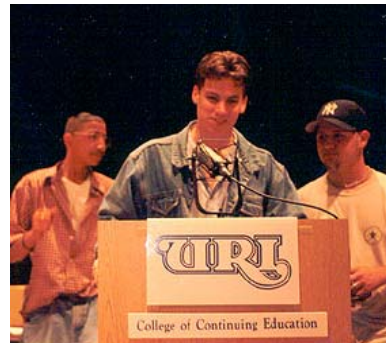


Succeeding together at the Met

by What Kids Can Do with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

student learning in small schools

VOICE & AGENCY



Photos by Cal Wolk

"I started out my first year here as a person whose talkativeness sometimes got me in trouble. By the end of the year, I saw that my talent for words could help me personally but also advance causes I believe in. My LTI gave me lots of chances to practice presenting in public. I had to describe to my team the results of the teen survey I'd conducted. [Then] I presented at a meeting in Washington about incorporating community service into school. Recently I attended an open conference on AIDS and other issues. I decided to step up to the microphone." — Nadia

"I didn't want to go to college when I came here in ninth grade. I just wanted to go straight to the Marines. Now it's like, I want to go to college, to be a song producer, I want to be a writer, a cook, I want to be everything! I want to be Mayor! Yeah! Mayor! That's where I'm at now." — Juan

From the moment students enter The Met they are encouraged to speak up, to find and tap their voice, to identify their strengths and pursue their passions. As they develop their voice, they also forge their personal narrative or story. The college portfolio required of each student

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showcases these narratives, as do the valedictory speech and 75- to 100-page autobiography required of all seniors. As Met students weave success stories small and large, they gain a sense of their own worth and power—what some call *agency*.

Below, we describe the building blocks that support and challenge students as they develop their voice and sense of direction and power, with links to student work and other artifacts.

JOURNALS

The Met The Met uses journals to help students express ideas and concerns that are still rough or not meant to be broadly shared: a pressing fear or disappointment, a family problem, a nascent dream, an opinion or perception that goes against the norm. In their journals students also reflect on books they read, their internship experiences, and their overall learning. Students are expected to write three times per week, and advisors write back, often drawing on their own experiences. In this way, students practice putting down on paper what they think, supported by an adult committed to listening.

[Click here](#) for examples of Met writing prompts that spark and guide student journal writing.

COLLEGE PORTFOLIOS

The Met requires *all* of its students to apply to college, even if they do not go—right away or ever. (Over three-quarters head straight to college.) The school embraces the college application process as a tool for helping students dream big, set high standards for their work, and hone their presentation of self. The expectations for what students will do increase yearly, beginning in the tenth grade when they start investigating and visiting colleges. By the time students graduate they will have: met with a college counselor and attended (with a family member) a Met college night; taken at least two sets of college entrance exams; adjusted their quarterly learning plans to reflect the admission requirements of the colleges they are considering; prepared a college portfolio that includes transcripts, a resume, college essay, best work, and awards; and visited, interviewed with and applied to at least four colleges and explored financial aid options.

[Click here](#) for examples of students' college resumes.

PUBLIC SPEAKING AND WRITING

Public speaking is a constant at The Met. Morning “Pick-Me-Ups” (the school-wide gathering that starts each day) provide a ready stage, as do “town meetings” and other school events. Internships offer another forum, as students make presentations to their adult work colleagues (perhaps reporting research findings) or to other teens (for example, speaking to groups of middle school-aged kids about smoking). Students are also encouraged to raise their voices as citizens (maybe at a public hearing on school spending) or to talk about The Met at regional and national education gatherings. Met staff never take the stage without one or more students by their side, spreading these speaking opportunities broadly across the entire student body.

Writing for a public audience is also a Met mainstay and often takes the form of handbooks or reports that convey information to selected community audiences. Just as often, students' public writing aims for understanding and reflection—essays and poems about school, family, community, identity.

[Click here](#) for a student speech at the December 2002 groundbreaking ceremonies for the new Met complex.

[Click here](#) for examples of student writing in national publications.

SUCCESS STORIES

The book-length autobiographies Met students write—over the course of their junior and senior year—stand alongside the unwritten personal stories they weave day in and out. As seniors receive their Met diploma, their advisor delivers the “short version” of these success stories, an oral tribute to the graduate for all to hear. The audience learns about the shy student who became an ardent public speaker, the science-loathing student turned aspiring pediatrician. It hears of the original style, attitude, and passions each student has carved, their talents and shortcomings, highs and lows, hard-won accomplishments. For adolescents yearning to forge unique and positive identities, the sense of agency conferred by these narratives is among The Met’s most enduring gifts.

