

Bridges: connecting school and community



The Education Newsletter of the Woodbridge School District

Summer 2009, Vol. 3 No. 1

A Look Back - A Look Ahead

An amazing year came to an end for students at *Beecher Road School* (BRS) last month. Packed with opportunities for new learning, both the students and the teachers came away from the 2008-09 academic year proud of what they had accomplished. To mention just a sample, student projects that use technology astonish all who see them in action. Achievement in both the visual and the performing arts finds Woodbridge students truly in a class by themselves as they astound adults with their sophisticated skills and talents. Reading and writing have been brought to new levels as programs shift from teacher-centered to student-centered models of instruction. Science instruction has taken a major leap into the 21st century with achievement results that make us proud. With a great appreciation for you, the taxpayer, I am happy to state unequivocally that *Beecher Road School* is a beacon of the best practices in American education – a place where leaders of tomorrow are being nurtured today.

Dr. Gaeton F. Stella - Superintendent of Schools

A renewed national emphasis on science finds Beecher students ahead of the curve

During a year when the *National Science Teachers Association* reports that elementary science instruction has lost ground nationwide due to exclusive emphasis on reading and mathematics in response to *No Child Left Behind*, science at BRS is continuing to engage students.

We began the year buoyed by the news that our fifth grade class of 2007-08 had scored among the top ten districts in Connecticut on the new Science Mastery Test. Since this success was based upon students' experiences of inquiry-based science throughout their previous years at BRS, teachers continued to use this *hands-on, minds-on* approach.

In addition to the science taught in the regular classroom setting, first grade students worked outside in small groups, exploring concepts related to sunshine and shadows. Students in grades 2-6 conducted investigations in the science lab. The advantage of holding classes in the science lab is that students benefit from having ready access to materials and tools as well as the guidance of both the classroom teacher and the science instruction specialist.

Every effort has been made to help students make connections between their classroom science experiences and the world outside. Kindergarten students learned how to observe while taking nature walks and keeping daily records of the weather. First graders explored life cycles of amphibians and insects in the context of a visit to a local pond. Second grade studies of nutrition, soils, and plant growth took them to the gardens at Common Ground High School. Third grade immersion in the science of recycling brought them to the Garbage Museum and involved them in actively supporting our newly revived BRS recycling effort that includes a composting area. Fourth grade classes raised and released Atlantic salmon fry as part of their unit about human impact on local ecosystems. Fifth grade

students' projects educated their classmates about the science behind human senses that included demonstrations and tests of specific sensory responses. Finally, in sixth grade, students ended the year with an ecological field study of biotic and abiotic factors in a local wetland ecosystem.

In June of 2008, teachers in grades 3-6 piloted common end of year science assessments with their students.

These results were analyzed and discussed with teachers to highlight topics in need of emphasis during the new academic year. Based on this discussion, common assessments were revamped. Students were given the revised assessments at the end of this year. Analysis of this assessment data will serve as a basis for directing instruction in the upcoming school year.



Our final evidence that science at BRS is preparing students to be scientifically literate citizens is anecdotal. Parents of former students and students themselves are stopping by to say that they are enthusiastic participants in the new scientific research courses offered by the Amity school district. College students are returning not only to report that they are science majors, but also to share with our students some of what they have learned from their higher education in science. That's inspiring for teachers, but more importantly, for our students. ☺



Supporting the Language Arts

The *Primary Grades Bookroom*, a place where teachers have ready access to books specifically geared toward students' individual reading skills was completed this year. Teachers used the newly designed and organized bookroom to more accurately select special books. Appropriate *Guided Reading* books were purchased, leveled, "bagged" and organized. A borrowing system was put in place that provided teachers with these newly purchased literacy resources.

Six primary classrooms were outfitted with resources to support the initial implementation of *Reader's Workshop*; this fall, the remaining primary classes will follow.

Through a collaborative effort among teachers, specialists and administrators, a new *after school literacy program* was created. Teachers planned instruction for small groups of students, which met twice a week.

A *SMART Board* installed in the Language Arts Center brought new energy and excitement to literacy lessons. Students eagerly embraced this new technology. *SMART Board* lessons were created through collaborative efforts with several classroom teachers and the language arts specialists.

The language arts support specialists continued the implementation of *Writer's Workshop* across grade levels by coaching and consulting with teachers as well as modeling lessons in individual classrooms. To give you an idea of how advanced writing has become in elementary schools, some of the genres learned in the upper grades include *personal narrative*, *personal essay*, *poetry*, *realistic fiction* and *memoir*.

Students at *SMART board*: A computer-based interactive teaching tool.



Concepts of mathematics learned and applied daily

Students at Beecher Road School have spent the past year developing understanding of major mathematics concepts in algebra, number, geometry, measurement, data, and probability. They continue to build computation fluency and to learn to use mathematics to solve a variety of problems they encounter in school and beyond.

Primary grade students have engaged in various math activities during the year. They have had numerous opportunities for problem solving, and have learned that students may have different successful strategies or approaches for solving a particular problem.

Kindergarten students played various math games intended to strengthen their understanding of number concepts. They collected and recorded data, explored nonstandard units of measure, and have strengthened their understanding of geometric concepts.



Measurement lesson in second grade.

First grade students continue to develop number sense, including moving toward an understanding of the base ten number system. They have used various hand-held manipulatives, such as unifix cubes, links, and beans to explore the relationships among numbers and to compare numbers.

Students in second grade engaged in numerous math activities set up as experimental "labs." In one activity, students made the transition from using nonstandard units of measure to using standard units for measuring length in their exploration of how far toy cars travel down a ramp. They recorded their data in a data table, found the median of their



Collecting real data from a math activity.

car's distance, and graphed their results in a bar graph. In a later experiment, students explored volume by displacement by adding various objects to a 100 ml. graduated cylinder and noting how much the water rose when the objects were added.

