



PARENT UPDATE FROM DR. STELLA SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

October 20, 2011

www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us Woodbridge School District

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New focus topics in this and future Parent Updates

In each of my Updates, I will try to highlight one of the educational trends that improve the quality of education at BRS. In this Update my focus is on technology. As I walk the hallways and corridors and visit classrooms, I am more impressed than ever before with the way that technology has created a unique, exciting, and accelerated environment for learning. I can unequivocally say that BRS has state of the art technology that provides an array of tools for enhancing student learning. This technology is serviced by a library-tech team that is like no other. We will continue our efforts in the coming year to assure that the use of technology, as a tool for learning, is available to students where and when it is needed. The question, as we look to the future, is not where is technology going but rather where is education going. The answer is everywhere.



- Technology provides a vast number of tools for individualized instruction in the classroom.

New Technology Plan

The 2011 - 2012 school year will be filled with “looking to the future” in technology at Beecher. A new three-year Technology Plan is being written to set the course for student-centered integration of technology in the classroom. Parents and community members will be invited to participate in discussions that will help guide the development of this plan. In conjunction with this plan, members of the board of education, administrators, and faculty are in the process of reevaluating, rewriting, and creating policies to address the many new technologies available to students and faculty. As the Woodbridge School District develops its new three-year Technology Plan, the Technology Committee will grapple with how to move to student-centered technology focused in the classroom.

Technology - an amazing tool in your child's education



Technology is supporting student learning throughout Beecher Road School. SMART Boards have become an integral part of most classrooms. As the fall progresses, new document cameras connected to the classroom SMART Boards are being introduced. Students and teachers will use these

document cameras to digitally integrate print and visual materials into lessons using the SMART Board.

During the school year, a number of pilot programs will take advantage of a new cart of iPads. The results of these pilots will drive decisions about the future of technology at BRS. To support the use of mobile devices like iPads and faculty laptop computers, the wireless system at Beecher has been upgraded, creating a single wireless cloud within the walls of the school.

Results of Faculty Survey on Technology, June 2011

The predominate use of Technology at BRS is to differentiate instruction and learning for students. In addition to learning basic skills, students use technology in the process of writing, conducting research, and creating visual presentations.

- Teachers overwhelmingly feel encouraged and supported when they innovate with new technology initiatives and feel that the resources and technology at Beecher allow students to produce high quality work.
- Teachers are abandoning outdated instructional technologies such as cable television, video cassette recorders, and DVD players in favor of current digital technology. SMART Boards are in use in most classrooms on a daily basis.

Have you signed up for our INSTANT ALERT communication system?



In this age of instant communication and connectivity, BRS is at the forefront of communication with parents and staff through our Honeywell Instant Alert System. With almost 100% of BRS families connected, parents get everything from topical weekly information to emergency notifications regarding school cancellations or closings. Recently, during tropical storm Irene, it was an indispensable tool for informing parents and staff.

Built into the system is the ability to get notifications through home and work phone, cell phone, text message, pager, or email. New upgrades now allow parents to select times when they do or do not want to receive messages.

If you are new to BRS or one of the few who isn't signed up, please do so now. If you are currently signed up, please log in to check your settings and make sure that all of your children are on the system. This is very important since grade level notices go out and because you want to make sure you're connected after your older child graduates.

If you have any questions or problems with Instant Alert, please call the school and ask for Lola Johnson or Larry Hurwitz.

Let's put on a show!



We anticipate starting an after school drama club that will function from November 2011 – April 2012, culminating with multiple presentations of a theatrical production. More information will follow.

Remembering a BRS alumnus on Veteran's Day



Becher Road School families are encouraged to join us in attending a special Veterans Day ceremony, Friday, November 11 at 10:45 AM in front of Center School Community Center on Meetinghouse Lane. As part of the observance, a commemoration will be held for Army Pfc. Eric D. Soufrine of Woodbridge who was killed in action on June 14, 2011 in Afghanistan. Eric, 20, was a 2009 graduate of Amity High

School and a former student at BRS. Children from BRS will be present as *Boy Scouts* and *Girl Scouts*. Members of the BRS Band and Chorus will also perform at the ceremony.

