the course.
There is a question that keeps popping in my head -
Why do I have a label – Special Ed?

I need some people to be with me in my fight. I need some people who have some good insight.

So if you please - - I think you will agree, there must be 50 ways to learn from one another. There must be 50 ways to learn from one another.

You got to INCLUDE… Jude

Don’t Pass the Buck … Chuck

We’ll need a new Plan … Stan

Don’t test them to Death … Beth

We all will learn to be free!
50 Ways to Learn From One Another

There is a question that keeps popping in my head -
Why do I have a label - Special Ed?
I need some people to be with me in my fight.
I need some people who have some good insight.
So, if you please --- I think you will agree
There must be 50 ways to learn from one another.
There must be 50 ways to learn from one another.

We got to listen like Kristen
Don't leave 'em in the dark, Mark
Read them a story, Lori
Love 'em to death, Beth

Get 'em in line, Caroline
Don't get fancy, Nancy
Go on the journey, Ernie
Stay on the job, Bob

Keep on your toes, Rose
Don't buy that scam, Tam
Climb up that hill, Bill
Enjoy that song, John

There is a question that keeps popping in my head.
How do I remember all this about Special Ed?
And how do I recall all that has been said?
There must be 50 ways to learn from one another.

Ben threw the Koosh ball perfectly without sight.
Helen reminded us of family with her will and might.
Please don't hear these words and get uptight.
There must be 50 ways to learn from one another.
There must be 50 ways to learn from one another.
My 20th Dylan Concert. As I get ready to attend my 28th Dylan concert (give or take a concert), I reviewed some of my reflections from previous concerts and decided to share some thoughts from my 20th attendance at a Dylan concert. The next time I will be in the presence of this Nobel Laureate will be on June 18th in Wallingford, CT.

My 20th Dylan Concert

The crowd was tangled up in the House of Blues Across from Fenway Park.
There’s something about a sold out show That seems to ignite the spark.

Blues to the north and blues to the west
On the signposts in the street.
Blues on the outside and blues at the Inn
Blind Willie McTell you’ll meet.

Things Have Changed but still stay the same
In this paradox by the Boston shore
The band was rockin’ - the people were knockin’
Trying to get to Heaven Before they Close the Door.

Thank you Bob for your energy tonight;
You shared with us and more
We heard your Blowin’ in the Wind
As a welcome third encore.

I write my notes on the morning after;
I’ll not soon forget this night
When our paths again crossed for the 20th time.
May the end not be in my sight.

06/10/17

Moving On

Before I teach a course again
I like to look at where I’ve just been.

Overall, I’m quite satisfied in my rhyme
About what I included in this course the last time.

However, there is always that nagging doubt
That hides in the background and lurks about.

Is “quite satisfied” what I want to feel
Or, is there another way that would be more real?

What pleases one student another finds fault
One student likes pepper the other - more salt.

What I come to realize each semester is this
The changes I make are both a hit and a miss.

But change I must – for my own piece of mind
Every semester is one of a kind!

This class was my outlet for creativity and more
I wonder next semester what there will be in store

Based on your feedback, which keeps me honest and true
I'm on the right track - and I sincerely thank you!
Neurodiversity. This morning in the Boston Globe, I read an interesting article that has relevance to a current course in which I am the instructor. Specifically, the article was about George Church, an eminent Harvard professor and scientist, who also has narcolepsy. One paragraph that I extracted reinforces my thinking on a theme in this course:

His condition has persuaded Church of the benefits of, even the need for, neurodiversity, meaning brains that work differently from most others. The world needs people with high-functioning autism and obsessive-compulsive disorder and attention deficit disorder and, yes, narcolepsy, he has come to believe.

Adjectives/Traits of Teachers of the Year. I had been collecting news articles about the various Teachers of the Year that appeared in our local newspapers. After I had accumulated quite a few, I searched for the adjectives that were used in each article to describe the recipient of this honor. I was pleased, but not surprised, that the word “creative” appeared with the highest frequency.

