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To: School Committee

From: Amy Clouter, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment

Unified Play at Beal Early Childhood Center : Building Confidence & Competency

INTRODUCTION

As you know, Shrewsbury's [Portrait of a Graduate](#) process resulted in the creation of a shared vision statement of the community's aspirations for our graduates. Our [strategic plan](#) and the resulting district goals outlined our commitment to that vision, namely that we will improve our schools by focusing on:

- Space and resources to support effective learning
- Connected learning for a complex world
- Learning environments where everyone's success matters
- Enhanced wellbeing of all

In the time since, principals and other leaders have wrestled with the question, What does *the Portrait* look like by level? At the Beal Early Childhood Center, faculty focused first on developing student agency in Kindergarten. They created structures and routines that build the capacity of children to cooperate, and integrated opportunities for curiosity and creativity into the academic day. These efforts were supported by guidance at the state level, namely the creation of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's [Guidelines for Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Experiences](#), which depict learning standards and curriculum tools designed to help educators meet and support young children as they develop academically and socially. The DESE published a related document which outlines the Massachusetts standards for Preschool and Kindergarten entitled [Social and Emotional Learning and Approaches to Play and Learning](#). Beal School's Unified Hour of Play initiative aligns well with these research-based

practices. More importantly, the experience is highly valued by Beal students.

PLAY, REDESIGNED

Imaginative play has long had a place in Kindergarten. The images of students busy playing house, flipping imaginary burgers or replicating supermarket experiences in school are familiar. Purposefully leveraging these experiences to grow students' skills is less common- and more challenging.



How can teachers allow for individual choice and foster collaboration? How can educators best support students with special needs as they enter the diverse social network that is Kindergarten? Together with four students, Mr. Chris Girardi, Principal at Beal, and

Kindergarten Teachers Margaret Aulenback and Michelle Neddo will describe Beal's Unified Hour of Play initiative. In their presentation, they'll speak to what they have learned. More to the point, they'll describe how attending to choice, voice, creativity, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making have resulted in an educational experience that's making a positive difference for all children.

Thank you for the opportunity to describe this important initiative, and for allowing some of our youngest students to meaningfully participate in such an important community forum.

