



connecting school and community

The Education Report of the Woodbridge School District

Vol. 6 – Summer 2012

woodbridge.k12.ct.us

To the Citizens of Woodbridge:

On behalf of the Woodbridge Board of Education, I would like to present you with our sixth annual education report. We've modified its name from Bridges to The Bridge, symbolically making the connection between school and community more direct. The Bridge highlights some of the exciting learning opportunities, updates on facilities and budget, and stories of success that make your exemplary school district one that stands out in the state, region and country. Without your support, none of this is possible. Thank you.



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

Listen to the voices of the children

The sixth grade class that just "graduated" from Beecher Road School was in kindergarten when I arrived here as superintendent on January 2, 2006. I have seen these children grow from eager five year old learners to rather articulate and reflective 12-year-olds who are ready for middle school. I engaged these students in a special closing exercise to gather feedback and to see what stands out in their minds. We

gathered in a circle and discussed two questions:

- 1. Looking back, what do you value most about your experience at BRS?
2. Looking back at your years at BRS, what impresses you as being unique?

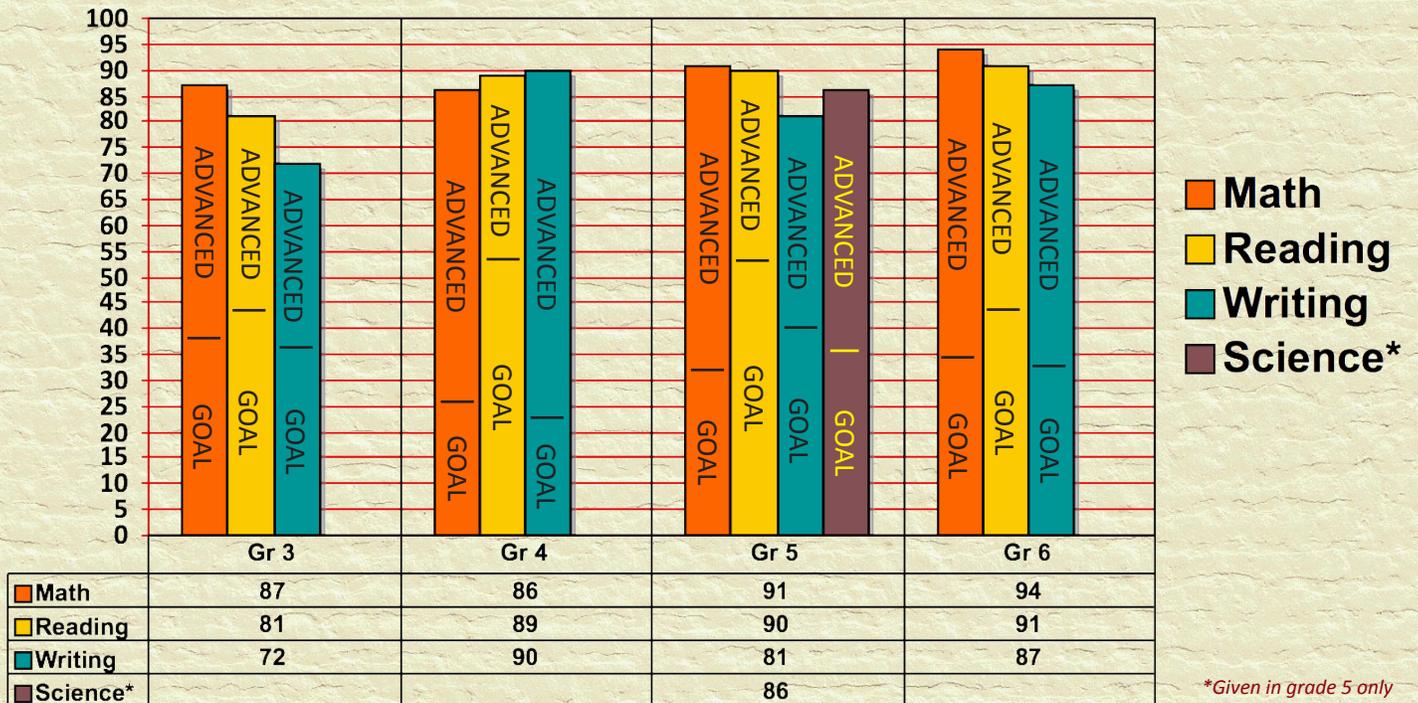
What they had to say was often insightful and humorous, but always true and honest. With hundreds of comments submitted, here is a smattering of what they had to say:

- Teachers are fun. They inspire you, play with you, try to make you enjoy class and are fair.
I moved here from a war zone. I didn't know anything about this country. Every single teacher I had helped me.
Teachers care, not only about school, but with personal or home problems.
A teacher found out I had dyslexia and helped me to be successful in reading and in my subjects.
There's technology all over the place! The use of technology helps our learning.
You can get any book you want.
The day I came here, at least five people came and greeted me.
I value the many field trips that we have.
We learn Spanish from Kindergarten on.
Although we are in 6th grade, we are still part of an elementary school and I like that.
Our campus is large. We are surrounded by nature.
Note: composite comments follow regarding the sixth grade digital story telling project:
We learned a new way of expressing ourselves.
We built trust by sharing things we would never have shared before.
We exchanged not only knowledge but also our inner-most emotions.
I shared my emotions and by doing so a burden was lifted from me.
Happy place changes your feelings when you are down.
Since we have been in school for such a long time, we have become like a family.

I thank the children for their comments as they closed the chapter on their elementary school years. — Dr. Stella



PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS PERFORMING AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT



CMT results continue to demonstrate high levels of achievement

“The continuing good news on the CMT is that the percentage of students achieving at the **goal** and **advanced** levels increased in 17 out of 26 areas.” Dr. Stella, Superintendent of Schools

Test results are reported in five performance levels

- Below Basic** - has little knowledge of area
- Basic** - has some knowledge
- Proficient** - has a good working knowledge
- Goal** - has a very good grasp of area
- Advanced** - has exceptional understanding

The Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) is given annually to all Connecticut public school students in grades three through eight. (The CMT is not administered in non-public schools.) In each of the grades, students are assessed on their ability to read, write and demonstrate mathematical understanding. In addition, students in grades 5 and 8 are assessed on their knowledge of science. Considered one of the most rigorous academic assessments in the country, the CMT has been administered here since 1985.

