



Parent Update – May 3, 2007

From Dr. Stella – Superintendent of Schools

Frequently Asked Questions Get Answered

As I look around at the marvels of nature occurring on our school campus, as well as the activities taking place within the school, it is apparent to me that spring is a time of transition, new growth and sunshine. As for my staff and me, it is a time for renewed vigor as we continue with the task of improving the quality of education.

Communication with *Beecher Road School* families remains a priority of my administration. Allow me, therefore, to share some important pieces of information by answering some *frequently asked questions*.

Question #1: When is the last day of school?

The last day of school was originally scheduled for June 15th. Because of snow days, the last day of school for children now will be, Tuesday, June 19 (full day). The last day for staff will be on Wednesday, June 20. The adjusted calendar still allows 182 days of school for students, two more than required by state regulations. In addition, on June 20, we are providing time for staff to do a thorough job of closing down for the year and time to engage in professional team planning for next year.

Question #2: When and where will the 6th grade transition celebration take place?

At last year's 6th grade transition celebration on the grounds of Beecher Road School, several children and adults fainted under the hot sun. There were also complaints by some that speakers could not be heard. In addition, we were worried by the fact that if it rained, we would have had to divide the graduate group in half and conduct ceremonies in two different indoor areas.

Therefore, some adjustments have been made to 6th grade graduation this year. After consultation with the 6th grade team, the PTO Board, the School Board and an informal survey of parents and children, my administrative team and I decided to hold the *6th grade transition celebration* in the auditorium of **Bethany Middle School** on Tuesday, June 19, at 6 PM. The arguments for this change are compelling. They include the following: (1) the auditorium at the middle school is large, air-conditioned, and has comfortable seats; (2) there is lots of parking; (3)

everyone will be able to hear the band and the speeches; (4) the 6 PM time would make attendance at this important ceremony more convenient for parents and invited guests; (5) the celebration will be ceremonial in that the Principal from Beecher Road School will *hand over* our sixth graders to the Principal of Bethany Middle School. We are starting a new tradition.

Question #3: What is the status of the School District Budget for the 2007-2008 school year?

*Although this is not final until the **Town Meeting** on May 21, at 7:30 PM, in the Center gym, the Board of Finance voted to restore a total of \$76,000 of the \$190,000 they had originally cut from the Board of Education's proposed operating budget. The budget recommendation of the Board of Finance represents a 6.21% increase over this year's budget. In addition, the School District asked for \$198,350 as part of a long-term plan to update the technology hardware at Beecher Road School. The Board of Finance granted \$125,000 of that request. Although we preferred that all budget reductions be restored, I believe that the Board of Finance's School District Budget recommendation is a fair one. It will allow us to continue with our mission of transforming Beecher Road School into a 21st Century model of education, while being respectful of the Woodbridge tax payer. I would like to express my thanks to the school community and Town officials, including the *Board of Selectmen* and the *Board of Finance*, for the support they have given the School Board and me in this budget process.*

Parents and citizens are always encouraged to attend Town meetings.

Question #4: What actions will be taken to support parents who have to drop children off at school before the official starting time?

*Approximately 45 children currently are being dropped off early at Beecher Road School on a daily basis, beginning at 7:30 AM. Over the past several years, the school has had to commit an increasing amount of staff to supervise the children. Currently there are four teaching assistants assigned. That means four hours of teaching assistant time or ½ of a *teaching assistant* position is lost from the educational program every day. For budgetary reasons, we cannot continue with early student drop-off as it currently exists. In fairness to parents, children and the*

community, we have rethought our approach. We anticipate establishing an early morning program under the supervision of the *Extended Day* program, beginning in September. The expectation is that the new program will cost the School District nothing, will be financially economical for participating parents, and will provide a more structured program with more options for children. Additional information will be provided before the end of the school year.

Question #5: *How are teachers at Beecher Road School growing and learning?*

Teachers are constantly upgrading their skills. Many take courses after school, on weekends or during the summer months for a variety of graduate degrees; others attend professional seminars during the school year and during the summer months. In addition, administrators and staff are taking part in collective professional learning activities that focus on school initiatives. For example, we have a partnership with the *Writer's Project at Columbia University*. Consultants from Columbia visit the school on a regular basis to provide in-classroom training for teachers and to interact with staff in a learning team fashion. On June 20, 21, and 22, Columbia University will be conducting a three-day *Writer's Workshop* at our school. Likewise, a group of teachers will be attending a one-week institute in July at Columbia for advanced training. Also, a one-week *Responsive Classroom* institute will be held during the month of August at our school for Beecher staff. However, one of the most effective models for on-going professional learning is that which is taking place daily through peer mentoring, team teaching and/or coaching by subject specialists.

Question #6: *What is the Global Knowledge Communities Initiative and how is it progressing?*

The Global Knowledge Communities (GKC) program will connect our students with global partners in a project-learning environment. Faced with real-world problems, real-world resources, and real-world communications, international students will conduct research and present their findings to peers. As a culminating project for grade six students at Beecher Road School, beginning next year, GKC will ask students to use skills accumulated across the curriculum including scientific inquiry, reading and writing in content areas, technological tools for gathering and analyzing data, and effective presentation.

The project will use the web-based GKC collaborative tool developed by Dr. Christopher Tan from the

University of Hong Kong. This year has been a pilot year for the project. Dr. Tan made a special trip to our school in January to train staff. We have forged a partnership with Bethany and Orange in order to conduct a regional pilot. A limited number of students from the three towns, including students from our *Talented and Gifted (TAG)* program, are currently participating in the project. Dr. Tan, in assessing the work being done on the pilot program, had these words of encouragement: "Your students are active and bright." The project draws upon so many aspects of learning and forces us to think about what it takes to become a successful sixth grader. We are breaking new ground.

Question #7: *When will the Summer Enrichment Program at Beecher Road School begin?*

The Summer Enrichment Program, 2007, will be held from June 25 – July 27, 9 AM – 12 noon. William Letsch will continue to serve as the program director. Booklets describing the wide assortment of course offerings have been sent home. The booklet can be found on the Woodbridge School District's Web Site. Students enrolled for five full weeks will receive a discount.

The *Extended Day Program* will be held from June 25th through August 10.

May I brag about our students?

Allow me to end by boasting about our school's exemplary Instrumental Music Program and Winterguard. Accomplishments this year include: (1) The BRS Winterguard finished the season in *2nd place* in state competition for the 3rd straight year with our highest score ever; (2) The BRS Middle School Winterguard finished the season (their inaugural season) in *4th place* just out of medal contention); (3) The BRS *percussion ensemble* has remained *undefeated* and finished the season in *1st place* with their highest score in two years.

I extend my congratulations to Mr. Letsch and our talented student musicians.

Feel free to communicate with me, or my administrative team, with questions or concerns that you may have.

Best wishes to all!

Gaeton F. Stella, Ph.D.
Superintendent