

# Bridges: connecting school and community



The Education Newsletter of the Woodbridge School District

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## 21st century education is more than computers . . .

We often refer to a 21st Century Model of Education when presenting budgets, addressing parents and townspeople, or speaking with reporters. Just what is a “21st century model of education” anyway? To answer that question, Dr. Gaeton “Guy” Stella, our Superintendent of Schools, sat down recently to explain it.



“When we refer to a 21st century model of education, we’re talking about preparing our students for certainties they will face in their workplace,” Stella said. According to leading futur-

ists, seven attributes will be demanded in tomorrow’s workplace. They include: 1) *literacy on global issues*, 2) *sensitivity to world culture*, 3) *ability to communicate in different languages*, 4) *a high level of proficiency in using technology for rapid communication and knowledge building*, 5) *ability to work on a team*, 6) *behaving ethically defined by culture*, 7) *ability to constantly learn and innovate*.

“The implications for our schools are tremendous.” The superintendent continued, “Look at that list.” In talking further he cited the need for social studies reform that would align with global issues and world cultures, and world language teaching that would address the need to communicate with non-English speakers. The implications for incorporating technology into daily life are obvious while at the same time having a sense of right and wrong, and ethical behavior.

“All of this, of course, is tied in with core academic areas and the ability to read, write and think critically. Our stu-

dents must become independent readers, writers, learners, problem solvers and thinkers by the end of sixth grade. Reading and literacy must be redefined to meet the higher standards of this new information age,” Stella emphasized. “It’s a tall order, but together we’re doing it.”

21st century classrooms are becoming interactive environments that reach far beyond the walls of the school building to places where there is constant thinking and learning going on. Assessments need to be timely, effective, and include a balance of standardized measures and teacher made evaluations.

Continuing, Stella said, “We’re training our students in the syntax and grammar of the internet. They have to know how to work collaboratively, research and gather information on short notice on a wide variety of subjects, guarantee the authenticity of their sources, synthesize their information rapidly, and be able to present a final product in an articulate manner using a variety of presentation modalities. And that’s just for starters.”

For more information about “The 21st Century Model of Education,” go to [www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us), Click “A Parent’s Guide To The Curriculum” >page 2.

The Woodbridge Board of Education holds regular monthly meetings in the Beecher Road School library media center. Go to [www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us), Click link to “Board of Education” > meetings.

## School Budget 101

If you've ever looked at a school budget the first thing that comes to mind is, "this is way too complicated to understand." Actually, although it is a complicated document it is highly organized and broken down into specific areas that make it understandable.

Many are not aware that some expenditures that appear in the budget are required by state law and must be funded. Take, for example, *transportation*. State law requires that the taxpayer foot the bill for getting children to and from school. Although that has little or nothing to do with instruction, it represents nearly 5%, or over a half-million dollars, of the budget total.

Another large expenditure that is required under state and federal law is the cost of educating children with special needs. In some cases children need to be sent to school settings outside of Woodbridge so they can get an appropriate education. An item in the budget called *tuition* is what funds those extraordinary cases. Those costs have totaled another half-million dollars a year for many years but are expected to be considerably lower next school

year. We accept the ethical and moral obligation to educate all children, but the financial cost of making that a reality is high.

Several other legal mandates are also part of the budget that funds the schools.

Other items, like keeping the phones ringing, the lights on and the heat going, cost nearly another half-million.

The Woodbridge Board of Education has submitted an \$11,907,906 budget proposal to the Boards of Selectmen and Finance for the 2008-09 school year. Salaries and benefits for school system employees account for 78% of the budget; 11% covers the three areas mentioned above, *transportation, tuition, and heat/utilities*. The remaining 11% of the budget is spent on everything else needed to run a school: supplies, books, equipment, paper, postage, insurance, outside services, etc. 

*For a complete and detailed look at the Board of Education Budget Proposal for 2008-09, go to the district website, [www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us), click on the Board of Education link > budget.*

## Students today, scientists tomorrow

As we begin the twenty-first century, educators are increasingly aware that students must be prepared to become scientifically literate citizens who are able to deal with pressing issues at the local, national and global levels that are related to science.

Furthermore, statistics show that at precisely the time that we need personnel trained in the areas of science that address problems such as climate change, the production and distribution of food, and the careful husbanding of natural resources, the numbers of college students completing relevant degrees are falling. A dilemma we must face.

A recent study funded by the *National Science Foundation* suggests that the most effective time to begin attracting students to careers in science may be while they are in elementary school. Inquiry-based science instruction at *Beecher Road School* strives to engage students in

scientific practices while encouraging their natural curiosity.



In the context of inquiry-based science, students develop an understanding of developmentally appropriate content while practicing a thoughtful and coordinated approach to seek, describe, explain and predict natural phenomena. Through a process of

questioning, predicting, designing and carrying out a scientific investigation, students progress.

Then they collect, analyze and interpret their data, all the while applying the tools of mathematics. Finally, students use their language arts skills to share their findings and ideas with others for the purpose of critical review and synthesis.

The new science laboratory at *Beecher Road School* engages students in inquiry by providing *hands-on, minds-on* learning opportunities in a setting that allows ready access to the materials and tools such activities require.