The CMT, though important, is just one of several measures we use to assess progress and achievement. Learning is a complex undertaking that requires constant student monitoring and subsequent teaching adjustments. The CMT only assesses the areas mentioned above and looks at specific skills, not all facets of learning. However, the CMT is the only standardized statewide assessment and, therefore, is the most visible.

Keeping the above five performance levels in mind, Woodbridge students rank among those at the very top of the state in all areas tested.

That is not to say that every single student in the district excels and achieves “at or above goal” – the target at which we aim – however, the vast majority do.

The graph above displays the percentage of students achieving at the *goal* and *advanced* levels. Of those achieving below *goal* the great majority are in the *proficient* range, with but a small handful of children at the *basic* or *below basic* levels.

The CMT results give us data that help us plan and deliver appropriate and effective instruction. Our district goal is to show meaningful growth over time for every student, whether that child is on the most advanced level, on grade level or below grade level.

For a complete look at CMT results, go to ctreports.com

New State mandates find Woodbridge in good shape

Connecticut has recently issued new requirements for school districts to improve student performance on the CMT. They have given districts and individual schools targets that must be met during the upcoming school year.

In the case of Woodbridge, the good word is **maintain**. That’s the official term. Simply put, that means that Woodbridge students are at a level of performance that there are almost no state-imposed targets for improvement. Essentially, the Connecticut Department of Education is saying, “keep doing what you’re doing.”

They did issue two minor targets, however. In the case of *students with disabilities*, the target is to increase the number of students reaching goal by 1.7%. As for students eligible for *free and reduced lunch*, (data that is used in many state formulas), the target is to increase the number by less than 1%, .8%.

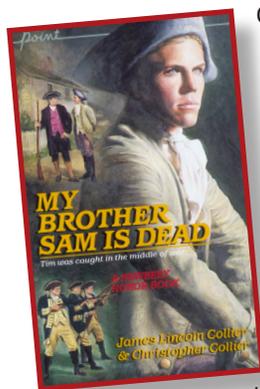
Dr. Stella, Superintendent of Schools, said of the targets, “Although the state has said we can ‘maintain’ our performance, we have local goals that are in place to raise our percentages to 90% or better (the percentage of students at or above goal). It takes very hard work on the part of our staff, but we are all up to the challenge.”

Excited about history: a back door approach

History is not dead! Just ask fifth graders at Beecher Road School. In fact, for these students history came alive in a whole new way, in a newly discovered literary genre: *historical fiction*.

Fifth grade has traditionally been the time to study American history in social studies class and to be exposed to important events like the Boston Tea Party and historical figures like Benjamin Franklin. That has not changed. The difference this year was more about students' thoughts and reflections as they were asked to think about what they learned not only in social studies, but also in their language arts classes. This approach calls upon students to apply their knowledge across the curriculum by developing, writing, creating and presenting their own historical fiction stories. The key ingredients are choice and inspiration.

Many steps were taken in this endeavor. First, the teachers taught a nonfiction unit in which students were immersed in reading short texts and articles of interest. Next, they guided children to write and present informational articles about the subject matter. Many children were so inspired by this unit that they also applied their understanding to the next unit of historical fiction. For example, one student who was fascinated about the Gold Rush decided to develop her story about a girl her age, who traveled with her family by covered wagon along with other *forty-niners* in search of the precious metal.



Other students found inspiration during a Book Club unit. After reading, *My Brother Sam is Dead*, by James and Christopher Collier, one child chose to craft his writing about a ten-year old boy who faces the loss of his sibling

during the American Revolution. And still another, who sat rapt during the read-aloud session of *Redcoats and Petticoats* by Katherine Kirkpatrick, wrote about a young spy during this time period in history.

This unit required many weeks of skill-

based lessons. Key components included crafting an intriguing lead – a good hook – like these written by students:

In 1776, the year Elizabeth Lipton was 11, her brother Jonathan died in the war. From the moment she heard the news, she decided her brother would not die in vain. There was no changing her mind. Elizabeth was going to be a spy.

And: *When I, William Matthews, was 11 years old in 1831, I did a dangerous, sneaky thing. I tricked my twin brother, Jack, into sneaking onto the HMS Beagle when it was docked. Before we knew it, we were sailing toward the Galapagos Islands, away from our family, friends and life as we knew it.*

A second component included using real historical figures that interact with fictitious characters. “Charles!” yelled the furious captain, “Show these boys to their new space.” A lanky man with long sideburns came trotting along. “Allow me to introduce myself. The name’s Darwin, Charles Darwin.”

Further components were developing descriptive settings within a distinct time and location, using effective dialogue, and balancing interesting narrative elements with accurate facts and information.

For example:

The next time Lewis awoke, sunlight drifted through the small cracks of the farmhouse wall. His eyes fluttered open and he took in the



The Minutemen of 1776

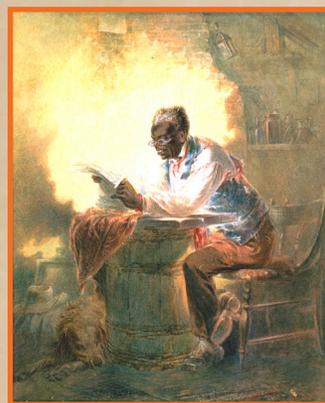
room around him. A small brick fireplace before him was no longer burning, but the coals still looked hot. A Brown Bess, that was his father’s, and a small emerald that he kept for good luck from his mother lay before him.

And still another wrote: “Halt,” snapped a tall officer. Bethie knew from his posture and tone that he was not the type to relent. His voice cracked like a whip. “What is your business here?” he barked at Bethie again. She answered him innocently, “My father has forgotten his lunch and extra bullets for his musket, sire. Mother has sent me to deliver them to him.” She held up her basket to show him and prayed that the officer had believed her story. Apparently he did.

