



Parent Update - March 5, 2010 From Dr. Stella – Superintendent of Schools

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School Budget Has Preliminary Approval

The 2010-11 *Board of Education operating budget** was recently approved by the *Board of Selectmen* and the *Board of Finance*. The next step in the process is a Town hearing in the spring.

This budget was developed to support the educational mission, vision and goals of the Woodbridge School District, built around needs associated with implementing a carefully crafted Strategic Plan. That plan seeks to transform BRS into a 21st century model of education – one that prepares students for their future, not our past. The focus of the budget is improving the quality of education while at the same time respecting the taxpayer. Here are two frequently asked questions about the budget:

How does this budget help to improve the quality of education for our students?

The *Woodbridge School District* is serious about educating students for their lives in this century. Our educational program is complex and comprehensive. The new budget provides:

- favorable class size
- integration of technology into all areas of the curriculum
- enhanced balanced literacy through the implementation of a *Reader's* and *Writer's Workshop* model
- transition for students from traditional literacy to informational and digital literacy
- student access to a well-equipped science laboratory and to a comprehensive science curriculum that is coordinated by a highly qualified teacher
- participation of students in an Arts program, K-6, that is second to none and that has won many local and state awards
- the use of interns to provide greater continuity in instruction rather than paying for substitute teachers
- support for *Professional Learning Teams* that focus on improving student performance
- support for the core curriculum areas such as mathematics and social studies
- increased global awareness for our students through: (1) a K-6 World Language Program that is a proficiency model (2) a sister school program (3) video conferences with students in another country
- programs to support the social and emotional development of students
- physical education and health programs designed to promote lifelong wellness, including a swimming program
- professional development to keep administrators and staff current

What cost savings steps has the district taken to show respect for the taxpayers of the Town?

The School District is aware of the difficult economic climate and, therefore, has made every effort to limit any increase in spite of soaring costs. Several important cost saving measures have been implemented. They include:

- savings through consortium spending in areas such as heating oil, electricity, cafeteria materials and supplies
- savings through the elimination of staff positions when appropriate

**PTO to host Dr. Stella who will explain the budget to parents in an informative and lively presentation:
MONDAY - MARCH 8 - BRS Library - 6:00 PM**

- savings on retirees' health insurance
- savings through an early retirement incentive
- savings by providing the least restrictive environment for special needs students by educating them in their own school to the greatest extent possible
- savings through implementation of energy efficiency measures
- savings through effective fiscal management practices and a zero based budget approach
- savings through partnering with the Town in areas such as insurance and consortium buying

The proposed 2010 – 2011 education budget represents a 1.9% increase over the current school year – one of the lowest school district budget increases in the region.

On the *capital budget* side, the budget that is used for large expenditures that go beyond the *operating budget*, the Town Boards voted to provide the school district with \$115,000 of a \$149,500 request for technology equipment, but did not approve the district's plan for grounds' projects.

There will be a Town meeting on April 19 that is open to all townspeople. Citizens will have the opportunity to share their thoughts about the budget. After this meeting, the Board of Finance will recommend a final budget to be presented to the citizens on May 17.

* For complete details go to the District website. www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us

Focus On Bullying

Noted authority on bullying and author of the *Surviving Bullies Workbook*, Dickon Pownall-Gray recently came to BRS to speak to students in grades 5-6 about bullying. Students watched a video that gave them background knowledge regarding bullying's impact on academic progress and social interactions. Afterward, with parental consent, students completed a confidential online questionnaire concerning bullying. The questionnaires are scored by computer. If children's scores suggest they are being bullied or in emotional stress, parents will be contacted by the *School Climate Project Team* to discuss results and options. Students demonstrated a serious attitude throughout the program. Of note, this project is being implemented in all BOWA districts.

Special thanks to the PTO for bringing Halloween fun to the mid-winter doldrums after we had to postpone the Halloween Hoot last fall because of the threat of H1N1 flu. Hundreds of families came together for fun on Feb. 27.

Chatting With China: Sister schools teleconferences promote global awareness and interchange

Students at the Heze Experimental Elementary School in Shandong Province, China, and BRS sixth graders have engaged in planned monthly teleconferences via Skype on the internet. These off-hours teleconferences have been well attended by students, parents and staff awed by the technology and the opportunity to interact face to face with children around the world.