Tomlinson’s Quotes. Below is an update I included in my current course that I will also share with the occasional viewer of this blog:

What I like about summer courses is the freedom to look for resources and bits of inspiration in between my review of current student work. Today brought me to a link with 10 quotes about differentiation by Carol Tomlinson. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did.

http://inservice.ascd.org/10-inspiring-quotations-to-help-you-differentiate-your-instruction/

Adjectives/Traits of Teachers of the Year and Other Mentor Teachers

- Adventurous
- Amazing
- Caring (4)
- Comfortable
- Compassionate
- Consistency
- Creative (9)
- Dedicated (4)
- Diverse
- Empathic
- Eye Opener
- Goal Oriented
- Hands On (3)
- Ingenious
- Innovative (3)
- Inspirational
- Intelligent
- Motivated (2)
- Multi-Disciplinary
- Passionate
- Persistence
- Positive
- Practical
- Prepared
- Relaxing
- Risk Taker
- Team Builder
- Thematic
- Unusual
Exam_ination of Content. Fourteen years ago I wrote:

When teaching an introductory course in special education, publishing companies often produce a companion set of exam questions to accompany the text. Typically, the data bank of these questions is composed of multiple choice questions or true/false statements. Because many sections for these courses contain 25+ students, this method of assessment appears more manageable and attractive to the instructors.

Last summer, I reviewed the exams recommended to accompany the chapters of the text I was using at the time. The multiple choice exams were online at the website of the publishing company. Prior to reading a chapter, I decided to take the exam. I scored 65%. I took another test from a chapter that contained information that represented the majority of expertise I have in special education. I scored 75% on that exam. I wondered. Is it me?!? I am a successful professional and, in fact, the instructor of the course. How could I score so low?

Upon careful examination of the questions, the answer became obvious. The questions were related more to the specific way in which the authors described the content rather than in the content itself. For example, a question might be phrased: What factors caused Rachel’s parents to be passive observers in their daughter’s PPT? You had to read the chapter to know something about Rachel’s story. So, I thought that once I read the chapter and took the test again, I should do much better. I did, but only to 80 – 85%. That would give me a “B” for the course. I investigated further at some more of the questions: Individuals with learning disability represent what percent of the total number of students in special education? The choices were a) 40%, b) 45%, c) 50 % or d) 55%. This is not relevant information form my point of view. If a student does not know this answer, s/he is penalized by having points taken away from their eventual final grade. How ridiculous!

I will not use these types of questions again - - ever! What’s the alternative? I do require exams in my courses. But, I rephrase them as exam_inations of the content. I offer questions in such a way that the students’ responses help me determine if they have made meaningful connections in my class to their content discipline. For example, in one course the final exam_ination of content was for students to develop a cover page graphic that relates to their discipline. One student presented an enlarge image of the parts of a cell. Next, tell me how parts of that image connect to this course. In the example of the cell, the student labeled the nucleus as “inclusion” and pointed out how this concept was the central most valuable part of the course. She went on to describe the relationship between the other parts of the cell and aspects of the class that she valued. The students are not penalized for what they don’t know. Rather, they are reinforced by providing evidence of what they do know. It makes all the difference in the world to me.
The Student With the Most Challenges

There will always be a student with the most challenging set of needs for which the teachers and other professionals are baffled by how to respond.

When the student with the most challenging set of needs leaves our school, another student takes his/her place and now has the most challenging set of needs in our school.

When we brainstorm and seek to support a student with the most challenging set of needs and are unsuccessful, we ready ourselves for success to deal more effectively with a student with a slightly less challenging set of needs.

Graduation Poem. This is the time of year for high school and college graduations. On one such occasion for one of my daughter's graduations, I composed the following tribute:

With this celebration of your education on this graduation leading to a validation of this manifestation of your maturation with a realization and some contemplation of this milestone of your satisfaction with your selected vocation we join in jubilation!

Quotes From Two Books From Off My Shelf.

Soli, let me tell you. The most important thing about a person is always the thing you don’t know. Barbara Kingsolver, The Lacuna, p. 218

We don’t always have a choice how we get to know one another. Sometimes, people fall into our lives cleanly – as if out of the sky, or as if there were a direct flight from Heaven to Earth – the same sudden way we lose people, who once seemed they would always be part of our lives. John Irving, Last Night in Twisted River, p. 552.