Some third year students in our Multi-Age Group created graphs showing various information about water use. Some facts included the percentage of fresh water on earth available for human consumption, the number of gallons that can be saved with water conserving fixtures, the number of deaths per year worldwide due to water related disease, and the amount of water consumed in various countries around the world.

Third grade students applied what they learned this year in mathematics by creating their own board games. The games incorporated key concepts such as time, place value, multiplication, and problem solving. The students were excited to engage in mathematical conversations while they played each other's games.

More students in grades 3 through 6 have had multiple opportunities to engage in mathematics through the use of the interactive *SMART Board*. The *SMART Board* allowed the students to use a variety of interactive mathematics manipulatives, including base ten blocks, spinners, dice, and protractors, to enhance their learning.

Sixth grade students leave *Beecher Road School* prepared for middle school math. They can solve complex word problems and are also able to explain and prove their answers in writing. Some sixth grade classes used technology as a way to display their answers, using graphics, charts, and text, while another group created scale drawings and models of malls and an airport.



Speaking Spanish “aqui”

At Beecher Road School all children study Spanish from kindergarten through grade six. Elementary school children are at the optimal age for second language learning and the early study of a second language offers many benefits. Research shows that children who learn a second language at an early age do better on standardized testing, show greater cognitive development and make greater progress in English reading and writing than children who are not exposed to a second language.



In the 21st century, we are preparing our children to participate in the global community. Children who begin their world language studies at the elementary level will have a distinct advantage when collaborating with their peers from other countries. The language skills our children acquire at BRS will enhance their career potential and broaden their employment opportunities. Upon successful completion of grade six, children will be able to demonstrate performance in the following linguistic and cultural areas:

- Communicate effectively in Spanish.
- Gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures.
- Make connections with other areas of study and acquire information.
- Understand the nature of language and cultures through comparisons.
- Participate in multilingual communities within a variety of contexts.

After comprehensive curriculum revision, the revised World Language program now used at BRS was developed to link directly with the middle school and high school programs. The transition to more advanced study will be more meaningful as our students progress to those levels. World language educators at those schools praise the *proficiency* approach which is the basis of our program. 

Library Media

The Beecher Road School Library Media Center offers a balance of visual, digital, and traditional literacy materials. This year the Library Media Center took a lead role in supporting those teachers piloting the *Columbia Reader’s Workshop* in grades 3-5 through resource-building and Professional Development. Extensive book talks were conducted throughout the year, encouraging students to explore the “just right” books available to them, while familiarizing teachers with new titles. The library staff has been working hard to keep pace with our readers’ appetites for new titles and series.

The *Artsweek2* festival in June featured political cartoons created by 6th grade students. Cartoons allow students to engage in higher order thinking. Students use symbolism and imagery to begin developing and expressing their own perspectives about issues in the world around them. Visual abstraction allows students to study and comprehend history and issues at their own level. This year’s emphasis has been on the U.S. Constitution, elections, American symbols, and current events.

In preparing our students to become global citizens, the library media and technology faculty are working to provide digital tools and resources to support student projects. Students are introduced to search strategies, copyright law, citation formats, and evaluation criteria.

The Library Media Center continues to strengthen ties between school and community members through a number of reading events. State and local officials participated in *Read Across America*, celebrating the March 2 birthday of Dr. Seuss by reading to classes throughout the school. Members of the *Woodbridge Business Council* were also guest readers during their annual *Holiday Reading Challenge*, presenting a donation this year to the Kucinskas Memorial Loop. Students read the ten *Nutmeg Nominated Book* titles, anxious to voice their own vote for Connecticut’s favorite. Student/Parent Book Clubs were enjoyed in Grade 5. The reading partnerships continue with the *Woodbridge Public Library* and *Amity Middle School - Bethany Library* presentations stirring up fervor for summer reading that students can add to their *Governor’s Summer Reading Challenge* list. The Beecher community loves to read! 

Developing readers and authors

Our school’s mission is for “all students to become independent readers, writers, learners, problem solvers and thinkers by the end of 6th grade.” In cooperation with Columbia University, our initiatives, *Reader’s Workshop* and *Writer’s Workshop*, help all students reach this goal.

In *Reader’s Workshop*, strategies are taught to help students become successful lifelong readers. The children are taught how to choose appropriate books for their skill level, while exploring different genres and authors. As students are immersed in literacy, they are taught higher level thinking skills to gain a better understanding of what they’re reading. The workshop approach emphasizes interaction between the reader and the text, while holding children accountable for skills and strategies they have been taught.



Writer’s Workshop encourages students to view themselves as authors. Units of study teach children to write in many different genres such as story writing, non-fiction, essays, poetry, and report writing. Children study exemplary writing and then craft their own pieces. As in *Reader’s Workshop*, students are given some choice in their writing topics, while teachers guide them to produce their best work. Celebrations are held after each unit of study when students share their reading and writing with peers, parents and teachers.

The *Columbia Reader’s* and *Writer’s Workshops* promote literacy in the classroom, as well as at home. Reading and writing become part of everyday life, not just activities completed at school. The workshop approach also fosters a sense of community because all students are seen as readers and authors, with something significant to share. The high expectations of these initiatives match our high expectations for a 21st century model school and student. 



Five projects making our campus safe and beautiful

North Entrance Clearing

One of our first projects as part of our grounds improvement initiative on our school campus was the brush and undergrowth clearing that took place on the North side of our entrance sign. There have been native plants and trees added to the area with ongoing discussions enhancing the area even further.

