



PARENT UPDATE FROM DR. STELLA SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

April 12, 2012

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

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Spring is a time of renewal, a time for new growth. The season also provides us with an opportunity to become more in tune with the wonders of the world around us. With that in mind, my educational focus in this Update will be on science. Early experiences in science help children develop a wider knowledge base, problem solving skills and lifelong interests in the natural world.

BRS has a comprehensive K-6 science program that focuses on the natural world. Our science resource teacher, Dr. Stebinger, assures that our curriculum meets state and national standards and that our students are exposed to a high quality hands-on, minds-on program of study. We are one of the few elementary schools in the state with a science laboratory.

Results on our annual 5th grade standardized tests in science continue to demonstrate that our students are among the highest achievers in Connecticut. In addition, our students continue to benefit from exposure to a series of well planned science-based field trips.

Beecher's science lab helps build essential skills

Inquiring young minds are nurtured and challenged in classrooms by teachers who provide hands-on science experiences reinforced with discussion, and who integrate science content with non-fiction reading and writing. Such integration is possible because language arts, science, and library staff work to acquire non-fiction reading materials that support the state science standards at every grade level. In this regard, BRS has anticipated the trend of the new *Common Core State Standards* that emphasize non-fiction reading and writing skills.

In addition to the science taught in the regular classroom setting, for the first time since the creation of the *science lab* in 2006, all students in grades K-6 and MAG have explored a portion of their science content through activities with the science resource teacher, Dr. Stebinger. Holding classes in the science lab gives students ready access to the materials and tools needed for inquiry-based science, and they benefit from the guidance of both the classroom teacher and the science resource teacher.

Kindergarten classes visit the science lab several times throughout the year to explore topics such as properties of objects and materials, and of living and non-living things. When they experiment with equipment to learn about the weather, they use thermometers to measure hot, cold, and warm water temperatures.

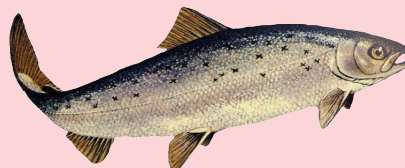
Meanwhile, *first grade* students explore the concepts of sunshine and shadows through a read-aloud and discussion followed by two separate shadow study sessions conducted outside, on the school



campus. Finally, soils are the focus for three or four weeks when the *second grade* and *MAG 1 and 2* classes visit the lab and explore the properties of clay, sand, humus and local soil in preparation for their studies of plants that begin in April.

Two units for which third grade students come to the science lab, culminate in non-fiction writing assignments designed to demonstrate what they have learned. Their first visit of about three weeks duration is focused on rocks and minerals, and the second weeklong visit gives students the opportunity to explore the absorbency of a number of paper products. Their letters to parents recommend a paper towel brand reflect students' ability to demonstrate their nonfiction writing skills while communicating about their scientific discoveries.

The highlight of the *fourth grade* year in science is the *Atlantic Salmon Restoration Project*, which lasts about three months and integrates students' studies of erosion and ecology. Students explore the ability of water to shape Earth's surface during several weeks of inquiry-based investigations in the lab. And, they raise wild Atlantic salmon from eggs to fry stage in chilled, insulated tanks in both the science lab and their classrooms. Students learn about the impact humans have had on the Atlantic salmon's natural habitat while learning about the salmon life cycle and the flow of food energy in the food web. That includes what salmon eat and what eats salmon.



When students deliver their baby fish to the Salmon River in Colchester, Connecticut, in late April, they make a direct connection between their

classroom experiences and the world outside. They observe the consequences of erosion and all of the dimensions of the habitat in which their fish will struggle to survive. Students express their learning in many ways: by creating drawings and paintings of salmon in art class, by drawing other organisms they have seen, by completing site maps of the area into which the fish are delivered, by making Atlantic salmon food chain posters, and by writing poetry.

Fifth grade students visit the science lab for several days in the winter to review all of the science content they have experienced during their third through fifth grade years. During this time they share their knowledge with one another, and any misconceptions about science are addressed as they prepare for the science portion of the *Connecticut Mastery Test*. Fifth grade students also have an opportunity for some hands-on time to explore optical tools used to examine objects too small for the eye to see.