One recent teleconference, conducted in the BRS library, had students in China and here asking each other questions through translators. A sampling includes: 1] *What is your typical school day like?* 2] *What kind of projects do you work on in school?* 3] *What do you do in your spare time?* 4] *How much homework do you get?* 5] *How do you try to show your appreciation to your parents?* 6] *What kind of food do you eat at lunch time?*

After the planned question and answer session, students in both schools enthusiastically shared science and social studies projects. Each group of children applauded each other at appropriate times throughout the presentations.

The second part of the conference involved teachers speaking with teachers. As planned prior to the conference, a group of mathematics teachers from the Heze Elementary School engaged in a presentation about how math was taught in their school. A lively exchange of questions and answers took place between both sets of teachers.

The final portion on the teleconference involved the ongoing conversation among school leaders to enhance the sister school partnership by pursuing a Confucius grant sponsored by the Chinese government.

The BRS Chinese Sister School Program, now in its third year, interested Dr. Dellinger, principal of Amity Middle School - Bethany, who recently established a Sister School Program with a Chinese middle school. Dr. Dellinger and educators from AMS-B attended the BRS teleconference and invited Rick Wood, technology coordinator at BRS, to come to the middle school and help them develop similar types of experiences.

The direct cost of the teleconference is nothing. Communicating via sound and video through Skype on the internet is free. The time to prepare the conference is minimal. The rewards are great. As one parent told me afterwards, "The evening was pure joy."

Math Curriculum Under Review

As part of the *Board of Education* curriculum review cycle, a comprehensive look at the district's K-6 mathematics curriculum has been taking place during this school year.

In October, BRS staff attended the *NCTM (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics)* conference in Boston. Participation at this national conference supported the district's objective of focusing on the mathematics review. The returning team reported back to the superintendent and staff.

In addition, administrators and coordinators have been and are meeting with K-6 grade level teams to assure that the district curriculum meets the most recent national and state standards and grade level expectations. A significant resource being used in this phase is an *NCTM* publication of grade level focal points and connections meant to guide the work of curriculum review. Standards, student outcomes, assessments, and units of study at each grade level are being analyzed to determine the match between what is expected and what is being taught.

Updated math curriculum will incorporate national and state standards aligned with the *National Council of Teachers of Mathematics'* recommendations.

After meeting with individual grade level teams, administrators and math coordinators will provide opportunities for contiguous grade level teams of teachers to meet to share findings and identify the most important connections from grade to grade. Ultimately, this work will culminate in whole faculty work to look at the continuum of mathematics instruction across all grades. Curriculum maps will be developed to outline the study of mathematics from kindergarten through sixth grade.

This summer, a task force of BRS educators will focus on the types of instructional materials, including digital resources, needed to support an updated math curriculum. During the 2010-11 school year, the school staff and math committee will evaluate several sets of materials resulting in recommendations for purchase. Budget recommendations to purchase new materials will be incorporated into the district's 2011-2012 budget proposal, for acquisition during that school year.

Connecticut Mastery Tests Underway

The annual administration of the CMT is taking place through March 11 for all students in grades 3-6. These important tests serve as one measure of academic achievement of Connecticut's public school students, and are used by the state and federal government to ensure that all students in the state are progressing at an acceptable rate. In Woodbridge, tests results are used for three primary purposes: 1] to measure student growth over time 2] to *inform instruction* 3] to provide a type of progress report to parents and community. The CMT mirrors state standards. The expectation is that our children can and will do well on these tests. In the past, the *Woodbridge School District* has had many indicators of success. For example, on last year's CMT, the district far exceeded state results, and our exiting sixth grade students scored among the highest in the state. In addition, well over 90% of our students achieved federal proficiency standards or scored above.

Although the CMT is important, we go beyond it in our mission to instill lifelong learning by creating interest, exposure and instruction in the multiple literacies, the arts, physical fitness and wellness, social studies, science and technology as a tool for learning and communicating. Also, while academics are important, the school seeks to foster creativity and innovation in our students and to support their emotional and social development.

We work to strike a balance between stressing the importance of doing one's best and being anxious about the CMT. As with anything in school, students should put forth their best effort but not be stressed. Please try to reinforce this approach with your child.

My best to you all,

Saeton F. Stella