Historical fiction catapulted the creative abilities of students into enriching and rewarding outcomes.

“... all persons held as slaves ... shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.”

To mark the 150th anniversary of the *Emancipation Proclamation**, Beecher Road School students and families will join others for a *Civil War Commemoration* sponsored by the *Town of Woodbridge* and the *Amity & Woodbridge Historical Society* on Sunday, September 23 at noon. A parade from Amity High School to the Woodbridge gazebo will feature the award-winning *BRS Marching Owls Band*, with BRS students and families following behind dressed in authentic 1862 costumes. The award-winning BRS chorus will sing Civil War songs.



Drum Corps and Amity school district music groups will add their talents to commemorate this chapter in American history. *Company G 14th Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry* will be on hand to reenact an event and town officials and students will give dramatic readings of Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address* and the *Emancipation*

Proclamation. All are welcome to join this commemoration.

* *The Emancipation Proclamation* was an executive order issued by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. It was not a law passed by Congress. Eventually as the war progressed nearly 4 million slaves were freed. To ensure slavery would remain abolished everywhere in the United States, Lincoln pushed for the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865.

Painting: Henry Louis Stephens “Presidential Proclamation/Slavery”



Music is *salve to the soul*. It speaks the human language, transcends linguistics. It starts in the young and continually deepens. At BRS we have, among the tops anywhere, an elementary school music program that consistently produces astounding award-winning performances that are compared to music students in the finest advanced middle school and even high school programs. As a result, through peer review and maintaining high performance standards, BRS has been granted a prestigious chapter membership of **TRI-M – Modern Music Masters – Music Honor Society** by the *National Association for Music Education (MENC)*.

Our music students perform many times throughout the year with a varied repertoire of literature at school concerts, ceremonies, competitions, and adjudications. The *instrumental* offerings we put forth are as varied as music itself. The grade levels of the offerings are not set in stone. If younger musicians qualify, they will be promoted to the more advanced group. The offerings include:

- **Jazz Ensemble** offered to students in grades 5 and 6. The rhythm section of this group is auditioned in the beginning of the year. Students are added and dropped throughout the year depending on their individual level of achievement.
- **Advanced Band** offered to students in grades 5 and 6.
- **Beginning Band** offered to students starting in grade 4. In addition to their in-school instruction, students rehearse together as an entire band ensemble. Students learn basic note reading and perform basic band literature throughout the year.

- **String Ensemble** offered to any student at BRS, regardless of grade, who has completed at least one year of instruction on a string instrument and is capable of note reading.
- **Percussion Ensemble / Drumline** is offered to students in grades 4 - 6.
- **Color Guard / Winter Guard:** Color guard uses props, along with movement, to express dynamic passages in the music accompanying a marching band. A colorguard is traditionally the visual representation of the music. Modern colorguards use flags, sabres, rifles, swing flags, airblades, and other pieces of equipment pertaining to the music, as well as a mix of dance. **Winter Guard** is an indoor color guard activity usually performed in a gymnasium or an indoor arena. Performances make use of recorded music rather than a live band or orchestra. **Colorguard/Winterguard** is offered to students in grades 4 - 6. Students in this group perform many times throughout the year in their own competitive circuit, as well as in local parades, school concerts, ceremonies, competitions, and adjudications.



BRS student performs at Winterguard

General Music students in the primary grades focused on building vocal, instrumental and music literacy skills (reading and writing music) this year through songs, rhymes, games, dances and other instructional activities. Students also explored the world of musical form and structure where they learned how to arrange, compose and perform songs by combining pitch, words, rhythm and form. They were also exposed to famous composers, world music, folk dances, and folk music. Students in MAG 4* even created their own *STOMP* show.

Students in grade six made more concept connections by studying the recorder.



Recorder Club wins gold

The *Recorder Club* was formed by students interested in expanding their recorder performance skills. It paid off. At this year's *BRS Music Festival Adjudication* they earned a *Gold Medal Performance* trophy. Meanwhile, the *BRS Chorus*, made up of grade 4 - 6 students, achieved many goals this year, both small and large. They came in not knowing what a chorus score (octavo) looked like, and left knowing how to read and sing in two-part harmonies. They were exposed to music history, performance culture, and they learned proper singing techniques such as diction, expression and breath control. At the *BRS Music Festival Adjudication*, the *BRS Chorus* won its first *Platinum Medal Performance* trophy. Judges told the students how rare it is to find an elementary school chorus that achieves that level of performance.

* multi-age-group – 4th year



done externally and internally. Paving was done on the entry road to the school and to the north parking area. A new South Playground was installed. Additionally, a rain garden and bio-filtration system was constructed on the grounds behind the “A” wing of BRS to prevent water damage to the building.

Legorobotics, Ancient Egypt, art classes, reading and writing courses were supported by the use of technology such as smartboards and computers in each classroom. SEP ended with *Restaurant Week*. Through teamwork, 35 children created restaurant facades, menus and food for the judges. Our courses combined creativity, challenge, science, math and fun for the children at Beecher Road School.

Beecher Road School is a school that never goes on vacation. While many schools close for most of the summer, BRS remains open 12 months a year on an almost 7-day basis. This summer, BRS was buzzing. 500+ children and adults were engaged in programs and activities during the months of July and August, extending right up to the opening of school. Programs included *Summer Enrichment, Extended Day, Summer Recreation, Special Education* and a *Literacy Camp*. In addition, dozens of teachers and administrators were involved in curriculum writing and/or various professional development activities. While all this was going on, our custodial staff was engaged in doing comprehensive building cleanup and maintenance assignments. Painting was

The *Summer Enrichment Program (SEP)* defied the expression, “it can’t get any better.” Dozens of SEP programs ran for five weeks this summer. To mention just a few, the *So Your Coming To Kindergarten* program ran for four weeks and about 30 new kindergarten children attended the program each week. This program helps transition the children into the BRS community by having fun, learning and making new friends. *Children’s Theater* was a hit with the sets and scenery at their best. Children created the sets with their teachers and learned their songs to preform two musicals for the families, friends and children of Woodbridge.

