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Update
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the brookline high school 21st century fund

local solutions for national challenges in education

Christien Polos Brings Arts Infusion Lab to Community Based Classroom

by Gaelen Harrington, BHS English Teacher & 21st Century Fund Program Liaison

"I've watched my students *transform* during Arts Infusion sessions," says Allison Behr, Lead Teacher of the Community Based Classroom at BHS. CBC is a program for students with severe to profound cognitive and/or physical special needs. The program emphasizes functional-life skills in order to prepare its students for increased independence after high school. According to Allison, CBC students aren't afforded many opportunities to participate in performance art activities at levels that are appropriate to them.



Until now, that is. Enter Christien Polos and his Arts Infusion Lab. Since last October, Christien has been conducting class twice a week in the Community Based Classroom, and in that short time he has infused his artistic charisma into the fabric of CBC's curriculum. "With many people," Allison notes, "there isn't such ease to interact so naturally with the [CBC] kids," but Christien has eased his way in quickly and has learned methods of adapting art to meet the needs of these students. Each student responds differently to the activities that Christien plans. Christien, a dancer, choreographs these responses into exercises that benefit the entire group while still accommodating

the students' wide variety of special needs. "He maintains high expectations," Allison says. "He does not underestimate what these kids can do."

Christien focused on dance during his first semester with the Community Based Classroom and the benefits have been profound. Allison has watched her students improve their physical coordination, their memorization and listening skills, as well as their ability to follow directions. To her amazement, the class recently performed a



three-minute choreographed dance. And then there is "Community Dance Circle." Every Arts Infusion session ends with this exercise: in the center of a circle, one student moves however s/he'd like and the rest of the group follows along; when that student is finished, s/he moves out to the circle, another student goes to the center, and a new round of dancing begins. During the first few weeks of Arts Infusion class, a few students wouldn't go to the center; now, those same students volunteer to dance in the middle and sometimes even have to be coaxed back out to give another classmate a turn. Arts Infusion is inspiring CBC students to take risks-to discover creativity with courage and exuberance.

Community Based Classroom will be doubling in size next year. The Arts Infusion Lab will grow with it, and another group of CBC students will blossom under Christien Polos's tutelage.

Arts Infusion Lab is a three-year innovative arts program directed at drawing Brookline's under-involved students into more active participation in expressive art activities. Funding provided by the 21st Century Fund. [Visit the 21st Century Fund to learn more about this program.](#)

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

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This email was sent to: beth_henderson@brookline.k12.ma.us

This email was sent by: BHS 21st Century Fund
115 Greenough Street Brookline, MA 02445 USA



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