



# PARENT UPDATE FROM DR. STELLA SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

November 29, 2011

[www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us) Woodbridge School District  
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I hope you and your families had an enjoyable, fun-filled Thanksgiving holiday and long-weekend. It is always a delight for us to welcome your children back to school. Yes, we do miss them.



As promised, in each of my updates, I will highlight one of the educational trends that are improving the quality of education at BRS. Last month's focus was on technology; this month's focus is on World Languages.

The Austrian philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, stated: "The limits of my language are the limits of my world." We are fortunate to have so many cultures and languages represented among the student body of BRS. As one example, 11% of our students are of Asian background. There are also children and families from Latin American, South American, European, Mid-Eastern and African countries. This cultural diversity provides everyone with many opportunities to experience a wider world. Evidence of the multi-cultural richness of our school district can be seen at the many gatherings and family nights throughout the year as well as through many classroom cultural presentations. Equally important is our relationship with our Sister School in Heze, China.

I'm sure that you would agree that to develop our students as global citizens the study of world language is very important. At BRS, world language is taught through a proficiency model that aligns with the middle and high school. The expectation is that students will be proficient in one or more languages other than English by the end of high school. Many of our students already speak a language other than English.

The study of World Language is an essential part of a child's education and development. All children study Spanish from kindergarten through grade 6. The sheer number of Spanish speakers and their rate of growth in the United States alone support the study of Spanish as a world language. Spanish is an official language on 4 continents and is the mother tongue in 21 countries.

Students receive instruction throughout the year according to the following schedule:

Grade	Instructional Time
Kdg, Gr 1 and Gr 2	One 30-minute period per 6-day cycle
Grade 3	Two 30-minute periods per 6-day cycle
Grade 4	Three 30-minute periods per 6-day cycle
Grades 5 and 6	Four 30-minute periods per 6-day cycle

## Improved web-posted calendar

Our web site now has a comprehensive calendar. Responding to suggestions, the district and school calendars are combined to make it easier to search and view events in one place. The new calendar lists events from the school, PTO, BOE dates, holidays and more. Up from 50, there are more than 105 events for this calendar year with more being added every day. We will add more events as the year goes on, and post any sudden changes in large scale events, such as concerts, on the district web site. As we continue to add events to the calendar, for safety reasons some events, such as class field trips, **will not** be added.

The world language classroom is designed to make language come alive through the use of technology and enhanced curriculum. Starting in kindergarten, students experience language through technology-based instruction, authentic literature and song, puppet conversations, and hands on activities. The SmartBoard is used on a daily basis to enhance language instruction. It is a form of technology that makes language learning even more fun and exciting at all grade levels.

At the intermediate level, the language curriculum is organized around thematic units to provide a more meaningful language experience. At the end of each unit, students have the opportunity to create technology-based projects such as *PowerPoints*, podcasts and digital photo albums. In addition to these regular assessments, a sixth grade exit exam has been implemented to keep the momentum of our program moving into the middle school.

Upon successful completion of grade six, children will be able to demonstrate performance in the following linguistic and cultural areas:

- Communicate at a grade appropriate level in Spanish.
- Gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures.
- Make connections with other areas of study and acquire information.
- Understand the nature of language and cultures through comparisons.
- Participate in multilingual communities within a variety of contexts.

You can support your child's interest in Spanish at home by encouraging them to read, listen to, and interact with language through the use of books, music, movies, and games. You can encourage your child to share what he or she has learned in Spanish class each day. Take the opportunity to practice speaking Spanish with your child on a daily basis. To enrich your Spanish skills outside the classroom, go to our district website to access information on purchasing *Rosetta Stone* software at a discounted price. Also, be sure to check out BRS teachers Senora Goldberg's and Senora Wolfson's web sites under BRS School/Staff Directory.

## Good reasons to ride the bus

In my last newsletter, I encouraged parents to have their children ride the school bus to and from school on a daily basis. In addition to providing children with increased opportunities to develop new social skills while interacting with their peers, riding the bus helps students gain independence and improves the environment. It also will lessen traffic congestion and potential danger. Thanks are extended to those parents who were able or are going to make the switch.