Latest CMT results show strong growth over time for BRS students

Board of Education members and the public saw the results of this year's round of *Connecticut Mastery Tests* at a special presentation on September 19th. The statewide tests are administered to all Connecticut public school students in grades 3 - 8 each spring. What did the results tell us:

- The vast majority of BRS students perform at goal and advanced. (Goal indicates very good grasp of subject matter. Advance indicates exceptional performance.)
- BRS students demonstrate continuous growth over time.
- Every single 6th grader who took the test was at or above goal in reading. That's 100%.
- Our students are among the top achievers in the state.

For more details, see the CMT *Power Point* presentation under *News and Announcements* on the district's web site.

Hurricane Irene put us behind - four days have to be made up

Due to the effects of Hurricane Irene, the start of school was delayed by four days. After consultation among superintendents in Amity, Bethany, Orange and Woodbridge, a potential make-up plan was submitted to the Woodbridge Board of Education. One of the recommendations is to conduct a minimum day of school on Friday, March 30th – a planned professional development day. Professional development would occur once students are dismissed. For other recommendations see memo sent to the School Board under *News and Announcements* on the district's web site. A final decision will be made later in the year.

Fixing our long-time soil erosion problem

This July, the Woodbridge Board of Education began a very exciting project at BRS aimed at providing a sustainable and environmentally-friendly future for the campus. The district has retained the firm of Fuss & O'Neill who is currently studying the site to develop a *Master Sediment and Erosion Control Plan* scheduled for completion this fall.

Due to various site, soil and topographic conditions, the BRS campus has been plagued by erosion that is causing frequent damage to school grounds. Instead of fixing individual problem areas, the district has opted for the development of a master plan that will look at the site in a holistic fashion and propose habitat-restoring and low impact design strategies to guide future changes. For more information go to *News and Announcements* on district's web site.



The First Lego League: 2011 Challenge ...

Mr. Holowienko, 6th grade teacher, has been selected as moderator for the newly formed after school *First Lego League* (FLL). He will be assisted in organizing the league by parent volunteer, Andrea Fleischman. Students in the 5th and 6th grade have been invited to join this club. Parent participation and support has been encouraged.

Students accepted into the FLL will do the following:

1. Explore food safety in a team building environment;
2. Research and present their own creative solutions, choosing a food, understanding its journey from ground to table, researching all the possible points of contamination, and then develop an innovative solution to keep food safe.

It is anticipated that teams from BRS will compete with other schools in the region in presenting their research based projects. In addition, students will be introduced to robotics using lego materials. A portion of the regional competition will involve robotics.

Why a food safety focus?

"Food factor" presents a real-world challenge in a broad view, showing children how scientists, engineers, government agencies, and food producers work together to find solutions to food safety. In the process, FLL hopes to inspire children to use their own imaginations and creativity in combination with science and technology to make food safer to eat.

The FLL ties into the national STEM initiative (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). It also aligns with the STEM initiative that is being promoted at the middle school and high school levels in Amity.

Updated math curriculum going into effect

During the past two years, teachers, coordinators and administrators at BRS have worked with a facilitator from the regional educational support center, ACES, to review the mathematics program at BRS. A major part of the process involved aligning the mathematics curriculum with the new *Common Core State Standards*. The updated curriculum was presented and approved by the Board of Education at the October 17th meeting. You may view a copy of the updated Math Curriculum K-6 in the BRS Library.

Ride the bus

We encourage you to have your children ride the school bus to and from school on a daily basis. These are just some of the reasons:

- Students have increased opportunities to develop new social skills while interacting with their peers.
- Students learn to be independent.
- Less traffic congestion in the North and South Traffic circles of BRS means a safer campus.
- Fewer cars travelling back and forth to BRS improves the environment.
- Financial savings for parents. Bus transportation is free.

For more information about signing your children up for bus transportation, contact our District Business Manager, Alfred Pullo, at 203-397-2445.

My best wishes to all,
Gaeton F. Stella