



*Stella F. Stella*

# PARENT UPDATE FROM DR. STELLA SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

April 10, 2013

[www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us) Woodbridge School District  
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Dear Beecher Road Families,

After a very unpredictable school year, it is welcoming to see so many signs of spring – flowers and plants starting to bloom, birds chirping, animal life returning to full view in various parts of our 43-acre campus. And what’s better than the sights and sounds of children swinging, sliding, jumping, running, walking, talking, singing and playing during their outside recess times and gym periods as well as after school in the extended day program? Spring is always a reminder of new growth and new hope for the future. As part of the four seasons, spring also serves as encouragement for us as we continue to focus on the development of the “whole child” – academic, physical, emotional and social. Thank you for being such good partners in this process.

This Update highlights the importance of communication between school and home. There is a brief description of the progress that has been made in developing the district/school web site to aid us in that process. Also, you will learn about a recent survey that has been sent out, designed to enlist you as thought partners in order to help us do a better job of educating our children.

There is a lot to celebrate about BRS. For example, Dr. Steven Marans, nationally acclaimed psychologist from the Yale School of Medicine and the Yale Child Center, recently noted: “Beecher Road School is one of the outstanding schools in the country for what it does for children.” You share, as always, in our successes as well as our efforts to continue to enhance the quality of education at BRS.

## Children come after school to challenge their minds

Learning at BRS extends beyond the normal school day. As one example, every Friday afternoon approximately 50 excited 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students come after school to participate in a rigorous mathematics problem solving club that challenges and stretches their thinking skills. Participation is voluntary. The club is led and directed by a moderator, Assistant Principal Nancy White, and an instructor, Andrea Fleischman who is a state certified mathematics teacher and parent volunteer for this club. Sixth grade teacher Joseph Holowienko also serves as a volunteer.

## Pre-School and Multi-Age Lottery Procedures are being updated

The Preschool Program and the Multi-Age Group are the two parent choice programs at Beecher Road School. Participation in these programs is determined through a lottery system. The lottery process and procedures have been under review, and are being updated with the intent of having a clear and equitable process for both lotteries that can easily be communicated to parents and the public.

Final drafts of lottery procedures will be reviewed by a school board attorney to

assure compliance with equity issues. Once the final draft is presented to the school board, lottery procedures will be placed on the district web site. It is anticipated that this process will be completed by the end of the month.



**Will you be a thought partner?**

*School climate survey online*

Beecher Road School is dedicated to providing students with a safe and nurturing environment in which to learn and grow. One of the best ways for us to know how successful we are in this area is to gather information from all constituents. We are in the process of collecting information from parents, faculty/staff and students to inform the Safe School Climate Committee.

This committee, led by the school’s Safe Climate Coordinator, Sheila Haverkampf, is comprised of teachers, administrators and a parent representative. The committee is charged with gathering information on our school climate to inform our Safe School

Climate Plan and to support the school community through activities and procedures that continue to enhance a nurturing school environment. While the current plan is focused on the prevention of bullying behaviors in school, the future revisions of the plan will take a more holistic view of the learning environment. Our survey results should provide valuable information. More information will follow.

If you have not done so yet, please take the parent survey on-line which can be found on the district web site under News and Announcements.

**Please Participate Online**  
**Your response is very important to us**

You can expect additional surveys in the coming months.

## School Board and Town continue to work closely on budget issues

The requested increase for the 2013-14 Board of Education’s Operating Budget is \$93,518 or 0.73% over the current budget. This increase was approved by the Board of Selectmen. However, the School Board’s Finance Committee and the Superintendent recently shared with the Town recent news that unexpected cost savings from an early retirement incentive exceed the 2013-14 requested budget increase. With this current information in hand, the Town’s Board of Finance has reduced the school district’s budget request for 2013-2014 to zero. We believe this open communication between Town and School Board continues to demonstrate the School Board’s transparency in dealing with budget matters. The action also demonstrates the School Board’s collaborative partnership in working with the Town to support quality education while at the same time respecting taxpayers during difficult economic times. We are confident that even with a zero budget increase, the school district will have the financial resources to support its mission and needs as presented to the Boards of Selectmen and Finance in January 2013. (See district web site under district information to view the Superintendent’s January 2013 budget presentation to the Town.)

## Our website is used more often than ever

There has been a focus on increasing the number of teachers with websites. Over the last two years the number of staff websites has grown from 18% to 90% and more specifically 38% of classroom teachers to 100% and 28% of teacher specialists to 86% and 0% of special services staff to 69%.