South Entrance Clearing

The second phase of our brush clearing has taken place south of our entrance sign. There was a lot of input from staff, board liaisons, and community members in determining what should actually be cleared in this area. Even a Yale arborist visited the site with one of our staff. There is still work to be done in this area.

Dumpsters

The brush clearing projects have made the school visible from the entry roads. While this has enhanced the beauty and safety of our school campus, it has also brought the dumpsters into sight. We are planning to plant white pines or hemlocks to surround the dumpsters and keep them from view.

Capital budget set for needed technology upgrades

In May, the Boards of Selectmen and Finance approved the Board of Education request for \$174,000 in capital budget funds to support improvement of technology at Beecher Road School. These funds will support several initiatives.

Expand Use of SMART Boards

Members of the Faculty at Beecher have been using SMART Boards in instruction for the last year and half. These teachers have demonstrated how effective the use of SMART Boards can be in classrooms. Additionally, they are sharing their experiences with colleagues, preparing them for further expansion of SMART Board use. During the 2009 - 2010 school year, the number of classrooms with SMART Boards will be expanded to 30.

Replace Outdated eMac Computers

At BRS, all students have network accounts that can be used at any computer in classrooms and labs. With the constant improvement in computer applications and online resources comes the need to provide computers that are capable of running these applications. The oldest computers at BRS, the eMacs, cannot run the latest systems and applications. During the 2009 -2010 school year, the majority



Entrance Sign

When the Board of Education offices relocated to Beecher Road it was time to update the main entrance sign. The new sign notifies visitors which entrance they should use when conducting business with the school, Board of Education/ Superintendent, or the Recreation Department.

South Playground

Last fall the Public Works Department corrected an erosion problem in the south campus area. They put in a swale at the top of the hill which now diverts water to a catch basin located behind the south diamond backstop. This has alleviated the erosion of dirt and sand that had filled the wetlands and south parking lot. Eroded areas were filled with top soil and grass seed was planted.

of these old computers will be replaced. Some eMacs will be retained and used to run older, but still useful applications.

A Mobile Faculty

The 2009-10 school year will mark a milestone in the Faculty Mobile Computing Initiative started four years ago. For the first time, all members of the faculty will have mobile computers. This mobility allows them to work together, communicate effectively both in and out of school, and provides access to teaching resources and student information wherever they may be working.

Infrastructure Improvements

All of these expanded uses of technology require improvements in the systems that support them. During the 2009-10 school year, a new master server will be installed to meet the heavier demands for authentication and centralized applications.

2009-10 represents the third consecutive year of strong support for technology by governing boards in Woodbridge. This continued support allows school leaders and teachers to prepare cohesive ongoing plans to successfully integrate technology into learning.

You're Invited! Kucinkas Memorial Exercise Loop Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

We are pleased to announce that with the support of the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance, Board of Education, State Senator Joseph Crisco, Recreation Department and our PTO, what has been a dream for many years is now a reality: a quarter-mile exercise loop at BRS.

**Historic Community Event
Dedication & Ribbon Cutting
September 2 at 5:00 PM
BRS North Campus**
Town & State Officials' Comments
Community Walk Around the Loop
followed by
PTO Ice Cream Social
Dee Jay Music & Dancing

We now have a facility that will bring many benefits to the school and the community such as:

- A safe area for our physical education classes to exercise and track progress in fitness levels.
- Increased positive options for the children during outside time.
- Increased community exercise options.

This project is a wonderful example of how many individual components of the Woodbridge community came together as one in accomplishing a goal. We look forward to having the track/loop serve the children at Beecher and the Woodbridge Community.

The track is named after Kevin Kucinkas, a Beecher Road School teacher who died unexpectedly last summer (2008). Mr. Kucinkas' passion for wellness, the environment and education touched the lives of students and adults.

Architect's Rendering of the Kucinkas Loop

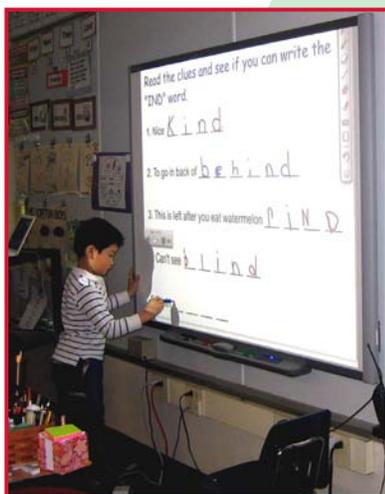




Podcasts and SMART boards lead technology initiatives

The technology center pursued many initiatives this year but perhaps the two most significant ones were the introduction to podcasting and the large scale implementation of SMART Boards. Podcasting is the creation of a work with voice and images. Less complicated than a digital story, which usually involves moving video, editing, captioning, sound tracks and other features, the podcast is the telling of information or a story accompanied by still images. All grade 4, 5, and 6 students created a podcast in conjunction with their health curriculum. In addition, Spanish classes also created 1-2 minute podcasts about a Spanish speaking country. Students were engaged in finding a topic and searching for information on the Internet. Then, they had to find appropriate imagery, plan how to tell the story, write the story, and finally record the story. The actual recording of voices revealed to students how precise and accurate language must be to be fully understood. With important skills now under their belts, it is expected that fifth and sixth graders next year will be able to further develop their research, writing, and speaking abilities.

Student at a SMART board - a computer-based interactive teaching tool.



