



## Parent Update - January 25, 2011 From Dr. Stella - Superintendent of Schools

### Unpredictable Weather Is Here

Once again we face unpredictable and severe weather. School has been cancelled three times already and there may be more cancellations. Make-up days are added at the end of the school year. Originally, the last school day was planned for June 16. The last day for students as of today is June 22. We will keep you informed of any additional changes.

The Bethany, Orange, Woodbridge and Amity (BOWA) districts continue to participate in a regional school transportation collaborative. When one BOWA school district closes, delays the opening of school, or dismisses early due to inclement weather, all BOWA school districts will do likewise. For more information, see the "Winter Advisory" memo on the district's web site under *News and Announcements*.

### Honeywell Instant Alert System

BRS uses the *Honeywell Instant Alert System* for all routine and emergency messages. This system offers 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 to get these messages via email or phone. It's a good practice to periodically check 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. Make sure all your children are listed. Sometimes messages are sent to one grade only. With the uncertainty of winter weather, now is the time to check your profile at <https://instantalert.honeywell.com>

### Unavoidable Systems Error

Fast and accurate communication with school is essential, especially during these winter months. On January 21 an unavoidable system error delayed the transmission of our closure message. Honeywell apprised us later in the day that a master server had failed, which affected our notification base. While we do our best to disseminate information to staff and parents prior to 6:00 AM, technology glitches beyond our control do occasionally occur. Families should have a back-up plan since notifications are always made on radio, television as well as designated Internet-based sites, including the Woodbridge district home page, [www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us)

### — Save the Date —

#### Superintendent's Parents' Curriculum Academy

Topic: Reader's and Writer's Workshop Approach

Presenter: Kara Gustafson, Columbia University Consultant

Date: February 8, 7:00 PM, in the BRS Rotunda

### Board Sends Funding Proposal to Town

The School Board approved a budget for the 2011-2012 school year at its December 20 meeting. The budget presented to the Board was thoughtfully and carefully prepared with two objectives in mind: (1) continue to support the education mission and vision of the school district; and, (2) respect the taxpayer. Even in today's tough economic conditions we must provide a quality education to all of our students.

We began the budget process with an immediate 6% increase over last year's budget. That was because of the following factors: (1) increased special education cost of \$212,000; (2) contractual obligations of \$325,000; and, (3) increased health and medical costs of \$218,000.

Working closely with our administrative team and with feedback from staff, we were able to reduce the budget increase to 2.93%. We reduced many account items, and we eliminated positions. The positions we eliminated included: (1) .5 primary art position; (2) 1 special education resource room teacher position; (3) 2 TA positions; and, (4) .5 secretarial position. Any further staffing cuts, in my opinion, will adversely affect the educational program and the children of our school district.

I will be presenting the School Board approved budget to the Boards of Finance and Selectmen on Tuesday, February 1, 2011 at 7 PM at Town Hall. All members of the public are invited to attend.

### National Geography Bee

Dr. Tomasello (l) and Dr. Stella congratulate Geography Bee winners



For the 23rd year, the *National Geographic Society* held the *National Geographic Bee* for students in grades four through eight

in thousands of schools across the United States and in the five U.S. territories. BRS students in grades four, five and six participated in this year's competition. Congratulations to our first, second and third place winners pictured above.

## **BRS Competes in Winterguard at Home**

The Musical Arts Conference has chosen BRS to host one of its annual *Winterguard* competitions. This is a singular honor for our school to be the host for this premier metropolitan event. Since BRS is too small a facility to host this important event, Amity Superintendent Dr. Brady has generously agreed to make the entire high school facility available to us. The competition will take place on Saturday, January 29, 2011. Any profits will go to support the BRS music/Winterguard program.

Beecher's *Winterguard* will compete in the *junior class*. There will be up to 25 different units from CT, NY, NJ, and MA competing. *Winterguard* is a synchronized music and dance performance using flags, sabers and rifles. Amity High School and Middle School will also be performing.

Show starts at 5:00 PM. Tickets are sold at the door. The schedule of individual performance times for the different units can be found at <http://www.musicalartsconference.com>. Please come out and support our students and see what all the excitement is about!

Anyone wishing to bake for the *Winterguard* bake sale can drop off items on Saturday, January 29 starting at 10 AM at the high school cafeteria. Items should be wrapped for individual sale.

## **Artists Share Works**

*Visual Arts Exchange* has been initiated between *The Country School*, Madison, Connecticut and BRS.

Artistic works will be exchanged monthly between the two schools. January's exhibit includes works inspired by Wassily Kandinsky from *The Country School's* first and second grade classes.



Kandinsky's *Transverse Line* 1923

Also on exhibit is a piece exploring color and design through typography done by a fourth grade class. BRS is proud to exhibit an interpretation of Byron Kim's "Synecdoche" showing a wall of 493 skin tones. All of the children in grades 3-6 in 2010 participated in this work. The piece is hanging in the cafeteria at *The Country School*. David and Linda Acheson are the visual arts teachers responsible for this interchange.

## **Math: Online Challenge**

The intermediate mathematics supervisor, Jennifer Schnitzer, has made a new mathematics enrichment opportunity available to families in grades 3-6. It is called the *Math Forum*. Students can work from home and submit problems online at [www.mathforum.com](http://www.mathforum.com). Once submitted, the student's solution and feedback left by university professors and students across the country can be viewed.

New problems are posted every other week from a variety of categories: math fundamentals, pre-algebra, algebra and geometry. Solutions are posted the following week. This is a home-based program that is sponsored by BRS. A personal family username and password is needed. Families can contact Ms. Schnitzer at [jschnitzer@woodbridge.k12.ct.us](mailto:jschnitzer@woodbridge.k12.ct.us) for more information.

Currently, 31 families signed up, and students have submitted 40+ solutions to problems. Students already have received mentor responses from university students in the field of mathematics.

## **Dr. Tomasello Brightens Our Day**

When Dr. Len Tomasello began his first day of work at BRS last fall, he did not miss a beat. He interacted with faculty, staff and children throughout the whole day. In the morning, he stood outside the doors of the South entrance with his umbrella to greet the students, and was at the same spot to wish them good-bye at dismissal. He visited classes and introduced himself to students and conducted two assembly programs. Dr. "T" has kept that pace and that type of interaction going over the past several months. In addition, he has added what we hope will be two long lasting traditions at BRS: *The Veterans Wall* outside the cafeteria and a very well received grade 3-6 *Geography Bee*. I am happy to announce that with School Board approval we have extended Dr. Tomasello's tenure for the remainder of the school year.

## **Join Me For a Moment**

During a recent school closing, on my way to the office I decided to check out the condition of the schools' parking lots. As I entered the North lot I spotted a group of children of different ages climbing up one of the highest snow mounds; others were at the bottom frolicking in the snow under the watchful eyes of their parents. What a grand time they were having! There was a real sense of joy in the moment. The scene reminded me that the world can always be viewed through multiple perspectives. Yes, these are tough economic times. Yes, we will have to struggle with our school budgets during the upcoming years. But no, we will not let our children down. BRS is a jewel of a school. Our focus will constantly be on ways of enhancing the quality of education for our children while at the same time being respectful to the taxpayer.

*With renewed hope and a sense of excitement in the new year, my best wishes to you -*

*Yestm F. Stella*