You Will Succeed

If you need to succeed to read, I'll discover another idea to uncover a way to say today what is tough and rough and gruff. You will succeed. All I need is to find the kind of rhyme that makes sense - not too dense - as you show that you know how to grow into the best - like the rest of us here. Is that clear?
Dylan Concert #28. My 28th Dylan Show did not disappoint. The highlight of the evening was a new rendition of Summer Days featuring Donnie Herron on the violin. A sedate crowd with a median age of 50 to be my best guess. Very tight security as mentioned on the Jimmy Fallon show a few nights ago from his trip to Port Chester. No intermission on this leg of the journey. Dylan plays a role as part Rudy Vallee and part Charlie Chaplin during his crooning to the oldies tunes. He appears to be having fun! I wonder if I will have his energy at 76! He also managed his way through a couple of malfunctions: wobbly mic stand and faulty stool. Earlier this week I thought of an apt comparison on the Dylan I have come to know: Dr. Who. Dr. Who has his T.A.R.D.I.S. and Dylan has his Cowboy Band to take us back and forth through time. Dr. Who regenerates himself so that his 13th version is currently airing on BBC America. Dylan has gone through the regeneration process a variable number of times depending on the observer. The scenes from his songs [Desolation Row & Highway 61] could take place in distant galaxies many light years away. Dr. Who is “The Doctor” – Dylan is ... well, he is “Dylan.” [In honor of Father’s Day, I thought it would be a great touch if Jakob Dylan had made an appearance. Perhaps he was there somewhere in the audience. It was 20 years ago (my 2nd Dylan Show) at this site that Rick Danko came on stage for a wonderful version of This Wheel’s on Fire.]
Jeopardy and Dylan. I felt quite smart last night when one of the Jeopardy categories was "Bob Dylan". I was a little slow recognizing the question to one response but readily knew two of the statements and none of the contestants rose to the occasion. I think I could do quite well if all the categories were related to Bob Dylan! Jeopardy reminds me of the high-stakes assessments many of the students must endure that supposedly measure their knowledge in specific areas that are deemed important by test makers and professionals in charge of such assessments. Personally, I believe that formative, ongoing assessment serves a much greater purpose: information about how good a match there is between teacher strategies and learner acquisition. Formative assessment measures the degree to which current strategies should be modified if projected learning is not occurring. Summative assessment merely provides a snapshot of life amid the stress of time, pressure to do well, awareness of what you don't know as opposed to measuring what you do know, etc. There are more prominent educational reformers than I who have eloquently expressed the "harm" in the decisions that are made based on high-stakes assessments. Let me just say that if I took the same summative assessment in a content area 6 months after completing my study in that content area, my score would drop significantly. So - - - what are we actually measuring?

The IEP (Individualized Ernie Plan). As most of you know, students who receive special education supports and services have an IEP (Individualized Education Program). This IEP is developed jointly between representatives of the school and parents / students that results in an "appropriate" education under various interpretations of what exactly "appropriate" means on a student-by-student basis. I have been in discussions over the years with friends and colleagues that ALL students should have the equivalent in name to the IEP, although different in content and degree of supports inherent in an IEP for students who receive special education supports and services. Since my initials are already "EP", my individualized program would still be an IEP. I have not worked out the details, but my IEP would follow me from Kindergarten to post-graduation and stay within my possession. My family and I would determine some broad goals and corresponding objectives that would influence the type of guidance and supports I would receive at school. Perhaps some of you have ideas about what shape and form this IEP (input your own initials to replace mine) would take. I think the discussion would go a long way to personalize the educational experience for ALL students and result in a more meaningful set of outcomes.
Hole In the Wall Gang Camp. Nearby, about 20 miltes from my home, is the camp that Paul Newman built and appropriately named Hole in the Wall Gang Camp. I share a video clip in my courses that features Natalie Merchant singing her song, Wonder, with the campers as we get a glimpse of what the camp offers individuals with a diverse set of challenges including cancer. As a result, I have received feedback from students who have applied for jobs as counselors or remember a high school community service project where they cleaned up the cabins prior to the summer season and more. Personally, I don't mind paying a little extra for Newman's Own products when 100% of the profits go to his continuing charities. I raise the following question to my students: why can't going to school look more like going to camp?