Extended Day is the program that never sleeps. It opens every school day at 7:30 am for early arrivals and remains open until 6:00 each evening. With over 30 children attending in the morning, and 140 in the afternoon, *Extended Day* hums with activity and learning all day and into the night. But it isn’t only school days that the program is open. *Extended Day* is open another 43 days when there is no school, including holidays, school vacations, and 29 days during the summer. On these 43 days, *Extended Day* provides coverage from 8 am until 5:30 pm so children can continue to experience the social, physical, cultural, and academic growth that is associated with BRS. We do this by staffing the program with the same teachers and teaching assistants who work with the children during the school day. The program accesses the full resources of the school including the cafeteria, library, technology center, art room, gym, fitness room, and swimming pool as well as the outside playgrounds, track loop and gardens which the students help maintain. The program is run through the Board of Education and funded by family tuition fees so there is no impact on the school budget.

For the 48th summer, the *Woodbridge Recreation Department (WRD)* continues to collaborate with the school system to share facilities and run successful summer camp programs. This town tradition serves over 190 youngsters, ages 3-13, making BRS a beehive of activity from 8:45-12:15 each day for 6 weeks. This Woodbridge institution employs many Woodbridge/Amity young adults as counselors who are second and third generation campers. Campers are involved in swimming, drama, arts and crafts, athletics, game room, music and a variety of traditional childhood games. Numerous off-campus field trips to area theme parks and fun time venues are also offered.

At Beecher Road School all children study Spanish from kindergarten through grade six using a proficiency-based model. This approach, as compared to an exploratory model of instruction, is aimed at mastery of specific skills by the time students leave sixth grade.

What do you see in a world language classroom at BRS?

- Students immersed in the Spanish language and culture
- Students involved in listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities
- Students engaged in interactive activities
- Consistent use of technology
- Authentic Spanish visuals

As students progress through the seven-year elementary program they are taught age-appropriate skills. From learning basic shapes, colors and greetings in kindergarten, to creating Spanish language *PowerPoint* presentations and podcasts about planning a trip to a Spanish speaking country in sixth grade.

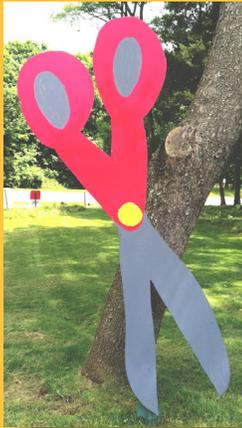
At the end of grade six, children will be able to demonstrate performance in the following areas:

- 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.

A sixth grade *Spanish exit exam* was implemented this past year. The purpose of the exam is to monitor and evaluate the progress of students’ functional language ability as well as provide insight into the effectiveness of the teaching approach. Given in May, the exit exam includes listening, speaking, and reading. Based on the results, it is evident that students are making consistent steady progress in all areas, and ready for middle school world language.



ArtsWeek Celebrates Five Years With Pop Art and Music

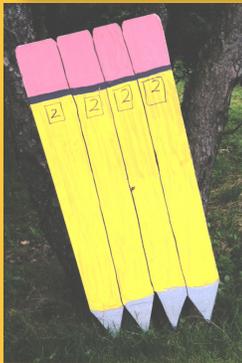


Pop art, an art movement that emerged in the late 1950's in the United States, was the visual arts emphasis in ArtsWeek5, the annual BRS week-long arts festival. Pop Art uses imagery from popular culture such as advertising, comic books and mundane cultural objects. With that mind set, BRS students set out to create their own

versions of iconic images like those originated by Pop Art luminaries Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Roy Lichtenstein and others. In true Pop Art style, the school walls were plastered with paintings and the grounds were animated with eye-popping displays. An impressive 11'x 45' wall of Warhol-inspired self-portraits of BRS students and staff was prominent in the exhibition.

Music was front and center in two concerts. Grammy Award winner Les Julian entertained with his original music featuring ethnic songs and rhythms from around the world with a theme of bullying. The *Acoustic Garage Band* also performed featuring a BRS dad, Andy Bucci. A music adjudication, where regional judges came to hear our various music groups perform, was also held. Afterwards, the judges provided direct feedback to the students and rated them according to established standards. Here is how BRS music groups performed: (a) the *chorus* received platinum for a perfect performance; (b) the *recorder* group received the gold; (c) the *strings* group received the platinum; (d) the *advanced band* received the gold; (e) the *jazz ensemble* received the gold as well.

An evening reception, attended by hundreds of adults and children, was a part of the festival. We extend thanks to our art teachers, music teachers, PTO and children for supporting this event.



Art talks. Students create art almost like they are writing a sentence. Their art is unique to them and we *read* their art as we view it. It *talks* to us about who they are and what they are trying to say.

Working with young artists who begin a new adventure each time they enter the studio is fascinating and an enormous pleasure. Our young artists create a trove of drawn and painted images always unique – never repeated. Each of their distinctive styles comes to the fore as they wrestle to master control over an ever-changing palette, compositions that can be vexing and the search for time to complete work.

Art is taught and integrated into the

curriculum in all grades. This year our focus here is on grades 6 and 2.

The influence of China and Japan through art greatly influenced the *Impressionists* and *post-Impressionists*. Sixth graders experienced that influence in their trip to the *Yale Art Gallery*. The museum's collection is rich in fine and decorative arts including all time periods. One of the last artistic experiences students enjoyed was creating a vessel, a personal one, a self-portrait so to speak, from clay.

American painter and photographer, Chuck Close, achieved fame as a *photorealist* through his massive-scale portraits. Mathematics entered in to recreating his large painting of the 1969 portrait *Phil** to

scale. The original work is 108"x 84". The huge BRS version hangs in our school's Rotunda.



BRS students' massive reproduction of Phil

Phil - The original

* Philip Glass went on to be a major late 20th century American composer.