[Click here](#) for examples of advisor tributes at graduation.

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Sources:

[1] “Forty-Three Valedictorians: Graduates of The Met Talk about Their Learning” by Adria Steinberg (Brown Lab, 2000)

[2] Learning Journeys and The Learning Cycle (Met videos, 2000)

[3] *One Kid at a Time* by Eliot Levine (Teachers College Press, 2002).

On speaking in public

Maya: Everybody here goes on job shadows and informational interviews to see if they want internships there. Last year I was so afraid to talk with people, to sit there and like talk. Now I’ve been to three or four informational interviews. I interviewed them, and it’s like helping me out. I speak well in front of people now. [1]

Leah: When I came to this school, I didn’t know anyone, so I was all shy... I never liked to speak in front of any people. I started with a Pick-Me-Up (a morning meeting ritual at The Met), and then I went to Florida. We spoke a little bit in front of 30 people, then we had a table, and people would come, and then we had to talk with them. [1]

Zoe: My LTI is at the Urban League of Rhode Island, and what I do there is I go around and I talk to schools twice a week, on Tuesday and Thursday, about tobacco prevention. And currently I have been talking to the students at B.J. Clinton School, and today I went to my old school, Community Prep, and talked to the eighth graders there. [1]

Nadia: I started out my first year here as a person whose talkativeness sometimes got me in trouble. By the end of the year, I saw that my talent for words could help me personally but also advance causes I believe in. My LTI gave me lots of chances to practice presenting in public. I had to describe to my team the results of the teen survey I’d conducted. I presented at a meeting in Washington about incorporating community service into school. I started to think more and more about what is involved, like that a public speaker should not be reading from note cards.

Recently I attended an open conference [in Providence] on AIDS and other issues. I decided to step up to the microphone. I spoke there, too, because I also felt very strongly about people that have the power, have the money to do something [but] just sit there and talk about it and they

don't go out actually in their communities... That was something I thought that would be good to say there. Also to encourage teens to do that, too, because many of us could do a lot, but we're not encouraged to. We feel like we're not useful for anything... So that's why I talked about it... We need to speak out about it. We need to be encouraged to do that, because we don't think we could. [1]

Juan (testifying to the Rhode Island House Committee on Finance, Subcommittee on Elementary & Secondary Education): My name's Juan Huertas, I'm a senior, and first and foremost I want to say it's good to be back here. I was here in the eighth grade, you know, supporting The Met, and I'm here now supporting it again. You all had mentioned something about going on trips—I just want to say that I, too, was a part of Summer Search. I did an Outward Bound course. I went to Dominican Republic to do community service, and I built a house for a poor family, and I built a school for 800 future students. [2]

On feeling one's power

Sando: Well I didn't really have anything that I thought I was good at in school, except for sports, and I didn't really have any goals for work or anything. I took a class in children's literature (at a local college). I wanted to be independent, wanted to go on my own and do something that I knew would give me a challenge, because I'm not used to doing work like that. And I love children, and that's what pushed me into that. So I took this class, and it came out really good. My tests were pretty good and at the end of the class you had to write your own book. And so I did that, and it came out really good. I never did anything like that before, and it was just crazy! Boom! I found my passion then. That was when I first managed to find out what I was good at. [1]

Maya: I'm surprised that I've gotten this far. It was back and forth, whether I didn't want to go to college or maybe I should. But I'm so engaged that I really want to work my butt off for the next four years again and do the same cycle and get somewhere after that. [1]

Juan: I didn't want to go to college when I came here in 9th grade. I just wanted to go straight to the Marines. I mean, the thought still comes into my mind, you know? Now it's like, I want to go to college, to be a song producer, I want to be a writer, a cook, I want to be everything! I want to be Mayor! Yeah, Mayor! That's where I'm at now. [2]

On persevering

Elliot (advisor): I just tell students that they're not dropping out. Deirdre's mom says, "Well, it's up to her. If she wants to leave, she can leave." And I say "No, she can't! If you talk like that, she'll think she can do anything she wants." Her plan was to go down to Florida and hook up with some older guy or some crazy thing. She's 17 years old! So I told her "You can't drop out. I won't sign the papers. You think you'll get a GED and go to college, but within two months you'll be pregnant and he'll dump you. Then no one will rent you an apartment, and you'll be living on the street. So you're not leaving. You're just not leaving." And it worked. She stayed. Sometimes you have to do something desperate like that. By delaying her a few days, we bought her the time she needed to change her mind. [3]