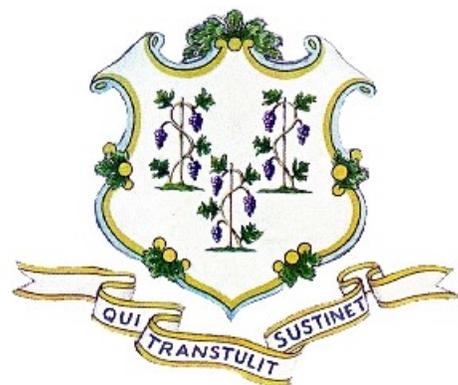
By October, 2008, 15 classrooms were using interactive whiteboards, commonly known as SMART boards. These tools transform the way lessons are developed, presented and received. With the use of text, audio, video and tactile information, students are able to learn information through a multi-sensory approach. Further, the use of multiple presentations motivates

students to observe, interact, and problem solve. Teachers can prepare lessons in advance using the SMART software which can then be shared with colleagues at BRS and with other teachers around the world via the Internet. While presenting lessons, teachers can save work, print notes, and pick up where they left off easily. By this fall, 30 teachers should have SMART boards working in their classrooms. 

Woodbridge 2009-2012 Technology Plan filed with state

Every Connecticut school district is required to submit a *Technology Plan* to the State Department of Education. The three-year plan details what each school district is doing to integrate and apply technology to the classroom. Our Woodbridge plan, including goals and specific objectives, is summarized here:

- Promote communication and collaboration among all constituents of the Beecher Road School Learning Community through effective use of technology.
- Increase parental involvement in the educational process through increased communication between school and home.
- Increase community involvement to support the educational process through the exchange of information between the school and community.
- Encourage digital collaboration among students, classes, and faculty.
- Engage students in collaborative knowledge building with peers around the world.
- Evaluate and upgrade the telecommunications systems to reflect current needs and technologies.
- Develop access for all members of the Beecher Road School Learning Community to digital applications and resources.
- Make digital resources available to students and others both in and outside the school.
- Research and implement web-based applications for collaborative use by students and faculty to expand accessibility to a digital work environment.
- Provide educational opportunities for parents and community members.



Seal of Connecticut

- Create a learning environment for students to:
 - § Practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology.
 - § Interact, collaborate, and publish with peers and others in digital environments.
 - § Develop cultural understanding and global awareness by engaging with learners of other cultures.
- Improve student learning and faculty effectiveness through the appropriate application of digital technologies and resources throughout the curriculum.
- Create personalized learning environments for all students.
- Develop creative thinking and innovation through technology by encouraging students to apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes.
- Develop digital literacy skills to gather, evaluate, and use information.
- Provide mobile access to digital tools and resources for all faculty.
- Provide interactive instructional systems (SMART boards and other tools) in all instructional settings as appropriate.
- Provide technologies to assist in meeting the needs of all students.
- Develop a unified method of providing digital alternatives to access text.
- Make tools available for all students to be able to express themselves.
- Encourage students to utilize alternatives to text.
- Engage faculty, staff, and administration in professional growth to continuously improve their use of digital tools and resources to bolster learning.
- Continue development of the Technology Academy to provide ongoing workshops, mentoring, peer coaching, introduction to new technologies, and user groups to support new technologies. 



ArtsWeek 2 Launched at BRS

The second annual *ArtsWeek*, held in June, provided experiences for children that emphasize the Fine Arts: visual arts, music, drama and dance. Teachers, parents and art volunteers made this weeklong event possible.

Some of the many experiences the children had included the building of a Louise Nevelson-type 3-D sculpture in the north lobby, Improv Day, Arts Night: included studio experiences, dance, Dada Parade, and school wide arts exhibits; a garbage can exhibit, band adjudication day hosted by BRS, and a performance by *The Villians*, a conservative jazz band.

Summertime is enrichment time

The popular and varied offerings of our *Summer Enrichment Program* gave children a chance to learn and to explore their talents and interests as scores of course offerings stretched minds and bodies during July.

The annual variety of classes touches many areas of human interest. To give you an idea, this is just some of what children can learn: magic, math, paper crafts, dance, digital photography, Shakespeare's theatre, theatre workshop, debate team, lemonade stand, poetry, writing, gardening, science experiments, percussion, strings, drums, harmonica, guitar, rocks, rockets, basketball, cake decorating, soccer, cheer leading, knitting, sewing, puppet making, scrap booking, drawing, cartooning, clay ceramic making, computers, American history, movie making and much, much more.

During the summer, more than 300 children use BRS every day.



Student in Clay Is The Way - ceramic art creation.

Yale Center for British Art Visit: British Imperialism and the Birth of America

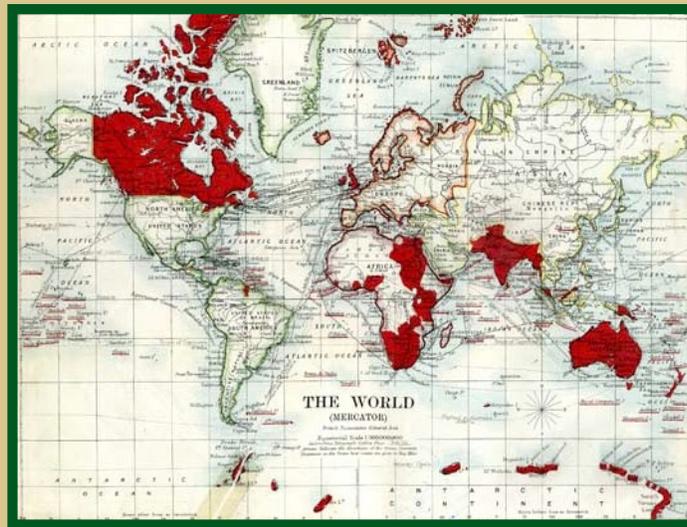
There can be little doubt that a trip to the *Yale Center for British Art* is enriching for all students, parents, and teachers. The centuries, continents, artistic periods, and cultural heritage that are enshrined present an overwhelming testament to the triumph of the English spirit. As part of the fifth grade curriculum for several years, certain paintings and subjects stand out as most valuable to student understanding of Britain as a global power in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

American colonies, strong schematic connections are created. The British treatment and ideas of the people in various parts of the empire bring out concepts of cultural sophistication, tolerance, ethnic differences, architectural details, and unique societal customs that we may enjoy as a fascination today. But, they were the foundations for oppression in the past. These ideas only lend themselves to broader discussions of civility and progress and whether the true savage is he who is judged or

he who judges. Even though some concepts and paintings are beyond the time period of the American Revolution they are valuable to study for overall impact.

