



BEST EDUCATION STORY



Good education stories also educate readers and parents, sharing the passion that great teachers use to inspire their students. Joshua Bleser does this best by talking to young teachers about how to detect drug use and help students get past it. Marc Lalonde and David Goldberg wrote wonderful stories about school visits that buzzed with excitement, and then shared that with the rest of us.

Drugs in schools

Ample supply, steady demand

By Joshua Bleser
It's no longer a war on drugs. Rather, it's about "offers of service", "the helping relationship", and attempts to "look at [drug users] holistically and not focus on discipline."
This is how the Eastern Townships School Board's core anti-drug foot soldiers describe their work. Not that they consider themselves softies; the board's attitude toward drugs has some bite to it. It's just that the bite isn't delivered from a moral high ground.
Still, teachers and guards can't be everywhere at once, so the school board must rely to some extent on students seeking help for themselves and their friends. This won't happen if kids are scared to approach the counsellors.
"[Students] seem to be very at ease," says Tiffany Blinn, the drug and rehab counsellor at Galt and Richmond high schools. "I don't think there's a huge barrier." But, she adds, her young age may help, and a wariness may set in over time.
Blinn is fresh out of the University of Sherbrooke, where she graduated in 2004 with a degree in psycho-education. After a one-year, part-time internship at Galt — during which she did some drug awareness work and some administrative work — she was hired full-time this fall.
With 13 years as Massey-Vanier's drug co-ordinator under

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BY MARC LALONDE
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"OK, starting from the G, halfway through the 24th measurement, let's begin," said Lindsay Place High School music teacher Marika Shaw.
To the average, non-music-reading West Islander, that means absolutely nothing, but to the 540 students in the Pointe Claire high school's music program, it tells them where to start reading, and from which note to begin playing.
Shaw, in her fifth year teaching at Lindsay Place, picks up her violin and begins playing the tune for the Grade 8 strings class, who sit at their desks in the back of the class, feeling a little out of sync. Shaw, who's not actually a bass player with her finger a few feet away, on the school's stage, first-year LPHS teacher conducts a Grade 8 band. In the front of the stage, while Shaw and department head George Dumas sit out in the rear, stepping in every now and then to help a young percussionist find the right rhythm, the classroom not far away, Larry is teaching music theory to a Grade 7 class. It's a team effort, and it has to be, in order to keep up with the massive program Dumas has built in his decades at the school. To add to the workload, the school now offers an Arts-Études program with music concentration that gives students extra class time three days a week in the hour before school starts in the morning.
Dumas said the combined energy the students and staff bring to the program has made it what it is and with the new music-concentration courses, taking it to a whole new level.

The magic of music



Music teacher Marika Shaw instructs students on violin playing at Lindsay Place High School in Pointe Claire last Thursday. Chronicle, Marc Lalonde
institution that charges students \$13,000 a year to attend.
"There, four children would share one instrument, and with 130 kids taking music, you're going to have instruments that need repairs and had to be sent out. When I was got that, and it's something they can be proud of. For a lot of teenagers, that's huge," she said.
For all the talk about what the program has, there's little to no talk about what it hasn't got. Indeed, what's missing from this picture of a suburban high school? Where are the smart-aleck comments, the knowing smiles and the nonsense one usually associates with the adolescent mind?
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They might be ... no, they are giants
Loyola High theatre students prove they do know Jack about entertainment

BY DAVID GOLDBERG
To most casual observers, they may just look like a bunch of average teenagers, but to the young tykes of Montreal West's Elizabeth Ballantyne School, the Loyola High School theatre students who put on a play at their elementary school are indeed giants.
Last Friday was performance number three of Loyola's production of Jack and the Giant, an interactive re-telling of the Jack and the Beanstalk fable. And judging from the laughter, the cheers, the boos, and the oohs and aaahs from the enthusiastic crowd, the play was a gigantic hit.
Jack and the Giant is narrated by Happy (Mike Gerbasi) and Sad (Giancarlo Mariani), whose emotional musings are intertwined with questions and comments for the audience. And there's plenty to ask them, as Jack (Jack Antaki) is told by his mother (Christos Simitsakos) that he must sell his beloved cow, Drusilla (James Certosini). This side of beef, as it turns out, has a lot of ham in him.
Of course, Jack ends up selling Drusilla for some magic Mexican beans to an old codger (Anthony Gervasi) and then climbs



Chronicle, Charles Montgomery
Andrew Al Tork as the Giant and Jack Antaki as Jack in action in Loyola's interactive play, Jack and the Giant.
The cast was almost as enthusiastic as their young audience, although having to compete with the youngsters' cacophony of glee can be quite a challenge.
"They go nuts for this kind of stuff," said Gerbasi, who was still very happy after the curtain came down. "It fills me up with ... it's indescribable. It's a rush of adrenaline followed by a moment of happiness."
And that happiness was apparently contagious, judging by the reaction of the audience. "This was the best play I ever went to," said Cycle 1 (Grade 2) student Annie. "I liked Sad and Happy — Sad was funny — and I liked the dancing at the end."
Her classmate Sean enjoyed the Giant. "He had a big stomach, and he was funny, when he would go, 'Oooooo, oooooo, oooooo,'" he said. "The play was really good. I liked how they did all the designs."
And how could these kids not like a play which takes a pause halfway through so the audience can sing If You're Happy and You Know It, and then come up on stage to hammer away on various percussion instruments?
According to Antaki, who brought a



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Judge: Lois Tuffin, Kawartha Media Group, Ontario • Number of entries in the Best Education Story category: 29

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