



Parent Update - November 24, 2010 From Dr. Stella - Superintendent of Schools

Expanding the virtual walls

As we move into the second decade of the new century, technology continues to break down the barriers between students' lives within schools and their lives outside the school. Education is a 24/7 process. BRS is in the process of introducing two new opportunities to extend learning beyond the school through technology.

Type to Learn at Home

Learning to use the keyboard effectively has been an important part of learning at Beecher for nearly twenty years. The goal is for students to be able to type accurately and more quickly than they can write without looking at the keyboard. *Type to Learn* has been the hallmark of our keyboarding program.

In the next few weeks, students in grades 3 and 4 will be taught how to access their *Type to Learn* program from a home computer. Detailed information will be sent home to parents along with suggestions for how to help students develop good keyboarding habits.

BRS Gaggle for Kids

BRS is introducing new web-based tools to expand students' ability to work more seamlessly between home and school. BRS Gaggle for Kids is provided through Gaggle.Net, Inc.

Gaggle is a safe, web-based Internet system for students where the teacher is always in control. It provides numerous tools that protect our students from the potential problems of online networking. The school controls the level of access the students have and with whom students can communicate. All messages and files pass through a number of filters. Messages and files with offensive language, questionable domains, banned file types, or inappropriate images are automatically rerouted to the student's teacher for review.

During the next few months, students in grades 5 and 6 will be introduced to the *Gaggle* web-based tools which include an online digital locker, word processor and presentation tools, image editing tools, homework drop box, message boards, and blogs. Parents will receive detailed information about home use of *Gaggle*.

As BRS continues to provide the best education for the children of Woodbridge, we continue to research ways in which technology will best serve that goal.

District website quadruples monthly hits



Woodbridge School District
40 Beecher Road South, Woodbridge, CT 065

Over the last two months the district/school website has undergone many improvements. Some of the changes you may have noticed; others are behind the scenes. One noticeable improvement is that, the number of teachers with a web presence has grown since the beginning of school year, and continues to grow. As of November 1st, 48% of classroom teachers and 62% of specialists have or contribute to an individual or team web page. This number is up significantly from July 1st when the numbers were 38% of classroom teachers and 28% of specialists. Class

pages on the web site represent an extension of the teacher's classroom. Our objective is to expand the web presence of classes throughout our school. Likewise, additional information has been added that may be of interest to you, including assessment data, and pertinent reports and newsletters. Newly added resource information for parents in the areas of *Talented and Gifted* and *Special Education* also can be found on the web site. District and school dates and activities are current and are updated on a continual basis. This increase of information is leading to more visitors at our site. Two years ago the site was attracting about 440 visitors a month, in October we had over 1,800 visitors to the site. We expect this trend to continue.

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

James Crawford, the newest member of our library tech team has been assigned to manage and facilitate the growth of the web site. Feel free to contact James, jcrawford@woodbridge.k12.ct.us, with any feedback, suggestions or questions about the website.

Are you prepared to receive "Instant Alerts"?

BRS uses the *Honeywell Instant Alert System* for all routine and emergency messages. This system allows users to choose from a variety of messaging devices and levels of urgency. Routine messages can be sent to email while emergency messages and school closing information can be sent directly to land line and cell phones.

You must be signed up in order to get these messages via email or phone. It's a good practice to periodically check to make sure that all your information is current and the correct level of alert is chosen. A new feature introduced this fall allows you to control when devices are used, both by time of day, and weekday vs. weekend. Also, make sure all your children are listed because sometimes messages are sent to one grade only. With the uncertainty of winter weather coming, now is a critical time to check your profile at <https://instantalert.honeywell.com>.



Dedicated boys and girls serve in the BRS safety patrol

On any given school day morning, as you enter the main entrance in the North, you will encounter a dedicated group of fourth, fifth and sixth graders helping to support and guide students as they enter the school. They are the members of our school's safety patrol. These dedicated boys and girls serve their school community by coming early, usually before 8 AM, in all kinds of weather, including rain, sleet and snow. Ms. Jill Colomonico, a teaching assistant, with the support of Principal Carol Bequary, serves as the moderator

of the safety patrol. Ms. Colomonico can be found along side the members, greeting adults and students alike with her smile and good morning each day.

With the help of Intermediate Principal, Dr. Tomasello, and teaching assistant, Kathy Holowienko, the safety patrol has been expanded to provide support for students arriving at the south entrance each morning. Ms. Holowienko organized and trained this new group of helpers who have faithfully taken their respective posts before the morning busses start arriving.

