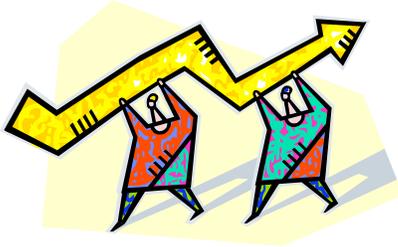




Parent Update – November 25, 2008 From Dr. Stella – Superintendent of Schools

Beecher students continue to make gains on the CMT

The Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) is given each spring to students in grades three through six. The results of the CMT were received in late summer. We are pleased with the steady gains being made by our students. Almost all students are achieving more and moving forward – some dramatically, and in all cases solidly. We have the data to back this up.



Let's look at one of the proudest points in the CMT: Our third grade results – children now in fourth grade.

- ❖ Our students rank at the top of the 20 school districts in our “DRG” – *District Reference Group*. Those are the towns that are most like Woodbridge according to the state. Our third graders literally took home the *gold, silver and bronze*.
- ❖ On the *reading* portions of the test, Woodbridge third graders ranked in the “number 1” position when compared to the other districts in our DRG.
- ❖ On the *writing* sections, Woodbridge third graders, are in the “number 2” position when compared to our DRG.
- ❖ And in *math*, they rank at “number 3” out of the 20 districts the state compares us to.

Last year's sixth graders, now in middle school, were at the top of the DRG in writing. Congratulations! And, for the first time ever, science was tested on the CMT in fifth grade. We are pleased to share that those students, now in sixth grade, scored among the highest in the state.

For a detailed analysis of the CMT results go to the district web site at www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us and click on *Assessment Information*.

My office and the district offices have moved

September 30 was *moving day* for the district offices. The Town of Woodbridge needed our office space, formerly in the Center Building, and asked if we could relocate to BRS. That move is now complete.

Should you need to come to the offices, we are now located in the south building of BRS, right at the south entrance. One of the benefits of the move is an additional administrative presence at the school if emergencies arise.

BRS Botanic Garden developing roots

A planned botanic garden on the BRS campus is underway. As you drive onto the campus at the Beecher Road entrance you will see that the large area to the right of the school sign has been cleared of wild, out-of-control vegetation, while preserving the mature trees in that area.

We are in the process of planting shrubs and trees that are indigenous Connecticut flora. As a beginning, eight *winterberry* shrubs, three *serviceberry* shrubs, and one white *dogwood* tree are intended for that area.

As you enter the campus and look to the left of the sign, a continuation of landscape work is planned there as well.

The *Beecher Botanic Garden* will serve as a place for reflection and a teaching tool by creating a safe, aesthetically pleasing, and environmentally friendly area.

At this time, plans are being considered for the Multi-Age-Group (MAG) students to create an information kiosk in that area.

Technology is moving BRS back to its once-held esteemed position of prominence in the state

With the support of the community and the Boards of Finance, Selectmen and Education, Woodbridge is one of the state's districts leading the way in educational technology.

We are pleased to report that \$179,000 allocated for technology in this year's budget has been spent on implementing our technology plan. The purchases include 80 new desktop computers, 25 mobile computers for staff, 10 *SMART Boards* (large interactive screens hooked to computers for classroom instruction), four administrative computers and one new central server.

A key component of successfully integrating technology into the classroom is on-going professional development. An after school *Technology Academy* has been underway this fall. It is a means of providing relevant professional learning opportunities for staff members as we continue to expand the district's technology initiative.

Teachers are teaching teachers. Workshops ranging from using *Microsoft Office* for student data gathering and management to the integration of multiple technologies for creating digital stories to using *SMART Boards*, to Apple's *Garage Band* and *iPhoto* are all being greeted with enthusiasm.



Spanish spoken here

Starting this school year, Beecher Road School has extended its current world language program to a Spanish K-6 model. Spanish is now the sole language taught at BRS with a proficiency model of instruction currently in place. With the introduction of Spanish to kindergarten, first, and second grade, we have taken the first steps in providing a sequential, proficiency-based, K-6 world language experience for all students.

The goal of the program is to provide students with the opportunity to acknowledge and embrace another language and culture and to develop communicative proficiency in a language other than English. The philosophy centers upon the idea that world language is an essential part of a child's education and development. Learning a world language at the elementary level serves as a tool for developing students' listening skills, problem-solving skills, memory, and creativity.

In the 21st century, students must be prepared to be participants in the global community.

Here's what we expect to see by the end of grade six, after BRS students have completed their elementary school Spanish program. Students will:

- Communicate in Spanish at a basic level that prepares them for proficiency as they move through middle school and high school.
- Gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures.
- Make connections with other areas of study and acquire information.
- Understand the nature of language and culture through comparisons.
- Participate in bi-lingual communities in a variety of contexts.

Fundraising for new ¼-mile exercise loop is going on now

Attached to this *Parent Update*, you will find a flyer from the PTO explaining the creation of the *Kucinskas Loop*. After many years, and with a start-up grant obtained by State Senator Joe Crisco, the loop is becoming a reality.

I'd like to also talk about the importance of fitness. An exercise loop would go a long way towards developing fitness in our children and adults. The loop would be instrumental in developing good habits at a young age. We expect exercise loop activities will be woven into the physical education programs at school.

The State of Connecticut requires that children's fitness is tested and measured regularly. One of those tests is aptly called the *One-Mile Walk/Run Test**. The test measures cardio-respiratory fitness.

Having the track at Beecher Road School can increase the chance for the children to improve their fitness levels by having them walk/run for a sustained amount of time. For

example, classes might walk/run a certain distance and time during outside recess periods and chart their activity in class throughout the year. The additional student activity on the loop would greatly improve personal fitness.

Other benefits of the exercise loop include:

- Provide wellness opportunities for staff.
- Increase community exercise options.
- Have a suitable area for our physical education classes to exercise and log progress in fitness levels.
- Teach BRS students the concept of pacing, a challenging idea for students at their level.

I encourage you to consider the PTO's efforts.

Kudos for BRS Teachers

Rick Wood (Technology Coordinator) – for playing a key role in organizing a statewide technology conference.

James Crawford (Special Services teacher) and *Nancy White* (Grade 6 teacher) – for presenting their award-winning *Digital Storytelling* project to a “standing room only” crowd at a recent statewide conference.

Jan Brown and *Lori Patrick* (Library Media Specialists) – for being recognized at a statewide for their award-winning visual literacy presentation on political cartoons.

William Letsch (Music teacher) and the *BRS Band* – for playing the national anthem at the opening game of the Sound Tigers hockey team to a capacity crowd.

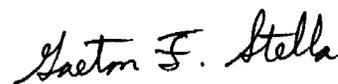
What makes a “teacher of the year”?

Like most Connecticut towns, and for that matter most towns in the country, Woodbridge participates in the national *Teacher of the Year* program. The Woodbridge Teacher of the Year is Debbie Sokol. Congratulations.

Debbie Sokol is a speech and language pathologist who has been in the school district for 13 years. What makes Ms. Sokol a *Teacher of the Year* can be gleaned from her peers who say she, “is widely respected for her personal and professional integrity,” and “assumes a leadership role in many capacities.” “Debbie is always giving to the Beecher community, especially those with the greatest needs.”

Taking stock on Thanksgiving

As we prepare to spend time with loved ones, let me extend warm Thanksgiving wishes to all BRS families and thank you for your support in our children's education. Happy Thanksgiving.



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