Perhaps the best measure of the success of the new science lab is the enthusiasm of students who stop in with their nature treasures, with questions about all sorts of phenomena, or who eagerly ask, "When will *my* class come to the lab?" 

## **Cornerstones of character: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control**

In Woodbridge, the *Responsive Classroom* approach to teaching and learning is being promulgated as a means of improving the educational experience. This approach recognizes that the process of learning is as important as the content. It is a social curriculum taught along with the academic curriculum.

Social interactions, and ways to have them be successful, require that children be taught skills such as cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. Adult behaviors in school, and at home, must be intentionally modeled to help our children learn them. *Responsive Classroom* provides the framework for developing classroom strategies for academic improvement as well as guidelines for behavior. 

For more: [www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us) >Curriculum >Responsive Classroom

## **Writers excel under “Writer’s Workshop”**

Writing is flourishing at *Beecher Road School* (BRS) through the introduction of *Writer’s Workshop*. The district’s goal is to help students become independent writers, readers and thinkers. We have established a partnership with Columbia University. Teachers at BRS receive on-site training from Columbia consultants and participate in summer writing institutes. The results show the quality of writing has improved while love for writing has increased.

*Writer’s Workshop* is a pivotal part of the curriculum. 

For more: [www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us) >Curriculum >Writer’s Workshop

## **Board of Education goals give schools direction**

Goals adopted by the Board of Education are the linchpins of strategic planning and curriculum. Three carefully articulated goals from which programs and budgets flow are:

### **Goal #1: Curriculum**

Prepare every child to be a highly successful and independent reader, writer, critical thinker and problem solver and build the foundations of character and wellness essential for responsible participation as a global citizen.

### **Goal #2: Community Building**

Improve internal and external communication to unite parents, educators, students and the community in working collaboratively to achieve our mission and goals for learning.

### **Goal #3: Learning Environment**

Implement a systematic process to ensure continuous improvement and proactive maintenance of the district’s buildings, grounds and capital assets. 

For more: [www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us) >Board of Education >Goals and >Strategic Plan

## **Connecticut Mastery Test gives us something to brag about**

The *Connecticut Mastery Test* (CMT) is given annually to all of the state’s public school students in grades 3-8. It measures achievement in reading, math, and writing.

The CMT results from last spring pointed out many strengths and some areas needing bolstering. We are especially proud of our exiting class of sixth graders (2007) whose achievement in all three areas (reading, math and writing) ranks at the top of the state along with a handful of Connecticut’s 165 school districts. 

For more: [www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us) >Assessment >2007 CMT Summary

## **Dr. Stella in China to set up sister school**

In November 2007, School Superintendent Gaeton F. Stella joined a Connecticut delegation of educators in a state sponsored trip to the People’s Republic of China. The purpose of the trip was to establish a *sister school* with a Chinese elementary school. A sister school is a way to promote international understanding and the exchange of ideas that benefit both schools.



Dr. Stella receives gifts for our children from the children of our new sister school, Heze Municipal Experimental School, in Shandong Province.

On his return Stella spoke about his trip and observations of Chinese school culture. One of the impressions he came away with was the sense of “passion, survival and urgency.” He said, “The Chinese see education as the key to their progress. Through education and by looking at education in other countries, they will continue to take their place as a world player. There is a pervasive attitude among the Chinese that they have a lot of catching up to do and their entire culture is behind it. The momentum is astonishing.”

One of *Beecher Road School*’s teachers, Nancy White, has just won a *Confucius Grant* and will be traveling to our Chinese sister school for the first of several educational and cultural exchanges. 

See Dr. Stella’s presentation about his trip online at [www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us). Click “China Gallery.”

## Why Bridges?

Public schools and a free public education are cornerstones of our democracy. Education in a modern world becomes increasingly more complex and places unprecedented demands on communities to educate their young. **Bridges** is a direct result of the *Woodbridge Board of Education* goal to build community and inform taxpayers about the work of their schools. Through understanding, dialogue and knowledge, informed decisions can be made on behalf of our greatest resource, our children.

**We want your feedback. Email us:  
bridges@woodbridge.k12.ct.us**

## Woodbridge Board of Education\*

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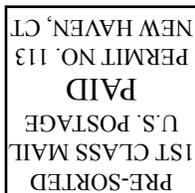
Mark Livesay - Debra Pines - Carolyn Wolff

Dr. Gaeton F. Stella - *Superintendent of Schools*

*\* For complete contact information go to [www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us).  
Click on the Board of Education link >members.*

## Sometimes confusing to newcomers . . .

The Woodbridge School District, under the auspices of the Woodbridge Board of Education, is an independent pre-kindergarten through sixth grade elementary school district. Children who reside in Woodbridge may attend our large elementary school, *Beecher Road School*. The towns of Bethany and Orange also have independent elementary school districts. However, starting in grade 7 and continuing through high school, we are part of a regional school district, *Amity Region #5*. As part of a regional district, Bethany, Orange, and Woodbridge students attend schools together. Two regional *middle schools*, one in Bethany and one in Orange, and one *high school*, located in Woodbridge, serve older students.



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