ART - continues on next page



2012
JEANNE
DEMPSEY



To enter Jeanne Dempsey's kindergarten classroom is to find oneself in a bright, beautiful space brimming with sights and sounds of young children eagerly and happily engaged in learning. Jeanne Dempsey has been a kindergarten teacher at BRS for 25 years. Throughout that time, Mrs. Dempsey has distinguished herself as a model collaborator and team leader whose classroom is a delightful combination of a child-friendly and academically challenging environment. Mrs. Dempsey believes that the children "keep me as young as their freshness and excitement about life." She says, "their learning keeps me invigorated year after year."

The BRS family is proud to have a teacher whose dedication, skill, enthusiasm and professionalism so positively impact our school community.

ART - continued from previous page

Second graders learned to weave this year using small cardboard looms. For many the process of simple over and under weaving became addictive, leading them to weave in indoor recess and free time. There was great satisfaction in achieving a small wall hanging or blanket for a stuffed animal. Some stuck to traditional color schemes. Others wanted to try every one of the yarn colors. Teaching weaving gives an opportunity to talk about many of the simpler life styles in small communities around the world where weaving is an important way to earn money for a family. Another advantage to including weaving in the elementary art curriculum is that it sometimes allows students to shine who may not feel confident in drawing or painting.

Second grader weaving a blanket for her stuffed animal.



Millions of rides later, 24-year-old playground gets replaced



Due to safety concerns and 21st century playground standards, the 24-year-old North Playground had to be demolished in December 2011. The design for the replacement playscape was agreed on with the help of the *Playground Advisory Committee*, *Fuss & O'Neill* landscape architects and the selected playground manufacturer, *Miracle Recreation Equipment Company*. The final design was the result of much input from students and the playground committee that included staff, administrators, faculty and parents.

Once the equipment was ordered, the anticipated weekend came when the school community gathered with the experts to erect the new play area - saving the town over \$10,000 in labor costs. Finished and approved, the ribbon cutting ceremony officially opened the new North Playground to students on April 9.

The overall size and location of the playground remains similar to the previous playground, however, the new structures provide an increase in play value and will be able to accommodate more children at one time – capacity of 100 children compared to the previous 70.



Maiden voyage down the new slide

Key elements of the playground include a main structure with various slides, climbing and hanging equipment, a separate rope-climbing structure and spinning component, and the refurbished existing swing set. For a safe and soft landing, surface materials consist of poured-in-place rubberized surfacing under the main structure and engineered wood fiber under the freestanding elements.

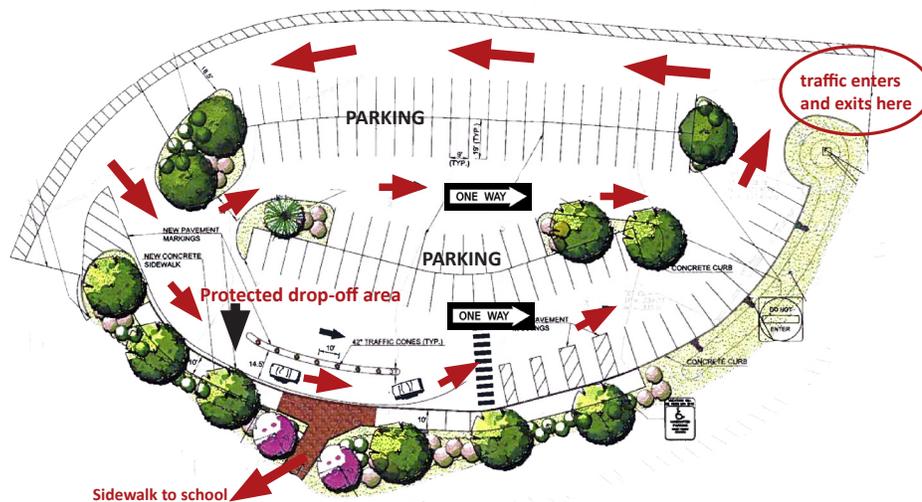
As with the North Playground, the South Playground is also being replaced and is expected to be completed for the new school year.



This spring, the Multi-Age Group (MAG) program at BRS celebrated 20 years of providing an alternative to the familiar sequential grade-level classroom structure. In a way, this celebration/gathering was more a family reunion than a school function. The three hundred attendees were all part of the Multi-Age Group community – past, present and future. Attending were current and ancestral students, parents, and teachers. There were a number of surprises. Former MAG students, known as ancestors, talked about how as adults they continue to reap the benefits of MAG's emphasis on child empowerment, democratic action, individual creativity and intellectual challenge. The experience of living in a community of different-aged children for four years also broadened their social skills.

Although the MAG program has evolved over twenty years, ancestors were happy to see that its key tenets and philosophy remain intact. The MAG rooms were filled with people happily recalling memories as they looked at all of the recent project work. The traditional MAG songs could be heard coming from another room. Many enjoyed reading the personal, local, and global issues written on the children's agenda board and remembered the daily meetings when they had stood up to argue a point or to propose a solution. They recalled being involved in the committee work stemming from these agendas. The woodworking area continues to be a favorite for many to build electrical devices, birdhouses, castles, bookshelves, toys, tables, clocks, cabinets and more. Twenty years later, children are still sewing, acting (now sometimes in the parent-run Spanish Theater), building, designing, experimenting and generating projects. Parents and grandparents are still coming in to cook each day with students. Everyone involved in this historic night found the event meaningful and touching.

Making it safer to drop children off for school



Vigilance is the watchword when it comes to safety. At Beecher Road School, improvements to the north parking area and student drop-off area are underway. The main goal of the project is to improve student, parent and staff safety and improve traffic flow at the drop-off area.

The work includes the introduction of a median island to physically separate the student drop off activity from parking movements, construction of a wider and longer sidewalk along the drop-off area, construction of granite curbing throughout the parking area to better

delineate the areas, and providing additional handicap parking spaces. In order to balance and enhance the aesthetic visual elements of the school entrance area, planned landscaping will be introduced and brick stamped concrete will be incorporated. In addition, an innovative *bio-filtration swale* system will be constructed in the landscaped area to reduce storm run-off.