Maya: I'm proud of myself for coming a long way in these four years, maturing and all that. I'm proud of my senior class for being the first class to ever graduate from The Met, and I also want to be proud of the next class coming up. I know a lot of the 11th graders—when they heard me say that their eyes just opened up a little bit, like yeah, I'm going to make it, too. That's what I really wanted—for them to hang in there. The Met is sort of like changing the path for them. [1]

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See also related student and staff commentary

1.0 Journals

*The Met expects all students to write in a journal three times a week. The following writing prompts are from **The Big Picture Learning Cycle: Organize and Do It**, one of six booklets developed by The Big Picture Company for students at The Met and other Big Picture schools.*

Writing prompts

Think about the most interesting thing you have done or learned this week. Describe it. What did you learn from the experience? What was interesting about it?

Do you like to **draw**? Include pictures in your journal.

Do you **write poetry**, or want to try? Include a poem.

Summarize what you did today. What did you do? How did you do it? Where were you? Who was there? What did you enjoy or dislike most about the day? Why?

Make a word collage! Write down all the words that come to mind when you think of your day or your week.

What have you been thinking about lately? Something you heard in the news? Something that happened at school? At your LTI? At home? Something you and your friends have been talking about?

What are you reading? Talk about it. Is the book causing you to think about a certain issue? Are you learning something new? Write about the style the book is written in. What do you think of the characters? Are they teaching you something?

Practice writing in a foreign language that you are learning.

Write about a challenging experience you had. How did you react to the situation? Why? What did you learn about yourself? Will you react differently next time to a similar problem?

What have you learned this week? Are you proud of it? Describe it.

Describe your day as a story. How would you make it more descriptive? Write an entry as if it is a story you are telling to someone. How would you describe the characters? What is the plot? What is the conclusion?

Read some past journal entries. Do you see any patterns or connections? Is there something you keep experiencing or learning more about? Write about what you learn about yourself and your progress by reading those past entries.

Do you love math? Is there a particular equation or formula that you've been thinking about and learning from? How are you using this knowledge in your daily life?

Are you doing a fun project? Describe it. Is the project turning out like you thought it would? What are you learning?

Is music your passion? Is there a particular song you have been listening to or performing that you love? Describe the music through words, or a poem, or a drawing. What does music teach you about yourself?

There are a million other things to write about. These are just a few to spark your imagination and get you thinking.

2.0 College portfolios and resumes

The resumes prepared by students as part of their college portfolio reflect their individual passions—and The Met's belief that combining personal interests with real world internships creates potent learning (along with unusual resumes). In the case of Alice, a passion for riding, plus three years of LTIs involving horses and other animals, has put veterinary school on her horizon. For James, his diverse interests spotlight a range of fields from music, computers, and videomaking to rock climbing and tutoring.

Alice's Resume

Met School

Providence, RI

Community Service:

Northeast Equine Association, Johnston, RI **April 2001- present**

- * Traveled with horse veterinarian to different horse patients.
- * Traveled in RI and parts of Connecticut and Massachusetts.
- * Assisted the doctor with horses during the exam.
- * Organized and restocked vaccinations by expiration dates.

Hoffman Animal Hospital, Providence, RI **Oct. 1999-Jan. 2001**

- * Exposed to many different kinds of animals and analyzed different illnesses.

- * Assisted the DVMs during many operations by putting in the tracheal tube or injecting the animal with the necessary medication.
- * Helped to train new employees to do chores to the proper way of handling an aggressive animal.
- * Worked with microscopes and did biopsies on deceased animals.

Sunset Stables, Lincoln, RI **1998-2001**

- * Worked 4 days a week on school days and every day during the summer.
- * Volunteered cleaning stalls, feeding, watering and grooming horses.
- * Taught new students of every age how to groom and tack before each lesson.
- * Led trail rides through Lincoln Woods Park.
- * Trained and sold a 15-year-old horse that had no experience riding because of its past experience of being a brood mare.
- * Volunteered in riding therapy by taking physically and mentally challenged kids, ages 3 to 8, of all abilities on a pony trail ride. I was to teach them different exercises to do to stay focused while on the pony.
- * Gave pony rides at a summer camp for children with Celiac, from all over the country.

Elmwood Health Center, Providence, RI **2000-2001**

- * Participated in pet therapy once a week with elderly people.
- * Went to each patient with two dogs to give them company and help them socialize.