With the support of the Town through a state sponsored grant, we are in the process of looking for ways to redesign the traffic circle in the North to improve traffic flow and safety. In the meantime, we ask for your help with the morning drop-off. The fact is that if one does not arrive prior to 8:15 am the wait in line sometimes can be a long one.

Here are three ways that you can help:

1. When dropping off your child, pull all the way to the front. Stopping mid-way or letting your children off prematurely, invariably affects traffic flow.
2. Help your children develop independence by providing them with the opportunity to leave the car on their own with their back packs, unless there is a child with special needs. Parents getting out of their cars to help their kids with their backpacks, or to give last minute instructions and hugs slows the line down. There are staff members available to assist students in need.
3. We care deeply about the safety of your children. Therefore, we advise that children leave the car through the door nearest the sidewalk. You put your children at risk when they get out of the your car on the traffic side. (Think of where school bus exits are designed.)

Be sure to follow national safety guidelines and use age appropriate car seats for younger children.

## Two playgrounds shut down for safety - Kindergarten OK

A month ago a *Certified Playground Inspector* from the district's insurance company did a comprehensive study of the North and South playgrounds. A number of safety issues were identified and were severe enough to warrant closing both playgrounds. The facts are that the playgrounds are nearly 25 years old, have been repaired numerous times and do not meet today's rigorous national playground standards.

### Here is our action plan

1. Set as a priority, the replacement of the North Playground with a new one of equal value that meets all national playground safety standards.

Our estimate is that the cost would be approximately \$80,000. The money would be raised from the following sources: (1) \$10,000 from the Parents Association; (2) \$20,000 from *Extended Day Surplus Funds* (*Extended Day* uses the playground on a daily basis.); and, (3) up to a maximum of \$50,000, if necessary, from projected Board of Education surplus funds. We are also planning a school based fundraiser that will allow us to memorialize the playground by selling wooden bird houses built from the playground poles. We would like to see ground broken by or before the Spring break for the new North Playground.

As of this printing, the PTO has agreed to the \$10,000 donation. *Extended Day* has supported the \$20,000 donation from surplus funds. (There will not be any additional charges to *Extended Day* participants.) The School Board voted to provide up to \$50,000. Thanks to this collective support we will soon be going out to bid.

2. Replace the South Playground used for the older students.

We are requesting approximately \$80,000 from the Town in our annual Capital Budget request. Also, money from an anticipated school based fundraiser and donations from the community can be used to supplement expenses for this playground. Our hope is to have the south playground constructed by the beginning of the next school year.

3. The Kindergarten playground is 12 years old and has been approved for continued use. Additional updates are being done.

Thank you for your support and understanding of our actions in closing down the playgrounds and our plan to build 2 new playgrounds. The staff and children of BRS have shown great resilience in responding to our new challenges.

## On the calendar..

There are currently two scheduled meetings of the *Superintendent's Parent Academy*.

### 1] "The Development of Updated Technology Policies for BRS"

Wed., Jan. 11, 2012 — 6:30 - 8:00 PM — Library Media Center  
*Parents will be invited to provide input into the formation of new policies that will govern the use of technology at BRS, e.g. internet use, social networking, use of student owned tech equipment at school, use of student photos and work on the district web-site.*

### 2] "Creating a Generation of Readers and Writers Through Readers/Writers Workshop"

Thur., Apr. 12, 2012 — 6:30 - 8:00 PM — Library Media Center  
*Consultants from the Columbia University Readers/Writers Project and faculty members will present to and interact with parents.*

## Winter weather closings

If there is a need for a delayed opening, early dismissal or school closing due to weather conditions, that information will be broadcast on WTNH News 8, WFSB Channel 3, and WVIT Channel 30 as early in the morning as possible. We also send out an *instant alert* and will post the information on our district website.

### Reminder: 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. Instant Alert 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 [www.instantalert.honeywell.com](http://www.instantalert.honeywell.com). If you have any questions about Instant Alert, contact Lola Johnson or Larry Hurwitz at BRS.



My best wishes to all,

*Gaston F. Stella*