BRS renovations, upgrades being heard at upcoming meeting

The BRS Town Building Committee has been working diligently over the past 18 months to solidify a plan for a badly needed renovation of BRS. The Committee is comprised of representatives from the Boards of Selectmen, Finance, Education and members of the community. They spent countless hours exploring each component and various options within the identified areas of need. The committee selected Newman Architects and Dimeo Construction to develop schematics and cost estimates. In an effort to provide the Town with as much information and flexibility as possible, the Committee developed three schemes. Each scheme addresses code improvements, life cycle, energy efficiencies and controls and enhancements related to lighting, data/technology, millwork, roofing and bathrooms upgrades. The Committee endorsed Scheme B, with a price tag of approximately \$17m, as this scheme provided for cost effective and efficient options in maintaining equity and parity among the North and South buildings.

A full presentation will be made to the Boards of Selectmen, Finance and Education at the Capital Budget meeting on November 30 at 7:00 PM in the Main Meeting Room at Town Hall.

BRS enrollment is above projected figure

Dr. Peter Prowda, a school enrollment demographer, recently completed an annual update of student projection figures for BRS. (A copy of the report can be found on the district's web site.) In putting together a report of this nature, many variables are considered. For example, last year's report projected an enrollment of 708 for BRS for the 2010-11 school year. Our current enrollment is 727 – 19 students more, or the equivalent of one more class. This was due to an unexpected influx of students from other parts of the state and country. Will the same thing happen next year? We can't be sure. The report is filled with lots of data. For example, information is provided about non-public school enrollment in Woodbridge over the years. It is interesting to note that there were 145 students from Woodbridge attending non-public schools in 2006. Last year, there were 111 students. All data is subject to interpretation.

State recognizes Peter Halsey

On November 3, I had the pleasure of escorting Peter Halsey across the stage of Herbert D. Welte Hall at Central Connecticut State University to receive a 2011 *Teacher of the Year Award* from the Commissioner of Education and Members of the State Board of Education. Peter was a semi-finalist for State of Connecticut Teacher of the Year Award. The auditorium was packed to capacity with a crowd consisting of superintendents, state officials, corporate leaders, fellow recipients, educators, and family members.

Veteran's Day observed uniquely at BRS

BRS celebrated Veteran's Day on November 10. It began with a gathering outside the main entrance. BRS's band began with the *Star Spangled Banner*, followed with the *Pledge of Allegiance*. Mrs. Bequary and I spoke to the students, explaining the significance of Veteran's Day. Mrs. Bequary introduced and publicly thanked the veterans who were present, including staff members and family members or neighbors of students. The marching band played another patriotic song, followed by Taps. Many teachers had invited veterans to speak to their students or involved their students in related activities.

Principal Tomasello with staff members and students started a new tradition: creating a display highlighting the names and backgrounds of veterans who were family members of students and staff. He also added the names of faculty members who were veterans. The display already has 1509 names! Additional names will be added over the next several weeks. Please, send Dr. Tomasello names from your family. We want you represented.

Happy Thanksgiving !!

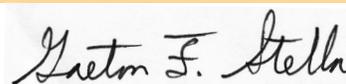
It is a beautiful fall day. As I walk the campus of BRS I see the sights and hear the sounds of children running and playing at recess. Walking through the building, I see and feel the pulse of learning. The corridors from north to south are filled with the creative work of children. Visiting classrooms, I see students engaged in interactive literacy, mathematics and science learning. **Responsive Classroom** group meetings start the

day in many rooms. Children, K-6, follow the strategies of good readers and writers in their readers/writers workshops. The pre-school class is filled with excitement, movement and hope. Children are actively involved in a myriad of sports and physical activities in our north and south gyms as well as in a well equipped fitness center and swimming pool. Music, both instrumental and choral, can be heard emanating from the music rooms. Children are engaged in research based projects in our expansive library media center. I see a smart board lesson in a world language class that connects our students with a global society.

We have a lot to be grateful for including wonderful students and BRS families, a dedicated faculty and staff, a committed and hard working school board and a Town that values education.

I am grateful to you for the support and respect that you have given me as well as our administrative team, faculty and staff. Most of all, thank you for sharing your children with us.

May your homes be filled with joy and laughter during the holiday season and throughout the year!



Gaetm F. Stella

