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For Immediate Release

Reading Public Schools Present a Celebration of Inclusive Schools

In February and March, the Reading Public Schools will present a Celebration of Inclusive Schools through a series of plays, performances and speaker sessions presented to the town's middle and high school students and to the public.

The offerings are being made possible through the combined efforts of Reading Pupil Services; the RMHS Drama Club; Understanding Disabilities, Inc; the Coolidge, Parker, and RMHS PTOs; Parents Supporting Student Theater; Project Challenge; Samantha's Harvest; as well as the gift of an anonymous donor.

The purpose of Inclusive Schools Celebrations is to highlight all that families, schools, and communities do to help schools successfully educate *all* children.

“Inclusive Schools Week is nationally celebrated in December,” says Colleen Dolan, Director of Pupil Services for the Reading Public Schools. “We postponed and expanded it because of the Drama productions and their relevance.”

The plays Dolan is referring to are two upcoming productions by the RMHS Drama Club. Both feature main characters who have disabilities. *The Boys Next Door* is a funny yet touching play that focuses on the lives of four men with developmental disabilities who live together in a group home. Performances will be Fri. Feb 5th and Sat. Feb 6th at 7:30 PM at the RMHS Performing Arts Center.

The second play, *The Elephant Man*, tells the story of John Merrick, a man with physical deformities who suffers from the way he is treated by society. It will take place at the RMHS

Performing Arts Center on Fri. Mar. 12 and Sat. Mar. 13 at 7:30 PM.

To fully prepare for these roles, Drama Club members have viewed the award-winning film *Including Samuel*, met with local residents who have developmental and physical disabilities, met with a recreation director from the ARC of East Middlesex, and visited a local group home.

In addition to Drama Club offerings, the Celebration of Inclusive Schools will include two presentations that will be given to Reading middle school and high school students. Both also feature evening performances that are open to the public.

On Mon. Feb. 22nd at 7 PM, actor, psychologist, and poet Michael Fowlin will perform his one-man show, “You Don’t Know Me Until You Know Me” at the RMHS Performing Arts Center. Fowlin combines his professional acting with his psychological training in performances that support his mission of creating an atmosphere of inclusion, not just tolerance, towards all people. The performance is free and open to the public. Fowlin will also perform for students at the Coolidge Middle School and at Reading Memorial High School.

The final offering of the Inclusive Schools Celebration will be speaker sessions by Karen Gaffney, an accomplished long-distance swimmer with Down Syndrome whose foundation champions the journey to full inclusion for people with developmental disabilities. Gaffney will speak at the Coolidge and Parker Middle Schools featuring the topic, “We’re More Alike Than Different” She will also address the Reading community on Wed. March 3rd at 7 PM at Parker Middle School with a presentation entitled, “Re-writing the Data,” which focuses on the possibilities of individuals with disabilities.

“We tell fourth graders about Karen's historic swim across Lake Tahoe and her recent eight-mile swim in Boston Harbor,” says Ruth Clogston, Program Director of Understanding Disabilities, Inc. “She's changing attitudes about what people with disabilities can do. We're so pleased she's coming to Reading.”

For further information, contact Colleen Dolan, Director of Pupil Services, at RMHS.