Smith Hill Center, Providence, RI **1997**

- * Prepared and served lunch to low income elderly people.

Amos House, Providence, RI **1997**

- * Served breakfast and lunch to poor and low income families.

Presentations:

Teachers Convention, Boston, Mass. **2001**

- * Spoke about going to an untraditional high school to 2,000 educators from all over the country.

Wesley College, Wesley, Mass. **2001**

- * Spoke to a class majoring in Education, about my thoughts on the new theory of unconventional learning.

Organizations and Athletics:

- Agenda Committee** 1999-2001
* Facilitator on campus Committee that discusses school issues.
- Yearbook Committee** 2001
* Provided insight and suggestions for content.
- Prom Committee** 2000-2001
* Gave advice on decorations to be set up at prom site.
- Horseback riding** 1997-Present
* 5 hours of Hunter and Dressage riding a week.
* Competed in Woodstock Fair and Guarded Park open horse shows.

James' Resume

Met School
Providence, RI

Objective: Applying to Eastern Connecticut State University.

Education:

- The Metropolitan Career and Technical Center** 1998-2002 Providence, RI
* Projected Diploma in 2002
- Community College of Rhode Island** Spring 2001 Providence, RI
* Writing Course. Received a "C" while still a junior in high school.
* Introduction to Business Course.

Internship/Work Experience:

- New Technology Computers** 2000-20001 Providence, RI
Intern/Employee
* Built a network of seven computers.
* Built PC-based computers.
* Performed daily troubleshooting.
* Learned POS software and hardware system.
- The Met Center/Roger William Park Zoo** 1999-present Providence, RI
Intern
* Created a video for the Roger William Park Zoo on careers at the zoo.
* Created short documentary of the Met Hunger Tour.
* Created videos using both Digital and Analog formats.
* Technology coordinator at the Met Center.
- GL Trading Company** 1999 Providence, RI
Intern
* Installed car radios.
* Built speaker boxes and wires an entire radio system.
* Prepared car alarms.

Activities Methodist Primitive Church 1998-2001 Providence, RI
Musician, Bass Player

* Took Bass Classes at church.

* Started to play with the music group two months later.

Outward Bound Summer 2001 Crochville, ME
Student

* 28 Days Expedition: Backpacking, Rock climbing, Canoeing, and Team work.

Interlocken Summer 2000 Hillsboro, NH
Student

* 22 Day course helped me become a leader. Community service work.
Ran class for younger students.

Skills:

* Bilingual Spanish Speaking and Writing.

* Public Speaking at Coalition of Essential School Conferences in Atlanta

* Computer Troubleshooting.

* Video Producing, Cinematography, Editing (I-Movie, Adobe Premiere).

* Computer skills: Software: Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, Adobe Illustrator, Premiere, and PhotoShop
Advanced Windows 2000, Me, 98 SE, 98, and 95.

All Bios

Mac Operating Systems

Hardware: Building PC and Programmer PC and Mac

Awards:

South Providence Development Corporation 2001
Participation in the Summer Youth Employment Program

Direct Action for Fights and Equalities 2001
Dedication in the struggle for justice.

The Met Buddy Program 2001
Appreciation of service for mentoring younger students.

South Providence Tutorial, Inc. 2000
Tutoring adolescents during the summer.

President's Student Service Award 2000
Outstanding service and commitment to strengthening America.

Democracy Compact 1999
Leadership, dedication and commitment to strengthening our democracy.

Computer Skills:

Proficient in Microsoft Office

MS Word, Mail Merge, Excel, PowerPoint

Internet

Research, instant messaging, e-mail.

3.0 Public speaking

The Met encourages all students, even those who are shy or reluctant, to speak in front of public audiences. At the opening ceremonies (Dec. '02) for The Met's new campus, an event that included Rhode Island's governor along with leading business and political figures, two Met students spoke. Here's what one said:

Hello my name is Jesse. My freshman and sophomore year I attended [the local high school]. While I wasn't nearly failing, I felt frustrated that my effort did not show through in my grades. My junior year I entered The Met.

My expectations were not clear, but I was very excited about a different kind of learning experience, a learning experience that promised a chance to explore my interests.

At [my old school] the bell dictated my day. For an environment that is meant to prepare kids for the "real world," an environment meant to lay the groundwork for our democracy, it actually reflected our real world very little, or at least I hoped this to be true. At The Met I found that I was right. I was given a blank canvas, I scheduled my day, I made my education my own. I dove into books I was interested in and I explored subjects that I was passionate about. My first quarter I continued to be surprised that not only did they allow me to do what I wanted, but they encouraged me to. Most schools seem to believe that kids do not want to learn; The Met recognizes that kids do, and further more that learning is not something that can be prevented. Through facilitating real world experiences students naturally learn.