Thank You For Thinking of Us First. One time, at the airport, after I dropped off the car, I asked the driver of the shuttle bus to take me to Continental Airlines. I then went up to the ticket agent, gave her my ticket only to hear her say, "You're flying Northwest - but thank you for thinking of us first." She handled an embarrassing situation on my part quite gracefully. I wonder what the equivalent situation might be when I can react in a similar manner. There have been times when, on the very first day of the semester, a student finds that my classroom [course] is not the correct place where he should be. Or, a student could arrive at my office on a different day than what I have on my schedule. Can I respond in a way that allows the student to maintain his/her dignity?

What's Really Worth Learning? I have always felt that how someone learns an academic subject like physics is ultimately more important that what specific laws or concepts have been learned, at least for the non-science majors among us. This idea was reinforced five years ago while watching a video clip about a physics teacher, Mr. Wright. His students commented that they learned about life, working together, asking good questions, etc. while using physics as the vehicle for this learning, not so much memorizing or wanting to pursue physics as a post-school goal. I think Mr. Wright is on to something. He has a passion for physics and the students are taking his course to be introduced to some important information in this content. However, how much of what is learned will they remember in five years, ... ten years, ... twenty years? Mr. Wright shared aspects of his family with his students and that included a son with significantly severe disabilities. He learned about them and their families, as well. He created a caring community of learners who were discovering how to be a better person as they are learning something about physics. In my best of all worlds in education, this would be a model for all to follow. Perhaps Habits of Mind become the central focus and students develop these habits via their academic coursework.
You're a Winner! One day during class I bought a lotto ticket for each student and gave a reason why each person would receive two bonus points because they won the lotto because of the unique distribution of their numbers. Four of the samples are included below:

**CONGRATULATIONS**

**ASHLEY:** 12 13 19 36 37 42

2 POINTS FOR YOU

You are the only person with a difference of 6 points between the 4th and 6th numbers.

**CONGRATULATIONS**

**JUSTIN:** 03 11 12 29 31 34

2 POINTS FOR YOU

You have the only sequence of numbers in the pattern of odd, odd, even, odd, odd, even.

**CONGRATULATIONS**

**Marie:** 10 12 13 14 20 32

2 POINTS FOR YOU

You have the most numbers in the teens (counting 10 as a teen number).

**CONGRATULATIONS**

**Melissa G:** 09 32 33 34 36 41

2 POINTS FOR YOU

You have the largest gap between the first and second number in any of the number sequences.
Beartown - A Brief Review. Here is a review I just posted on Goodreads. Of all of Backman's books, this was my favorite, mainly because of the more serious nature of the topic that evolved about half way through the novel. Parts of the book reminded me of the movie, Nebraska, in a scene when there are five men all watching TV without saying a word until someone comments on the weather. Then, about 15 minutes later, someone will answer. As Backman states, silence is one of the main means of communication in Beartown. I also like the image of the unspoken language that a "cup of coffee" can have and the many variations of its nature throughout the book. It's almost as though a "cup of coffee" is one of the characters. This book provided me with hours of enjoyment. I can't wait for what he has next in store.

Special Books by Special Kids. As I reviewed an assignment from one of my students today, she directed my attention to an ABC News Report [http://www.specialbooksbyspecialkids.org/about-us] that I had not seen and I want to share it with readers of this blog. The images and interviews of individuals reminded me of the students in my first classroom in which I was a teacher in Carbondale, Illinois back in 1975. It's been a long and rewarding set of experiences ever since!

The Answers Around Us. (From my Journals in June, 1990) I had been working on an acrostic puzzle for a few days and one of the clues was "describing an electrician's diagram." I hadn't been able to come up with the answer but I had tentatively put an "S" for the first letter. One of my daughter's portable tape players was broken and she bought a new one. As she took it out of the case I noticed a diagram of the electrical parts of the tape player/radio and it said electrical "schematic." That was the very word I needed for the puzzle I was working on! How often are the clues to challenges we face found in other contexts of our lives?
Practicing Kindness. Currently I am co-editing a book on Social and Emotional Learning with my colleague Lynda Valerie. As such, I am drawn to articles and resources that address this topic and located one today to share with you. This specific article has a focus on kindness and caring [https://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2017/06/30/how-to-design-a-school-that-prioritizes-kindness-and-caring/]. I admire schools where the overarching priority is a focus on mindfulness, caring and kindness. In our current push for accountability via high-stakes assessments, it is refreshing to note when schools say, "Enough is enough! It’s time to focus on what REALLY matters. Getting along with each other and forming relationships based on kindness and caring."