



# Lexington Public Schools

146 Maple Street ♦ Lexington, Massachusetts 02420

Paul B. Ash, Ph.D.  
*Superintendent of Schools*

(781) 861-2580  
email: [pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)  
fax: (781) 863-5829

## Our Schools

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*Louise Lipsitz, Principal, Maria Hastings School*

Walking into the Hastings School last Thursday morning, you would have found the building abuzz in anticipation of a visit from the Commissioner of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Earlier in the fall, Commissioner Mitchell Chester's office contacted Dr. Ash with a request to visit Lexington to see first-hand a school district that is highly successful at meeting the needs of a diverse population of learners. The Hastings School was selected to represent the district as the host school.

During his visit, Commissioner Chester had an opportunity to see what makes Lexington a high performing and high growth school district, and one that continuously seeks to improve achievement for *all* students. Joining Commissioner Chester was State Board of Education member and Lexington resident Thomas Fortmann, Superintendent Paul Ash, Assistant Superintendent Carol Pilarski, and Hastings School Principal Louise Lipsitz.

During an intervention block in grade 5, the Commissioner observed three classrooms where student groups worked collaboratively on the same topic, but at different levels of difficulty. The mathematics specialist co-taught in one room with the classroom teacher. In the other two classrooms, technology was used to enhance mathematics learning. We were proud to show the Commissioner how Hastings uses flexible grouping and co-teaching practices, combined with thoughtful teacher planning, to provide focused instruction based on student needs.

In the art room, the Commissioner observed a kindergarten class that included children with identified special needs. In addition to the art teacher, the occupational therapist supported the fine motor development of the children, indicative of the collaboration between general and special education staff members.

When the Commissioner entered a grade 1 class, he observed the students actively engaged in their literacy block. The general education class included six children that required specialized instruction. The children were working with two teachers and two assistants in mixed ability groups. Every child's learning needs were being met as a result of the planning and implementation of multiple, related learning tasks.

The final stop on the Commissioner's tour was to a grade 4 class. Students in this classroom were busy writing persuasive paragraphs. Co-taught by a general educator and special educator, one cluster of students was writing independently. At their sides were rubrics, which are descriptors students use to assess their writing for content and mechanics. What made this task even more effective was the differentiation of the four rubrics, each designed to support the writing skills for a specific set of students. At one table, children received direct teaching about the content of an effective paragraph. At another table, the teacher conducted conferences with students who had completed their writing.

After touring the building, Commissioner Chester commented on qualities that he observed — the welcoming atmosphere, the high degree of student engagement in all classes, the collective commitment to school and district goals, and outstanding teaching.

As the principal of the Hastings School, I am very proud of our students and the educators that teach them every day. The Hastings School faculty was honored that the Commissioner of Education had an opportunity to see one of Lexington's outstanding nine schools for a few hours.

*Louise Lipsitz is the Principal of the Maria Hastings Elementary School.*