Works by other artists such as George Stubbs, Tilly Kettle, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Canaletto are presented for

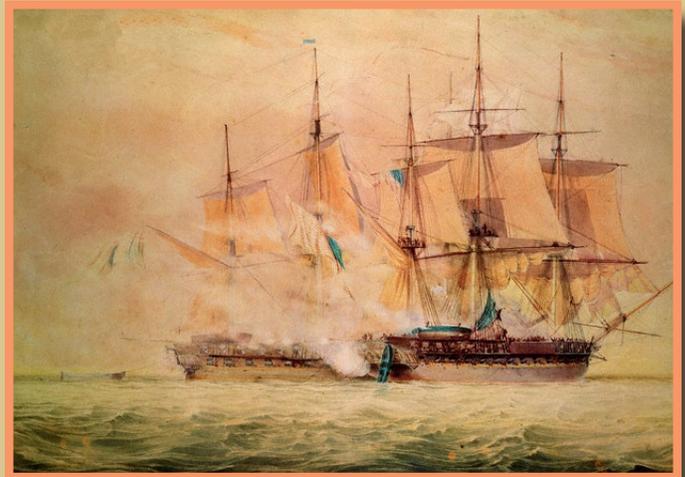
student reaction where they are taught to think, reflect, wonder and ask.



Map: "The Sun Never Sets on the British Empire"

Imperialism is a concept that is foreign to most students in fifth grade, and paintings such as the *Battle of Trafalgar* and the *Indian Woman with the Hookah* depict the stretch of British might. For students to look at a painting and make out a Union Jack on the stern of a British warship firing on a French or Dutch ship off the coast of India brings up many eco-global circumstances at the time. Students must consider why these powers were fighting, and for what.

Then, when students consider that many of these events were occurring simultaneously with conflict in the



John Christian Schetsky: "The Battle of Trafalgar"



Taxpayer's Guide to the 2009-2010 Woodbridge Board of Education OPERATING BUDGET

The Woodbridge Board of Education, Board of Selectmen, and Board of Finance approved the funding plan for the school district that took effect on July 1. The budget, with a very small increase over the previous year, is respectful of the taxpayer while continuing to move the educational system forward.

The operating budget is the legal plan under which the school system is funded. It puts in place the financial wherewithal to pay for one year's worth of expenses that include employee salaries and benefits, books, software and supplies, student transportation, heat and utilities, building maintenance and much more.

Here is a summary of the budget with clarifications for each category. The Woodbridge Board of Education seeks to make the budget process transparent and help taxpayers understand what they are being asked to pay for.*



Budget Category	Last Year 2008-09	This Year 2009-10	\$ Amount Change	% Change	% of Total Budget
Salaries and Benefits ¹	\$ 9,138,028	\$ 9,490,583	\$ 352,555	3.86%	79.81%
Utilities ²	259,440	267,403	7,963	3.07%	2.25%
Heating Oil ³	174,785	117,212	(57,573)	-32.94%	0.99%
Student Transportation ⁴	544,153	498,116	(46,037)	-8.46%	4.19%
Tuition ⁵	337,172	139,307	(197,865)	-58.68%	1.17%
All Outside Services ⁶	830,970	879,938	48,968	5.89%	7.40%
General Supplies ⁷	315,915	352,997	37,082	11.74%	2.97%
Furniture and Equipment ⁸	42,140	57,590	15,450	36.66%	0.48%
Dues and Fees ⁹	84,138	88,565	4,427	5.26%	0.74%
TOTALS	\$ 11,726,741	\$ 11,891,711	\$ 164,970	1.41%	100%

1: Salaries and benefits would be a higher percent increase but through the monitoring of our staff profile we have been able to offer early retirement incentives and reduce staff by one teaching position and two teaching assistant positions while still adhering to the Board guidelines for class size.

2: Electricity, water and sewer.

3: Through a purchasing consortium we will be paying \$1.94 per gallon.

4: In addition to regular school buses, some children require special transportation due to special needs (\$67,200). We also buy the diesel fuel for the buses through the purchasing consortium. That cost is \$49,000.

5: Because some children, due to special needs, require school settings outside of Woodbridge, we pay tuition for their special education. We have been able to increase the programs we offer in-house and the student population has changed lowering this line item significantly. This line item also includes \$22,507 for participation in the regional *Wintergreen Magnet School* in Hamden.

6: Services we purchase or lease. Examples include telephones, insurance, internet, postage, professional development, legal, technical and professional services, substitutes, building repairs, improvements and maintenance.

7: Paper, pencils, books, wax, soap, paper products, band-aids, software, envelopes, library books, subscriptions, etc. The largest part of the increase is due to our *Reader's Workshop* initiative.

8: The major increase in this line item is for sixth grade classroom furniture that needs replacing.

9: *Ezra Academy* school nurse (required by state law), unemployment, memberships in professional associations, miscellaneous expenditures, other fees, etc.

**The relatively small increase in the budget is due to four main reasons: 1] responsible fiscal management and cost savings 2] reduced staff 3] decreased special education costs 4] creating a staff profile that lays out future personnel needs clearly.*

For a more complete and detailed look at the operating budget, go to our web site at www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us and click on 2009-10 budget.