This \$200,000 project is funded by a grant awarded to the Town of Woodbridge through the *Connecticut Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP)*, supplemented by Board of Education financing.

Town Committee continues making BRS facilities more energy efficient

The *Town Building Committee (TBC) for Infrastructure Upgrades at Beecher Road School* has been meeting since December to plan major improvements to our school building, parts of which are over 50 years old. The goal of the coming building project will be to make the school more energy efficient by taking advantage of the newest technologies, as well as to improve the learning environment with better lighting, heating, ventilation and air cooling. Solar energy, wind, natural gas and geothermal energy are among the systems being considered. It is expected that the TBC will be making its recommendation in the early fall. At that point, a series of information meetings and presentations will occur to fully inform the community. Once funding for the project is approved by the Town, work would take place over the next several years. Meanwhile, you may notice many smaller improvements to Beecher's grounds including the projects highlighted in this issue of *The Bridge* and a few more recently completed or in progress:

- Rain Garden and Biofiltration swale outside the A wing
- External and internal painting in designated areas of the building
- Exterior door replacement and locks
- Pool locker replacement
- Paving of the entrance road and both the north and south driveways
- Sidewalk replacement near car drop off in the north parking area

Some of these projects have been funded through a state grant, and some through a combination of town budget and school budget expenditures. But no matter the funding source, all the recent work at BRS has enjoyed the enthusiastic support of Town Hall as the Beecher administration and Woodbridge Board of Education work closely with the Board of Selectmen and Finance to ensure we continuously invest in the tremendous town asset that our community school represents.

Pre-School earns national distinction



In July, BRS received formal accreditation from NAEYC, *The National Association for the Education of Young Children*.

This professional distinction involved a yearlong self-reflection on curriculum, instruction, administrative process and parent involvement. A rigorous portfolio review and on-site visits by a team from NAEYC were also conducted. The pre-school program, among other things, was commended for...

- promoting positive relations among all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community, and to foster each child's ability to contribute as a responsible community member;
- promoting learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language and cognitive;
- using developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate teaching approaches that enhance each child's learning and development;
- using ongoing, systemic, formal and informal assessments to provide information on children's learning;
- promoting the nutrition and health of children and protecting children and staff from illness and injury;
- employing and supporting a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development, and to support families' diverse needs and interests;
- recognizing the reciprocal relationship between home/school;
- creating an environment, both indoors and outdoors that fosters the growth and development of the children;
- administering a program efficiently and effectively, ensuring that all involved persons, staff, children and families, are included.

New team takes charge of BRS under new plan

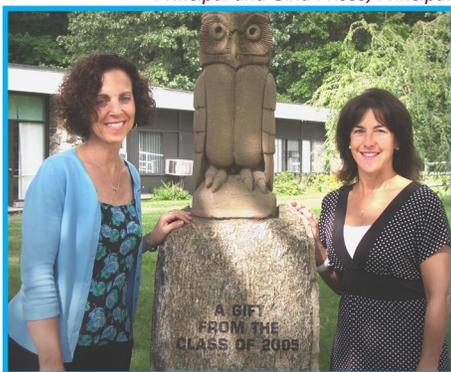
A newly adopted administrative structure will transform Beecher Road School from two schools, a primary house and an intermediate house, to one *pre-kindergarten through grade 6 school*. The restructuring moves us from a dual principal model – one principal in charge of the primary house and MAG (multi-age group) and one principal in charge of the intermediate house, grades 3 – 6, to a principal/assistant principal model with oversight of one school, pre-K – 6. Dr. Carol Bequary, principal of the primary house, retired at the end of June. Donna Pagé, interim principal of the intermediate house, completed her year of service at the end of June as well.

An independent firm was hired to conduct a search for a new principal to lead the newly restructured BRS. The position was advertised on state, regional and national levels. Over 30 applicants applied. Through a vetting and interview process, six strong candidates were sent to Woodbridge for consideration.

The district's 15-member selection committee included teachers, support staff, administrators, district office personnel, parents and school board liaisons.

The committee unanimously agreed to send the name of one candidate to the superintendent for consideration. That candidate went through a series of additional steps on the district level and a site visit to the school where she was principal.

New heads of BRS. Nancy White (l), Assistant Principal and Gina Prisco, Principal.



The Woodbridge Board of Education unanimously accepted the superintendent's recommendation of Gina Prisco as the new principal, and Nancy White, as the assistant principal of Beecher Road School. Mrs. Prisco brings a rich professional background to her position here in Woodbridge. She has extensive experience as an elementary and middle school administrator, and has taught at both the elementary and middle school levels. Ms. White is a longtime and highly respected member of the BRS staff. Together they represent a team of highly experienced, energetic, hands-on, child-centered leaders who will do well in leading the newly reconstituted pre-K – 6 school.

Even dogs help children learn to read at BRS

Where's the place students can go to sing, read, work with words and practice comprehension strategies? Where's the place that uses technology to help children physically interact with lessons, see the smallest of word chunks and learn intriguing new words? Where can children go to learn the English language and have a chance to demonstrate their knowledge of reading to a certified reading dog? The answer is... the *Primary Grades Language Arts Center*.

Following the guidelines of *Scientific Research Based Instruction (SRBI)*, the language arts instructors teach targeted literacy lessons to children in whole class groups, small groups or single students. Using state of the art technology (SMARTBoard) has helped breathe new

life into literacy instruction. Interactive SMARTboard lessons allow students to strengthen their literacy skills through word games, viewing books, and participating in instructional videos and activities that promote learning English vocabulary. This year, for example, the Kindergarten children were excited about learning to recognize the upper and lowercase alphabet through an instructional video sung by Elvis Presley – seems like everyone wants to teach at BRS. Since many non-English speaking students attend our school, their families need communication support. This is when our Family Team springs into action. In an effort to help close the communication gap with non-English speaking parents, translators are provided to help explain the process of setting academic/social support plans for the ELL (English language learners) children.

2nd graders build new bonds

One of the challenges of a school the size of BRS is building a strong community amongst students and faculty. In an effort to build that community among our five second grades, we decided to host monthly assemblies. Each class decided on a focus or theme and planned an assembly for their grade level peers.