Sixth grade students begin and end their year with investigations designed to help them understand the transformation of solar energy into food by plants and the subsequent movement of that energy through a Connecticut wetland

ecosystem. In the fall, students design and conduct investigations of factors that affect plant growth and productivity, some of which bring them to the science lab's greenhouse.

Following spring vacation, students visit the lab to prepare for an ecology field experience in a local wetland. During these outdoor explorations students connect what they have learned about the importance of plants from their laboratory investigations with the role plants play in a local ecosystem. They spend a few hours gathering samples and data about a number of living and non-living factors in a Long Island Sound or freshwater ecosystem.

During the weeks after their trip, groups of students prepare presentations about their areas of expertise so that all may have a complete understanding of the complexity of living and non-living factors found in a healthy ecosystem.

All in all, BRS students benefit from the integration of science with many other areas of study because such integration helps them connect what they are learning to the world outside the classroom.

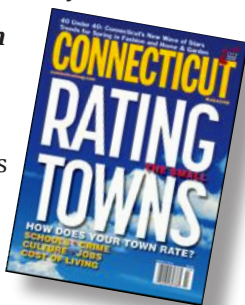
Congratulations, Dr. Bequary!

Please join me in congratulating Carol Bequary, principal of the primary house, on completion of her Doctorate in Education from the University of Connecticut. This accomplishment is a source of pride, not only for Carol and her family, but also for the entire BRS Community.

Woodbridge has a great school system

Woodbridge education system ranks high, according to *Connecticut Magazine's* latest survey of the best small towns. The research piece broke the state's 75 small towns into groups according to population: 6,500 – 10,000; 3,500 – 6,500; and below 3,500. Woodbridge and 23 other towns falls into the 6,500 –10,000 category.

The survey compared five factors based on official data: 1] Education 2] Economy 3] Cost of Living 4] Crime 5] Leisure/Culture. Of the 24 towns that include Woodbury, Litchfield, East Haddam, Essex and Old Lyme, to name a few, Woodbridge ranks #11 out of 24 when considering all five factors. However, when broken down farther, Woodbridge education ranks #3 out of 24, with Easton at #1 and Redding at #2.



Thank you, Board of Education

School Board Member Day was officially proclaimed on March 19 by First Selectman Ed Sheehy and Superintendent Guy Stella. Among kudos for the Board members, the official proclamation highlights the role of an excellent public school system for a quality community. The fact that Woodbridge has such a system is the result of the efforts of many, not the least of which are Board members. They must make difficult decisions while responding to demands for higher standards. These men and women, exemplary public servants elected to their positions, deserve recognition and thanks for their countless hours of volunteer service to public education and the children of our community. Woodbridge Board of Education Members are: Margaret Hamilton - *Chair*, Steven Fleischman - *Vice-Chair*, Matthew Gilbride - *Secretary*, David Barkin, David Bernard, Clotilde Dudley-Smith, Carl Lindskog, Sheila McCreven and Yan Yun Wu.

New playground built - Thanks to all who participated

On the weekend of March 31st, members of the BRS community, including PTO, staff, parents and citizens came together to build a replacement playground for the primary school children. With shovels, rakes, wheelbarrows and picks, these volunteers came to demonstrate once again how the Woodbridge community values its children.

Directed by parents Brie and Jason Pfannenbecker, teachers Anthony Taddei and Larry Hurwitz, and a foreman from *Miracle Playground*, the new primary playground was put together. Volunteers worked round the clock, stopping only for lunch, with sandwiches provided compliments of *Subway's*, Amity Road location. The weekend activities saved taxpayers money, helped build community, and most importantly, provided a meaningful resource for our students.



After the playground was approved for use, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held on April 9 attended by First Selectman Ed Sheehy, State Representative Themis Klarides, PTO representatives, administration and staff. Students from the primary house, multi-age and grade 3 classes joined in the ceremony. For the community, it was a day of celebration; for the children, it was a day of joy.

BRS Drama Club presents Alice In Wonderland

The *Whimsical World of Alice* and her friends will be coming to the BRS stage. Members of the *BRS Drama Club* invite you to join them for this new and exciting production of *Alice In Wonderland*.

Friday, April 27, 7 PM in the South Assembly room

The *BRS Drama Club* includes students in grades 1-6, and is under the direction of teacher Cathy Salinardi assisted by Ashley Wagner, the supervisor of set and stage design.

My best wishes to all for a wonderful spring vacation, 