During the summer of 2012 the website was redesigned with the goal of making information "1-click away." This transformation included more organized navigation bars to district and school information, a more appealing visual design, and the elimination of redundancies for a better overall user and visitor experience. The website was also condensed to bring the separate school and District sites into one District and school site, with ease for the user our goal.

The website itself continues to garner attention and be a resource to school and

School Year	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13*
Visits	16,298	27,387	36,745	31,823	34,469*
Absolute Unique Visitors	6,654	11,182	14,271	14,075	13,799*
Time on Site (In minutes)	1:39	1:58	02:17	03:00	02:36*
Page views per visit	3.18	3.51	3.39	3.51	3.27*
Bounce Rate 🌪	47.09%	39.61%	36.6%	36.39%	38.71%*

🌪 Percentage of visitors who enter the site and "bounce" (leave the site) rather than continue viewing other pages within the site.

\* As of April 1, 2013

community members. One interesting note from looking at the data this year compared to last year is that you can see that the visitors checking the "for school closings" and "delays" impacts the total number of visits and unique visitors. These visitors are coming to the site for quick bits of information and then leaving the site. A very positive indication from the site analytics is that the time spent on the site per visit is going up at a steady rate and the bounce rate has gone steadily down over the last few years. One downside to the redesign of the website is that the efficiency of information being "1 click away" leads to visitors

looking at fewer pages and spending less overall time on the site.

In the next few months, additional features will be added to the site in order to provide easy access to information for all members of the school and community. The district/school web site will be used as a vehicle as we seek to become paperless in our communications. Be sure to check out the site at [woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://woodbridge.k12.ct.us)

Feel free to contact web master, James Crawford, [jcrawford@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:jcrawford@woodbridgeps.org), with any feedback, suggestions or questions about the website. 📧

## Internet Acceptable Use Policy revised for grades 5 and 6

In order to provide greater access to online materials for student research, the school has revised the Internet filtering restrictions for grades 5 and 6.

Discussions with teachers, parents, and administrators demonstrated that not only should students have enough access to find the materials needed for school assignments, but they should have to make decisions about appropriate selection of materials, an important life skill in today's world.



Appropriate use of the Internet is our goal.

The filtering restrictions are still greater than required by law and are designed to minimize access to material inappropriate for younger children. As always, filtering is not perfect and occasionally students may view something questionable. Students are taught that if this occurs, they are to discuss it with a teacher immediately.

This new access represents a significant change in how Beecher approaches the use of Internet services for students. The responsibility for properly using the Internet is now focused on the student. The school will no longer focus on technology to prevent students in grades 5 & 6 from making irresponsible choices.

Teachers will give students clear directions for using the Internet while helping them understand responsible use.

Here are a few reminders from the Acceptable Use Policy of Technology that you may wish to review with your child:

1. I will use school technology resources only for educational purposes. I will use the programs and websites that my teachers have approved. I will use the Internet only when given permission by a teacher.
2. I will notify an adult immediately if by accident I encounter materials that violate the rules of appropriate use.
3. I will obey copyright laws. I will properly cite all sources.
4. I will not use my personal accounts, personal digital devices, or social network sites in school without explicit permission from a teacher.
5. I will act safely by keeping personal information out of my digital projects. I will not give out my family name, email address, screen names, home

address, school name, city, country, phone number, or other information that could help someone locate or contact me in person. I will not post identifying photos or videos.

(Editor's Note: We are grateful to our library/tech team for their assistance in thoughtfully developing the new guidelines.) 📧

## Calendar Reminders

### Plan Ahead: Important Dates

- Shortened spring recess: April 15 - 17 only
- Sixth grade graduation: June 19, AHS 1 PM
- Last day of school: June 21 [1:10 dismissal]
- Summer Enrichment Pgm: July 1- Aug 2
- Extended Day & Town Rec: July 1- Aug 9
- First day of school: September 3

**Thursday, April 18 and Friday, April 19**, previously part of the *spring recess*, are now regular school days. The spring recess is April 15 – 17. Absences for students due to pre-planned travel will be excused. A note from a parent or guardian is required in order to excuse the absence.

### Other Important Dates

**Preliminary Town Budget Hearing**, Monday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> at 7:30 PM, Center School

**Monthly School Board Meeting**, Tuesday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7 PM, Library Media Center, BRS

**DARE Graduation** (6<sup>th</sup> grade): May 24<sup>th</sup> at 11 AM 📧