Some of this year's highlights were an assembly around the theme of friendship and another, a spelling bee. The children in the host class would plan a special performance that would be the *opening act*, followed by individual and group presentations featuring work by any second grade grader.

Students created a *Magic Mailbox* where second graders could submit work they wanted to showcase. The class that hosted the assembly would interview their peers about that work.

These assemblies gave students a chance to come together as a group, but also created a venue for them to share work they were proud of, interact with fellow students in a new way and practice their presentation skills. Students excitedly took ownership of these gatherings coming up with great ideas for themes and performances. They also encouraged one another to share their work and provided one another with a genuine audience.

Motivation was at its peak when our newest addition, Remy, visited. *Remy the Reading Dog*, is a certified *Pet Partners* canine and helped engage students in oral reading. The children felt relaxed, focused and motivated while they read to her and to Remy's owner/handler, Danny. Thanks, Remy. Ruff-Ruff!



Remy the certified reading dog listens attentively to a group of children reading to her.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is pervasive in our lives.

We encounter digital systems in our homes, cars, work environments, stores, and even on the street corner. We are connected everywhere at all times. Our children encounter these same technologies in their lives from a very early age. This rapidly accelerating presence of technology forces us to assess its meaning and place in school. The way students view technology in their daily lives greatly influences the lessons they learn while using it in school.



in front of her. She used this observation to change her behavior and become a better reader.

Students also benefitted greatly from having an audience for their work. As a result of the students' awareness of the audience, they spent more time editing and revising their work – a task generally loathed by students.

Several young authors republished their pieces to correct mistakes they found once the book was published. This is a radical difference from how students usually view revision.

Additionally, students shared their work in venues outside the classroom including a presentation of their government project to the Woodbridge Boards of Selectmen and Education, and to our state legislators at the Connecticut Educators Computer Association (CECA) Tech Expo at the Capitol in Hartford.

State Representative Themis Klarides and State Senator Joseph Crisco presented BRS students with State Citations for Excellence at the Capitol.



Students also took greater ownership of their projects and often came up with creative ways of meeting objectives using iPads. Although there are many examples of this, one that stands out is the students developing a series of anti-bullying public service announcements.

The class had been involved in a series of anti-bullying lessons and was charged with sharing what they had learned with other members of the school community. Students wrote, acted and recorded

(using their iPads) four public service announcements teaching the important lessons they had learned.

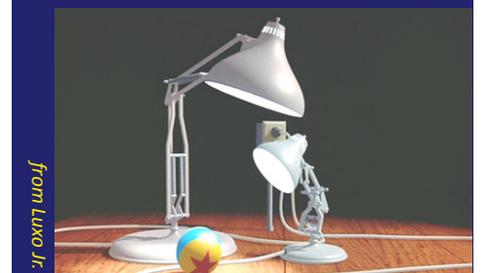
Student learning certainly has been enhanced by the availability and flexibility of this tool. One of the major contributing factors to the success of this pilot and the ability of the iPad to truly add value is that we were not “app” focused. The power in the iPad as a learning tool is that it provides students with an array of choices and supports that can help them individualize their own learning and support their independence.

Making original animated films

How do students come to understand movies, animation, and the digital telling of stories? Third grade students use a software program called *Frames* that allows them to create animated movies, slide shows and digital stories. Introduced in third grade, it is the first formal exposure that students have to combining pictures to create motion, with sound added later. Before students can create stories in *Frames*, they have to learn the concepts of sequential animation, layering, grouping, perspective, background, timing, and the use of appropriate text and graphics.

Students created excellent examples of good story line, fantasy, animation, dialogue, absence of dialogue, photography and divergent plots and themes. As members of the audience, the students were good watchers, were sensitive to other students' work, and applauded their classmates' efforts.

After the project was done, the students watched the first animation that Pixar ever made, called *Luxo Jr.* Having experience in creating animation themselves, the students were able to analyze, critique and better appreciate the efforts and techniques that went into this Academy-Award-nominated short.



from Luxo Jr.

At BRS one predominant theme prevails: Provide students with the experiences necessary to insure they are responsible, ethical users of technology today and in the future. In order to meet that challenge, we continually seek the best ways to integrate technology into the classroom. Here are some ways technology has been used during this past year.

iPads at work in 2nd grade

Creativity and independent learning thrive at BRS as students and teachers pilot the use of iPads in the classrooms. A second grade teacher put it like this: At the outset, our pilot team had some very clear ideas about how iPads would be used. It was fundamental that the iPads needed to enhance teaching and learning in ways that other resources and tools, already available to us, could not.

Over the course of three months, second grade students were able to fully realize the iPad as a learning tool. Early instruction focused on how we can use the iPad to show our thinking and demonstrate learning. This understanding was embedded into every lesson. We demonstrated that the iPad provides opportunities for students at all levels to engage in academic work that is challenging, thoughtful, and creative.

Students quickly took charge of their own learning with the iPads. One excellent example was self-assessment among students struggling with reading fluency. They took turns reading and video recording one another. One student discovered that a big part of her difficulty was that she was constantly in motion while she read in contrast to her partner who was still and focused on the page

SCIENCE MATTERS!

Exploring science at BRS begins in the classroom, but it extends to many other venues as children work to connect what they are learning to what happens in the world outside the classroom. Students pursue science on carefully planned field trips and in field experiences on the school campus, at sites in Woodbridge, and in Connecticut locations that connect learning to real world situations.

An integrated unit about plants was the culminating focus for second graders, who germinated, examined and described seeds. In addition they studied roots, stems, leaves, and flowers. Students shared their learning by writing “All About...”, “Question and Answer”, and “True/False” books, and by completing “Pixie” technology projects to be shared with the entire school on the console in the hallway outside the technology center. One class piloted the use of iPads for science journaling incorporating drawings, photos, voice recordings and written work during this unit.

In third grade, students conducted library research about different organisms in which the focus was adaptations – specific features or behaviors of organisms that help them to survive in the environment in which they live. Students produced illustrated technology projects that shared what they had learned about their organism, its preferred habitat, its adaptations, its food and its predators.