Connecting Connecticut with China

The image of today's students becoming tomorrow's global citizens is exciting to imagine and important to plan. A main postulate of our Board of Education's mission includes such a vision and as a result we are engaged in connecting our students with their peers in China. As part of this effort, BRS continues to exchange school personnel to promote cross-cultural communication and global awareness among our staff and students. Started in 2007, our Sister Schools program with two schools in Shandong Province is growing.

This school year saw several activities designed to connect us with China. Among them were a formal ten-day visit from two Chinese principals, a visit to our school by ten Hong Kong students, the expansion of the Sister Schools program to Amity Middle School, Bethany Campus, and a week long trip to China by two teachers to develop joint projects through the use of technology.

Sister-School visitors "overwhelmed" by their experience

What excitement filled the BRS community when two principals from China came to spend ten days with us earlier this year. Mr. Zeng Guanggo, principal of our sister school, Heze Municipal Experimental Primary School, and his colleague, Mr. Guo Zhenhu, principal of Binzhou Shandong Primary School, were treated to an incredible whirlwind taste of American education, hospitality and generosity.

With very short notice the BRS community rallied to provide private housing, home-cooked meals, translators, and cultural experiences for our guests. Mr. Zeng and Mr. Guo were treated to an insider's look at how high performing

American public schools do it. Observing many classrooms in all grades, being guests at our *Windows on Technology* expo including a look at our *digital story telling* program, meeting key staff and touring Amity High School and Middle School, attending night meetings, meeting with BRS teacher and student representatives, and being treated to a Winter Concert of our BRS orchestra, jazz band, and chorus were just some of the coordinated educational activities.

Members of our own Woodbridge Chinese-American community provided nearly 'round the clock translation services in both formal and informal

settings. BRS staff members and families provided housing and off campus activities to give our visitors a taste of Connecticut – complete with winter school closings and delayed openings.

An extensive look at Town Government in action was also part of the experience. The visitors met with the First Selectman, visited all Town departments, and toured the new firehouse, library and police station. They were introduced and made a presentation to the Board of Selectmen where they described Beecher as "a world

class school," and expressed gratitude for the hospitality extended by Woodbridge families.

Of the experience, through a translator, Principal Guo said,

"Woodbridge is a beautiful community with the warmest, most welcoming families. They are so hospitable. We are quite overwhelmed by their response to us." About the American child in a family setting, the principals "were quite impressed by how well the children behaved and how they could participate in conversations in very natural and proper ways," according to parent translator Dr. Ling Yang.

BRS parent, Margaret Hamilton, who hosted both principals in her home, stated, "It has been an honor and a privilege to host these gentlemen. They are wonderful guests and wonderful people."



Principal Zeng with BRS parent Dr. Joan Pang.



Hong Kong Students See Beecher

Ten students and two teachers from the Lung Kong World Federation School in Hong Kong visited Beecher Road School for one day this spring. Last fall, these students participated in a *Global Knowledge Communities* (GKC) project with students from Mr. Holowienko's sixth grade class.

During their visit to Beecher, the guests were introduced to Beecher, Woodbridge, Connecticut, and the USA through presentations by Mr. Holowienko's class. The class also prepared breakfast for the guests. After a tour of the school the students from Hong Kong spent time in grade 6 classes and went out to recess and to lunch with their hosts. The teachers from Hong Kong met with the Grade 6 Team and compared education and life in Hong Kong and Woodbridge.

In the afternoon, the students from Hong Kong presented results from the joint GKC project and taught grade 6 students to sing in Chinese. The BRS Percussion Ensemble performed for our guests to wrap up their visit to Woodbridge. After school, Technology Coordinator Rick Wood accompanied the visitors to Yale for a tour of this world-famous campus.

When asked what was surprising about BRS, one of the teachers from Hong Kong responded, "The Hallways. The hallways are filled with student artwork that inspires students to be creative and to do their best. It was beautiful."



**Beecher teachers in China:
Third visit for us**

In the fall of 2007, Dr. "Guy" Stella, Superintendent of Schools, made the first trip to China as part of a Connecticut delegation of educators encouraged by Hartford to establish school relationships. In April of 2008, Nancy White, 6th grade teacher from Beecher Road School made the trip to further the sister-school relationship.

This past April, James Crawford and Rick Wood, educators from BRS, traveled to China to work with students and faculty at our two sister schools. With a focus on creating a digital link among the schools, Mr. Wood and Mr. Crawford developed these projects.

ConnecticutChinaConnection.org

Beginning several weeks before the trip, Mr. Crawford and Mr. Wood began blogging their activities preparing for the trip, learning Chinese, and researching the history and culture of China. During the trip, the two teachers shared stories of some famous historical sites, experiences with students and teachers in the sister schools, and observations of life in China. The blog includes hundreds of photos, videos, and sound recordings from the schools and other sites in China. Teachers and students from Beecher

Road School and other schools around Connecticut traveled virtually with Mr. Wood and Mr. Crawford, asked questions and shared in the development of this international relationship.

Developing Ongoing Communication Links

While at the sister schools in China, Mr. Wood and Mr. Crawford worked with their Chinese counterparts to develop ongoing communication among the three schools.

First, to make the communication process simple and accessible to students learning English, a website, focused on using pictures with captions, was developed. Students at Beecher are exchanging pictures and details about life in America and China with students at the two schools.

Second, video conferences between school leaders, teachers, and students have begun with plans to continue on a regular basis.

Mr. Wood and Mr. Crawford have laid the digital groundwork for the continuing development of Beecher's global learning initiative.

