Dear RMSEL Parent Community,

This school year, our entire community of staff, students, and parents are dedicated to the elevation of student learning. RMSEL has an exceptional growth and achievement record as documented in our annual School / District Performance Framework. While we take pride in these achievements, it is important that our focus remains on striving for excellence in both achievement and character development.

To highlight the work that is taking place, I want to provide the community with concrete examples of our focus throughout the school year. Currently in 7th / 8th grade, our students are doing a multidisciplinary learning expedition shared between Science and Mathematics. Students are currently engaged in the design, construction, and planning of tiny house models. To elevate this work, students are conducting fieldwork experiences as well as working with local experts in the classroom to understand all aspects of design and implementation of a tiny house community. Last week, Steale Ethridge from Denver Homeless Out Loud, joined our students in class to share sample blueprints from a current Tiny House Community in the Denver Metro Area. Steale worked hand in hand with the students to answer questions and steer their thinking and learning about the current learning expedition. It is exceptional for students to experience this type of learning in the classroom and an added bonus is that Steale understands the process of Expeditionary Learning. Steale is a proud alumnus of RMSEL, graduating in 2007.

In addition to this project, we are working to make an additional connection with RMSEL Graduate (2015), Faaris Hays, who is currently a student at the University of Colorado studying design and architecture. This winter, if you make it out to the Denver Botanic Gardens, you will likely purchase your ticket from a modular ticket booth. The ticket booth was designed and constructed by Faaris and his team of fellow students. The ticket booth is amazing as it has the ability to be illuminated to reflect the marketing campaign of the Botanic Gardens throughout the year. The booth is currently operational and will surely make a splash this winter during the annual holiday of lights celebration.

This work is authentic and purposeful, leading to deeper engagement of students in seeing the connection of their grade level content to the local community. In addition to the increase in complexity, it requires students to work together through challenges and setbacks throughout the learning process. Design Principle #5 states, “All students need to be successful if they are to find the confidence and capacity to take risks and meet increasingly difficult challenges. But it is also important for students to learn from their failures, to persevere when things are hard, and to learn to turn disabilities into opportunities.”
Authentic learning experiences in which students experience success and failure also lead to stronger relationships and true compassion for their classmates. Academic achievement and character excellence cannot be met in isolation of one another.

**District Accountability Committee**

To assist with the ongoing work to elevate student learning, our District Accountability Committee will facilitate connecting parents and community members to projects throughout the year, posting links to sign-ups. In addition to supporting this work they will also be sharing photos and write-ups on our website through a new link sponsored by DAC. The first post to kick off the year can be found at the following link: (http://www.rmsel.org/Parents/District-Accountability-Committee/index.html)

**Roots – Gordonstoun to RMSEL**

In 1933, Outward Bound founder Kurt Hahn opened Gordonstoun, a boys’ school in Scotland that became renowned as one of Britain’s most distinguished progressive schools. (Roots: From Outward Bound to Expeditionary Learning).

Hahn’s vision at Gordonstoun was to “bring together people from different social classes in common pursuits leading to self discovery and services. Building upon his experience as an educator who had used challenging outdoor activities requiring cooperation and craftsmanship along with academic learning, he and others devised a program of intensive training from initiatives he had been running at this school. The program became Outward Bound.”
Our connection with Hahn is different from new schools of EL Education, as we believe the principles established by Hahn at Gordonstoun and through the establishment of Outward Bound are more important in the present than when established at the turn of the century. Hahn believed that we must collaborate to overcome hardship, which sharpens both the mind and spirit of an individual. This feeling of success is the most genuine and euphoric state an individual can experience but can only be manifested when a child is truly challenged.

At RMSEL, we strive to engage students in challenging classroom activities and field experiences that expose them to failure while guiding them to success. At every turn of almost every day, I observe our teachers pause and ensure that they are guides and not performing task for students. They question students and require them to think before acting and plan before doing. This, in itself, is a challenge in our present day society as instant gratification is artificially manufactured and pumped at students through the false interactions generated through electronic domains.

I share this with you in closure as our High School Teacher Team Leader, Eric Dinkel, had the privilege to visit Gordonstoun while attending a family wedding in London last month. Upon Eric’s return he was able to reflect on his experiences and draw comparison to the work we are doing at RMSEL. In summary to Eric’s experience, it was reassuring that at RMSEL, we continue to foster experiences that require students to engage directly with one another as human beings and provide them adequate challenge. The values of Gordonstoun are still vibrant and present at RMSEL! While we work in different contexts it is reassuring that we are doing the right work in service of our students!

(High School Team Leader, Eric Dinkel, with an original portrait of Kurt Hahn at The Gordonstoun School)

Sincerely,

Chad