

Program Update
April 2009

the brookline high school 21st century fund

local solutions for national challenges in education

Welcome to the second online edition of the *21st Century Fund Program Update*. This month we are highlighting the Ithaka Project's Freshman Advisory.

Freshman Advisory: Telling Our Stories

By Gaelen Harrington, BHS English Teacher

"I like football, but not the NFL"
"I'm obsessed with **Lost**."
"I hate mayonnaise."
"I play drums in three different bands around Boston."
"I play the harmonica (badly)."
"I have an embarrassing fear of needles."
"I'm a Sox fan!"
"I root for the Phillies!"
"I have an identical twin."
"I hate bugs, including butterflies!"
"I like fishing; I don't like hockey."
"I love to play my violin."

What are all these random remarks about, you might be asking? They're about our students. They are snippets of the personal histories and preferences that BHS students bring with them to school every day.

And on this particular day in April, sixty BHS juniors are capturing pieces of their personal histories on poster paper. Several posters feature flags-Ethiopian, Brazilian, Haitian, Irish, Turkish. One student's poster features a globe in the middle, dotted with little red flags that represent the places she has gone or would like to go to; another student's poster claims, "I've never left this country." Posters feature the things kids love and love to do: there are drawings of footballs, baseballs, hurdles and running shoes; there are violins and drums and pianos and a flute. There are masks on one poster (she loves to act) and the structure of a glucose compound on another (she loves biology, and writing, too).

These sixty juniors are sprawled across the floor of the MLK room. They are Brookline High's "junior-mentors"-eleventh-graders who were selected through an application process to be compassionate student-leaders and role models in the Ithaka Project's Freshman Advisory groups. They're leaning

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intently over their posters, sketching the images, symbols and words that reflect their individual stories. In a couple of weeks, they will share their posters-these visual representations of themselves (like miniature graphic novels)-with the freshman whom they mentor in their respective Advisory groups. By sharing and explaining their posters, these junior-mentors will kick off Freshman Advisory's culminating unit of the year: "Telling Our Stories."



Freshman Advisory is part of BHS's Ithaka Project, the 21st Century Fund's biggest and most sweeping program to date. This is Ithaka's pilot year, and it will be another three years before this ambitious program is fully rolled out. Freshman Advisory has four main goals (see goals below). The "Telling Our Stories" unit pursues Advisory's fourth goal: to explore and appreciate our diversity at BHS and to affirm the essential kinship we all share. This unit encourages students to get past assumptions that we may make about each other, to break down barriers of prejudice that might exist. We want to foster interest in, rather than judgment of, the differences among us and discover connections that we might otherwise not have had the pleasure of knowing. This is the unit that celebrates the proud community of BHS's

class of 2012 by acknowledging the uniqueness of every one of its individuals.

With the launching of Advisory this year, junior-mentors have taken on a stronger leadership role than they did in years past with the traditional five-minute homerooms. As their posters reflect, these juniors are willing to share their stories-their strengths and passions, even their weaknesses and fears-in order to make the freshmen feel more integrated in our big school. Maybe Ithaka's Freshman Advisory needs to add a corollary to its third goal: to foster strong, trusting relationships between students and grown-ups **and between BHS freshman and BHS upperclassmen**. Advisory capitalizes on the learning that thrives not just between teachers and students, but also among the students themselves. Now that's a way of making students take **ownership** of their education and their growth as citizens!

[Learn more about the Ithaka Project and its Advisory Program here.](#)

The Four Goals of Freshman Advisory:

- To communicate the culture of BHS, using mantras like "freedom and responsibility," "hard work over time," and "bring your best self to school every day."
- To develop among the freshman class a strong sense of citizenship and to instill the value of community service.
- To foster strong, trusting relationships between students and grown-ups in the building and community.
- To explore and appreciate our diversity and to affirm the essential kinship we all share.

About This Newsletter

The **21st Century Fund Program Update** is produced by the Brookline High School 21st Century Fund office. For comments or questions, please contact Beth Carlson at beth_carlson@brookline.k12.ma.us or 617-713-5211.

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