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Update  
November '09

the brookline high school 21st century fund

local solutions for national challenges in education

Dear 21st Century Fund Supporters,

On October 24, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fund celebrated its 11<sup>th</sup> year of public school innovation with its "Join the Journey" Gala. This year's event raised more than \$360,000. Thank you to our very generous supporters that made this event such a huge success.

This year's featured teacher speaker at the Gala was Mary Burchenal, BHS's English Department Chair (pictured below right). Mary was part of the team of teachers who developed [The Good Citizen in the Good Society](#) course ten years ago. This innovative social issues/social action course is still thriving today. Alex Lawrence, BHS class of 2004, said "choosing Good Citizen was the best choice I made"; her classmate Laura Larsen-Strecker claimed that "it made me a more active and conscious individual." The impact of this course on the BHS community has been profound.

Equally profound was the Fund's respect for and support of the teachers who created this program. In her speech, Mary described the year's worth of intense research and development that went into Good Citizen. Such thorough and professional preparation was possible only because of the funding provided by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fund.

The paddle auction following Mary's speech at this year's Gala raised more than \$26,000 to establish a *Fund for Innovation* to support research and development of new programs. Her speech appears below. Please read and enjoy.

*The 21st Century Fund*

Good evening. It is an honor to speak to you this evening about an entity close to my professional heart: the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fund.

First, I'd like to share a business scenario:

*Proctor and Gamble introduces a new children's shampoo one fall. A P & G shareholder asks the CEO about the origins of this new product.*

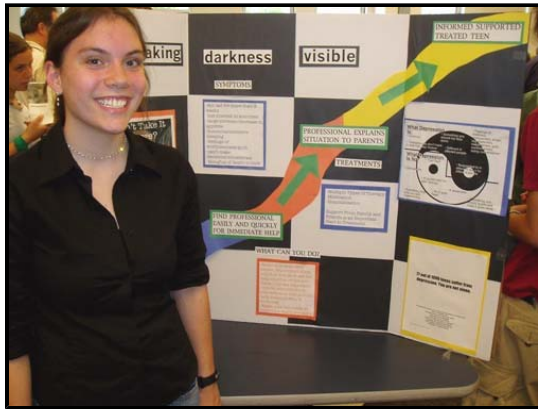
*"Well," the CEO says, "a couple of guys had this terrific idea for a new shampoo for kids."*

*"Really?" asks the shareholder. "So what happened to make the idea a reality?"*



*"Oh," says the CEO, "we were a tad short on cash last spring, so those two guys volunteered to take two weeks out of their unpaid summer vacation to develop the product. The shampoo hit the shelves in September."*

As you know, this scenario would never happen at Proctor and Gamble. But it happens all the time in schools. In my 25 year teaching career, I can't tell you how much of my own time I have spent rushing new courses into existence, often between applications of Coppertone. Frankly, just between the 300 of you and me, these courses could have used more time, research, and thought before hitting shelves in September.



However, one time in my career this was different. Back in the late 20th century - 1999 to be exact -- I signed onto what was essentially an R&D team to develop an innovative social issues/social action course at Brookline High called The Good Citizen and the Good Society. Thanks to the 21st Century Fund, three other teachers and I were given release time for an entire year to develop a double-block, interdisciplinary course for seniors. We spent that time reading books, poring over articles, finding alternate points of view, attending workshops at Facing History and Harvard, arguing about which social issues should be included, planning field trips, developing curriculum.

When that course hit the shelves in September of 2001, our team was organized and energized. We had built a course that was experiential, exciting, academically rigorous, educationally sound. This was pedagogical beauty. In the development process, we had undergone the intense and targeted professional development we needed to become experts. Most importantly, we were ready to concentrate on the students themselves because the curriculum was fully in place.

It may be sad to admit, but my terrific teaching partner, Brian Poon, and I both agree that we probably peaked with The Good Citizen. It seems unlikely we will ever teach a course so successfully again with students so thoroughly engaged. Nonetheless, ten years later, the course and the curriculum we created lives on. The course is now part of the fabric of the high school. The other thing that lives on is that Brian and I became better teachers from watching each other in the classroom every day.

As someone who now hires and supervises teachers here at the high school, I can tell you this: the people who come to work here are smart, creative, and motivated. They come here to seek others of their species. Frankly, most of them are terrible workaholics (I think sometimes that working long hours may actually be an obscure mating ritual to attract other teacher-workaholics). These teachers don't want to be doing the exact same thing in year ten of teaching that they were doing in year one. At Brookline High, thanks in good part to the Fund, they don't have to. At least eight members of my department have been given opportunities to do something new in their careers because of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fund projects.

The high school's teachers are our engines for innovation. They are bursting with ideas - not about shampoo -- but about how to do more meaningful work with the students they know. When a Brookline teacher comes up with an idea, and we are able to fund that idea's development and implementation, not only do we serve students, but we



channel and renew the energy of our best teachers.

When I came to Brookline High twenty years ago, I was in transition. I had spent the previous five years teaching in three different private schools. Part of me thought that maybe I should move into college teaching. What I'd like to tell you tonight is that if I hadn't had opportunities like creating and teaching The Good Citizen course, I wouldn't still be at Brookline High. I wouldn't have fallen in love with it the way I have. And the future possibilities of the 21st Century Fund still glimmer before me like an emerald city. So I'm not going anywhere.

#### About the 21st Century Fund

The Brookline High School 21st Century Fund innovates effective local solutions to national challenges facing public high schools. [Visit the 21st Century Fund website](#) for more information or click the Donate Now button to make a contribution.



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#### About This Newsletter

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