Mr. Wood at Heze Elementary School



Monique MacDonald is Teacher of the Year

The Connecticut Teacher of the Year program recognizes and rewards excellence in teaching. It celebrates excellence in teaching by recognizing teachers who have inspired a love for learning in their students and who have distinguished themselves in the profession. Monique MacDonald was chosen to represent the Woodbridge School District next year as *Teacher of the Year*. Monique joined the faculty of Beecher Road School in 2001 as a Reading Consultant. During her tenure in this position, she worked with teachers and administrators to implement a balanced

literacy program. In 2005, Monique decided to return to the classroom and has been a leader in the implementation of the *Writing and Reading Workshop* programs at the third grade level.

Monique is an exemplary teacher and leader. She shares her teaching expertise with colleagues and serves as a role model of professionalism. In the coming school year, Monique will once again step into the role of Reading Consultant. Her experience in the classroom for the past few years, combined with her expertise in language arts, will make a powerful contribution to the language arts program at Beecher Road School.

Supporting English Language Learners

Like many Connecticut towns, Woodbridge is being enriched by the diversity people from other countries and cultures bring to us. Some children arrive with little or no English language skills and must learn the language in order to learn the curriculum. That's the purpose of an ELL program. It is not only our ethical responsibility to provide this special instruction, it's the law.

During this past school year, 12 students received ELL services. You may find it interesting to know that 16 languages, other than English, are the dominant languages spoken in nearly 70 Woodbridge households. Among others, the languages range in diversity from Spanish to Chinese, German to Hindi, Khmer to Tamil, Hebrew to Russian, and Farsi to Korean.

Social Studies studies people in a global society

Social studies is defined as the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. As students progress through the grades at BRS they focus on geography, culture, history, and government. At every grade level students are exposed to concepts in age-appropriate ways.

Some of the questions students will ponder along their social studies journey include the following: What effect do people have on their environment? How do geography, climate, and natural resources affect the way people live and work? What is culture? What happens when cultures interact? How are our lives similar to and different from those of other cultures? How does the evaluation of past events help us make future decisions? How are governments created and organized? How do people develop systems to manage conflict and create order? What impact do the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services have on a society?

During the 2009-2010 school year, a revised social studies curriculum will be implemented in grades K-4 based on standards adopted by the Connecticut Department of Education. Last summer the social studies curriculum was revised and implemented during the 2008-2009 school year for students in grades 5 and 6.



Swine Flu/H1N1 continues to be monitored and managed

The spread of the *swine influenza – the novel H1N1 virus*, had the country concerned this spring as the outbreak was reported in many areas including Connecticut. The concern continues. So far, we have had one confirmed case at BRS during the summer program. The student involved has since recovered.

The Superintendent, the administrative team and nursing staff focused on a proactive plan to meet the challenges of a possible pandemic. Activities included, but were not limited to, maintaining contact with the Quinipiac Valley Health District (QVHD) as well as with the other BOWA (Bethany, Orange, Woodbridge, Amity) districts. In addition, the Superintendent and key members of the leadership team participated in state wide conference calls with the Governor, state health officials and superintendents throughout Connecticut to garner the latest and most relevant information on the topic. In addition, the Superintendent joined with Woodbridge police and Town officials in a national conference call with representatives from Home Land Security and national health organizations.

On the school level, the safety of students was our first priority. Our approach was proactive and cautious but not panicky. We communicated with our parents and staff through email, our web site and hard copy notices. Daily attendance, and reasons for students being home sick, were monitored carefully. Established internal protocols and procedures were enforced to detect any possible cases of flu at the school. There were no identified cases of H1N1 at BRS during the 2008-2009 school year.

School policies and administrative guidelines that will be used internally in the event of any future pandemic alert are being updated on a continuous basis. The School Board will be discussing and approving any future changes to district policies. In the upcoming school year we will be prepared for the worst, but will always hope for the best. We will keep the school community and the Town informed on an ongoing basis.

H1N1 Cases Reported by the Centers For Disease Control as of 7/24/09. New England and the Northeast Region

State	Cases	Deaths
Connecticut	1713	8
Rhode Island	192	2
Massachusetts	1370	5
Vermont	59	0
New Hampshire	247	0
Maine	145	0
New York	2738	63
New Jersey	1414	15
Pennsylvania	1960	8

Some noteworthy points regarding the illness.

- Good personal hygiene, especially washing hands often with soap and not touching one's nose or mouth, is an important first defense against getting the disease
- Influenza-like illness is assumed when students have a fever of 100° F and a sore throat or cough, unless the individual's health care provider makes an alternate diagnosis.
- The school's nursing staff continues tracking absentee rates and their causes all year long, including the summer.
- Schools and programs will not routinely close due to the presence of H1N1. However, the schools or programs may be closed due to absence rates that affect the education process.
- The emphasis is on early detection. Students diagnosed with flu-like illness should remain home for seven days after the onset of the symptoms unless there is a written medical diagnosis provided by the health care professional stating that the illness is not influenza.

For continuing updates about this illness and precautions to help prevent its spread, visit the QVHD online at www.qvhd.org. You can also access the Centers For Disease Control at www.cdc.gov. And, you can get breaking Connecticut flu news at <http://ct.gov/ctfluwatch>.

Looking ahead: What's coming?



Actually, we don't need a crystal ball to tell you about what we have planned for the future. Our vision is constant and our mission is grounded. We have several exciting plans on the horizon to keep the quality of our education leading the way into the 21st Century. Here's a sample of what we intend to bring forward in the coming months:

Implement a mathematics curriculum review as part of a continuing Board of Education approved curriculum review cycle. Among the topics in the review are: (1) **alignment** of the mathematics curriculum to state and national standards and tests; (2) **benchmarks and assessments**, grades K-6, including assessment of student growth in basic facts over time; (3) **instructional materials** in mathematics, including anchor sets, support material, educational software and technology support; (4) **instructional practices** in mathematics; (5) **revisiting district vision** and goals with staff and parents; (6) **professional learning** opportunities that strengthen the quality of the teaching of mathematics; and, (7) **family math nights** - implementation and structure.