Early in the second quarter, I entered my real world experience. My internship at Jobs with Justice was life changing. It provided me with the most intense learning of my school career. At The Met students learn what they want to, because they want to. This is unlike any other school. Because of this my learning was internalized, NOT memorized. My project was to create a documentary about the exploitation of a group of immigrant fish processing workers. My learning ranged from researching the National Labor Relations Act and Board, to the artistic and technical side of video production.

Possibly, the most important and valuable attribute of The Met is its community. Advisors at The Met know students personally and truly care about each of them. Within weeks of entering I became close friends with my entire advisory. The Met advisories are diverse in every way, and alone offer a learning experience worth changing schools for. At The Met we learn from our peers, are provided opportunities by our peers, and are supported by our peers. The growth and division of campuses has made it important to work to preserve the close relationships found in the student body. The first few weeks have gone well; I have had access to both a small student body for personalized learning, and to a large student body that provides vast resources.

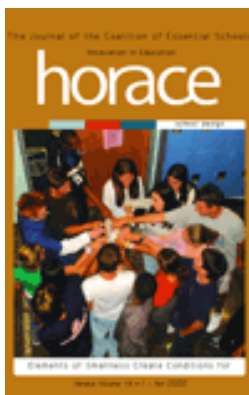
I have been asked what kind of kid should go to The Met. All kids should go to The Met. The Met is not only for kids who stand up to authority, or for "college bound" kids, or for artists, mechanics, mathematicians, scientists, writers. It's not only for these kids,

it's for all kids. This wide group of students creates the diverse learning environment, which is The Met.

So I stand here in this new space, a very beautiful space, and I am very appreciative—and excited about making it our own. In the same way we have made this school, our individual learning, and our community our own.

4.0 Public writing

*The writing of Met students frequently circulates well beyond the school's walls, as handbooks and research papers or on the pages of the state's journal of youth poetry and expression (**The Muzine** published by AS220). Occasionally, the writing of Met students also reaches a national audience.*



In the Fall 2002 issue of the Coalition of Essential School's *Horace*, Met senior Laura Hughes writes about individualizing her own learning.

[Click here](#) to read



In the March 2002 issue of *Youth Today*, Misty Wilson, a Met graduate currently enrolled at Brown University, writes about precariousness and hope in an autobiographical essay, "How a Family Turns."

[Click here](#) to read

5.0 Graduation tributes

*As Met seniors receive their diploma at graduation, their advisor summarizes what's made them special. As one graduate said, "We're all the success story here." The following advisor graduation tributes come from *The Met* video, **Learning Journeys**.*

From Juan's advisor ... Juan and I had the distinct pleasure of seeing and listening to Saul Williams speak at Harvard University. He talked about the power of words, the spell they cast on people. And I think more than any student that I know, Juan possesses this ability, to be able to use words in a way where they can cast—they can cast spells, where they can really provide power. Juan has been a passionate defender of The Met culture, this culture of respect and safety. There has been a willingness to share his mistakes, his history, to benefit other people. I'm proud of his direction, his example for others to follow. His classmates said, We will never forget you. You really made an impact in our lives. A huge inspiration to us, your courage to stick with the school—you realized that it was more important than the streets. Congratulations.

From Raysa's advisor. So I'm walking into the courthouse one day, where Raysa has her internship with a state Supreme Court justice. Raysa sits by the judge's bench while lawyers present their cases. This seems fitting, to see her sit next to the first African-American woman Supreme Court justice in Rhode Island. Raysa's a natural leader with a penchant and talent for law. Seven college classes later, she has almost

completed the requirements for a paralegal degree, but why stop there? She interned with the Attorney General's office, but she wants to know, How much higher can I go? Her first internship at the Rhode Island Children's Crusade was a springboard for Raysa and she has thrived. I'm sad to watch her go, but excited to see how far she'll climb. Congratulations.

From Priscilla's advisor. She's memorized every nerve, muscle and bone in the body, learned to write beautiful poetic prose, mastered high-level algebra, learned how to calligraphy in many fonts. She has taken seven college classes, spoken at conferences and influenced in a positive way almost every facet of The Met. She has pursued her interest in poetry, physical therapy, and medicine; she has boundless potential. She will be deeply missed. Congratulations.



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