Students in fourth grade wrote both prose and poetry about their experiences with the Atlantic Salmon project. This science activity began in January, when 20-gallon aquaria in three classrooms each received 200 eggs, and extended through late April, when baby salmon, called fry, were released into the Salmon River in Colchester, CT.

One fourth grade student wrote:

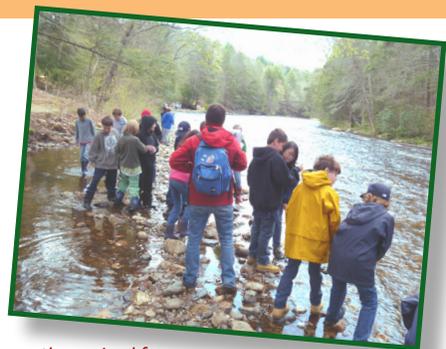
When I got off the bus there were trees everywhere, but I could still see the beautiful flowing river where I would release the salmon. It was a very exciting day, the day the salmon would leave us. Finally, after learning many new things about nature, it came time to release the salmon. I grinned when I got my cup full of salmon. I bent my knees in the shallow, but rocky water, tilted my cup slowly, and into the river they went.

Another 4th grader composed this poem about the life of the salmon:

<p><i>I am an egg A shining red sphere I hide in the rocks Still fresh and alive. I am an eyed egg Ready to hatch You can see my eyes I am an eyed egg. I am an alevin Eating from my sack, I hide in the rocks Away from deadly trout.</i></p>	<p><i>I am a fry Half way in the stage, Yummy algae is my meal I eat it everyday. I am a parr Swimming in the stream, I dodge the trout In my way. I am a smolt Changing color slowly, Getting larger every minute I am a smolt.</i></p>	<p><i>I am a salmon Finally free I enter the ocean After traveling for days, I am a salmon Finally free!</i></p>
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Just as these fourth grade students nurtured their baby fish, taking an interest in every stage of their development, BRS nurtures the next generation of scientifically literate citizens, preparing them to make informed decisions about caring for the resources and organisms in the world in which they, themselves, will become responsible adults.



Fourth graders release salmon they raised from eggs.



The BRS Library Media Center: much more than the library you remember.

While shelves are still packed with books, there are new aspects to the library. With digital availability, today’s students and teachers can access library resources from home or school whenever they need them. Literacy and research skills are mainstays of the library program. The library supports students and teachers with genre studies and book clubs. Selections are customized to every student’s reading ability. The library helps introduce and reinforce research, note taking and citation skills. Students develop presentation skills at each grade level that culminate with a comprehensive grade 6 *digital storytelling* project. These emphases are an important part of two school priorities.

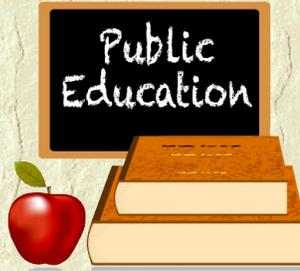
The library supports the work of students and teachers at every turn. Working closely with the teachers, temporary customized libraries are developed and brought into the classroom for unit study projects.

The library staff is trained to pay attention to individual student reading needs. Books are recommended and selected to keep children interested while improving their reading abilities. Students learn to access the online library circulation system for research, favorite authors and series. It takes a community to keep the BRS literacy momentum vibrant. To support this effort, the library promotes connections to the Woodbridge community. Many groups and individuals such as the Woodbridge Business Council, Woodbridge town officials, our state representatives, the Woodbridge Public Library, the PTO and parents have taken the time to visit our school and bring their enthusiasm for reading to our students. Their efforts have resulted in parent/student book clubs and events such as the *Holiday Reading Challenge* and *Read Across America*. Working closely with the Woodbridge Public Library, we connect students with their community and foster student reading and learning during the summer months.



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NOON

PARADE FROM AMITY HIGH SCHOOL TO TOWN GAZEBO
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CO. G 14TH REGIMENT CONNECTICUT VALLEY VOLUNTEER INFANTRY
GETTYSBURG ADDRESS & EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION
TOWN OFFICIALS AND BRS & AMITY STUDENTS

Taxpayer's Guide to the 2012-2013 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 increase is 3.84% over the previous year. This budget 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.



Second grader shares his book with special volunteer dog.

Budget Category	Last Year 2011-12	This Year 2012-13	\$ Amount Change	% Change*	% of Total Budget*
Salaries and Benefits ¹	\$ 9,801,543	\$ 10,235,119	\$ 433,576	4%	80%
Utilities and Heating Oil ²	405,184	432,778	27,594	7%	3%
Student Transportation ³	549,349	595,397	46,048	8%	5%
Tuition - (out of district) ⁴	282,102	239,102	(43,000)	- 15%	2%
All Outside Services ⁵	907,113	901,724	(5,389)	- 1%	7%
General Supplies ⁶	303,567	303,413	(154)	0%	2%
Furniture and Equipment ⁷	33,000	33,000	0.00	0%	0%
Dues and Fees ⁸	62,082	77,466	15,384	25%	1%
TOTALS	\$ 12,343,940	\$ 12,817,998	\$474,059	3.84%	100%

* Percents rounded to the nearest whole.
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 1 teaching assistant position.

2: Electricity, water, sewer and heating oil

3: In addition to regular school buses, some children require special transportation due to special needs (\$136,400). We also buy the diesel fuel for the buses through the purchasing consortium. That cost is \$51,188.

4: Because some children, due to special needs, require school settings outside of Woodbridge, we pay tuition for their special education. This line item also includes \$19,102 for participation in the regional *Wintergreen Magnet School* in Hamden.

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

6: Paper, pencils, books, wax, soap, paper products, band aids, software, envelopes, library books, subscriptions, etc.

7: In most cases, furniture and equipment items purchased are replacements.

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

For a more complete and detailed look at the operating budget, go to the district web site and click on 2012-2013 budget.

School starts August 27



The Education Report of the
Woodbridge School District
Vol. 6, Summer 2012

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

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.