Enhance the quality and rigor of reading instruction by implementing a *Reader's Workshop* model of instruction in all grade K-2 classrooms and expanding this model in grades 3-6. Support ongoing professional development of teachers through the use of consultants, partnership with Columbia University, peer coaching

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Learning Is The Work: Escaping from old ideas

Beecher Road School is in the midst of a very exciting journey – that of becoming a professional learning community or PLC. The work teachers and administrators are pursuing is not based on adopting new programs or implementing new practices; rather it is the work of examining the assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and habits that have become part of “how we do business” with one another. For students, the focus is moving away from *teaching* to a focus on *learning*. In other words, our collective goal is assessing what students have learned and determining if they are proficient with the material.

The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping old ones.

John Maynard Keynes, noted British journalist

When students don’t achieve proficiency with the curriculum, they are supported during the school day and given multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning. There is also a shift in how teachers work with one another. Rather than working in isolation, teachers are part of collaborative teams. They focus on results and work toward short-term wins. Rather than learning by listening (external training), teachers learn by doing – job-embedded professional development. Teachers themselves are life-long learners.

Our teachers are part of different learning communities at BRS; however, each team’s purpose is to improve student learning. For example, teachers meet weekly to examine student work, design common assessments, monitor student proficiency, build shared knowledge regarding curriculum, discuss ways to celebrate student successes and share innovative ideas with one another.

The over arching PLC goal focuses on these four questions:

- 1] What do we want students to learn?
- 2] How will we know if they are learning it?
- 3] How will we change our practices if students are not learning or meeting expectations?
- 4] How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are already proficient?

PLC’s are one way *Beecher Road School* is meeting the sometimes daunting educational challenges all schools face today, such as identifying every child’s learning pathway and advancing them along that route. These learning communities are also ways to celebrate student learning, develop a sense of shared responsibility, create powerful learning opportunities for staff and students, and increase commitment to making sure every student is a successful, independent learner ready to embrace the global society of the 21st century. We continue our journey toward what worldwide education reform authority Michael Fullan calls the *new professionalism*. One that is “collaborative, not autonomous, open rather than closed; outward rather than insular.”

(continued from previous page: Looking Ahead)

and attendance at summer institutes; and, implement a series of parent workshops on new methods of teaching reading.

Expand and enhance the quality of the writing program throughout the school with a major focus on implementing *Writer’s Workshop* as well as other effective practices of teaching good writing. Objectives include: (1) develop new or improved units of study that introduce students to multiple genres of writing such as story writing, non-fiction,

how-to books, essays, persuasive writing, poetry, and report writing; (2) continue to develop K-6 writing assessments that inform instruction; (3) continue professional development of teachers through a partnership with Columbia University; and (4) implement a series of parent workshops on new methods of teaching writing.

Place a major emphasis on proficiency in our World Language Instruction.

Expand opportunities to grow in global awareness through activities such as the China Sister Schools Project, global learning communities, digital storytelling, and the study of world cultures.

Promote the Arts as essential strands in the curriculum. Strengthen the arts curriculum and child development by continuing to provide opportunities for students to participate in instrumental groups, chorus, general music, visual arts and movement. Continue to link the *Arts* to all subject areas including *World Language*.

Install solar panels on the Kindergarten roof as a first step in energy efficiency and *going green*. This project will be funded in part by grants in cooperation with the Town of Woodbridge.

Support the social and emotional development of students by strengthening the *Responsive Classroom* program and looking for other ways to support student well-being.

Continue to focus on communication with all school, community and Town constituents including via an enhanced district website.

Distribute an updated Parents’ Guide To The Curriculum document to strengthen family involvement in the learning process.

Reach out to the community for supplementary support and involvement in the literacy movement.

Integrate the use of the ¼-mile exercise loop with instruction. Physical education teachers are excited about integrating the new Kucinskas Loop into the curriculum while physical activities on the north campus will be revised.

Support teachers as they develop their own interactive websites for greater communication with the home.

Implement new units of study in the health curriculum with the health teacher collaborating with classroom teachers to integrate content and activities into the regular classroom and in the health classroom.

Plans are underway in the areas of nutrition, physical activity, outdoor classroom, and policy review. The *Wellness Committee* will play a major role in these endeavors. 

Students' First Day of School

**Beecher Road School:
August 31**

**Amity Middle School:
September 1**

**Amity High School:
September 1**

**Feedback? Email us:
bridges@woodbridge.k12.ct.us**

Visit often – Linger long

www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us

*We encourage you to visit the Woodbridge School District revised web site. It contains thousands of pieces of information about the district. **Bridges**, the print publication you are holding, contains abbreviated highlights about many topics that are explained more fully on the web site. Keep informed about your school district and the people and programs that make it work.*

www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us

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*The Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools gratefully acknowledge the dozens of staff members who made contributions to **Bridges**, and to all the staff who make programs and children's minds come alive every day. Thank you.*

The Woodbridge Board of Education holds regular monthly meetings in the Beecher Road School library media center. Go to the district website. Click the link to "Board of Education" > meetings.

The Woodbridge Board of Education, as a matter of policy, does not knowingly condone discrimination in employment, assignment, program or service, on the basis of race, gender, color, religion, natural origin, age, sexual orientation, disability or unrelated abilities to perform the duties of the position.

**Mark your calendar: Kucinskas Memorial Loop Dedication
September 2. See page 4 for details.**

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