



*Stella F. Stella*

# PARENT UPDATE FROM DR. STELLA SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

January 24, 2013

[www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us](http://www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us) Woodbridge School District  
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## WHAT'S INSIDE — Mrs. Prisco Reflects on First Six Months - Safety and Security Parents Academy - Winter Fun in Extended Day - New Lockers at the Pool - Budget Presentation

**A** year ago in the **Parent Update** an article announced, "Search for new principal has begun." At that time BRS consisted of two schools: a primary (pre-K-2 + MAG) and an intermediate (gr. 3-6). Each school had its own principal. As of July 1, 2012, BRS was changed to a single school configuration under a new administrative structure of principal and assistant principal. After a rigorous selection process, Gina Prisco was chosen to be the principal of the school and started on July 1. After serving with us for six months, Mrs. Prisco shares her thoughts about her new position.

**W**hat are your reflections on your first half-year as Principal of BRS?  
*My first sixth months? Exciting and challenging.*

I have been struck by the incredible uniqueness of Beecher. The types of experiences that children have at BRS surpass anything I have ever seen in an elementary school. Children have so many opportunities and choices to develop their personal interests and passions. Whether it's a passion for the arts, or an interest in technology, or a personal goal to excel in physical pursuits, Beecher has it all. It's a school so committed to provide support for every child on every level; that means meeting the bar or jumping it.

On the academic side, as I observe current practices at BRS, I find that the teachers are continually learning and growing to improve their craft. This is accomplished individually and in professional learning communities. An incredible amount of time and dedication by the administration and faculty are required for this to happen. And it does.

We have a very strong literacy model that promotes both traditional and digital approaches to learning. Regarding traditional literacy, joining Beecher has allowed me to reacquaint myself with the *workshop* model in both reading and writing. As a participant in the *Writers Workshop Summer Institute at Columbia University*, I know the importance of this approach for the classroom. Each day I see it in practice and am inspired by the writing produced by our students.

Children go beyond the traditional classroom with many opportunities for self-exploration and discovery. At BRS children learn another language starting in kindergarten. Their social and emotional needs are met in a variety of ways. They do experiments in a science lab and release their hand-raised salmon into a river. The children participate in a dynamic physical education program that gives them access to two large well-equipped gyms, a swimming pool and a huge campus. BRS is a beacon of exemplary practices and educators who practice life-long learning to the benefits of their students.

Reflecting on the Newtown tragedy and its aftermath, I was so proud of our staff that demonstrated strength and compassion yet kept BRS and our children in a state of normalcy. The outpouring of support and appreciation from the parent community left me without words.

I feel fortunate to be part of a strong team that includes teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents. Together, as a team, we dedicate ourselves to the complex needs of the children we serve.

**W**hat is the best part of your day?

This is the easiest question to answer. It's interacting with students and teachers in their classrooms. Administrators can easily get caught up in the functions of the job that take them away from the students. While those aspects are very important, I never want to lose my direct connection to the children in the classroom. That can take on many forms as your children may tell you. They may see me helping a kindergarten with word work or engaging students in grade six as they work on a science

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### Superintendent's Parents Academy

Part 1 of 2

### SAFETY AND SECURITY

You are invited to attend...

- January 29, 2013
- 6:30 PM – 8 PM
- Library Media Center
- PTO will provide child care support in the cafeteria.
- Presenters: Superintendent, Administrative Team and Members of the District Safety Committee



You are encouraged to email questions you have about *Safety and Security* at BRS that you would like addressed at the meeting. Send them to my Administrative Assistant, Marsha DeGennaro,

[mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org)

Write "Safety/Security question" in the subject line.

### Superintendent's Parents Academy

Part 2 of 2

### Supporting the Social and Emotional Growth of Students at BRS: School Climate Plan and Behavioral Support Plan

- February 28, 2013
- 6:30 PM – 8 PM
- Library Media Center
- PTO will provide child care support in the cafeteria.

### Important Budget Presentation: Your attendance is encouraged.

I will be presenting the proposed school board budget for the 2013- 2014 school year on Thursday, January 31<sup>st</sup>, at 6 PM in Town Hall. That presentation to the *Boards of Selectmen and Finance* formally puts the funding request in their hands. The budget calls for a .73% increase over our current year. Stay informed by viewing budget information at the district web site under *District Information*. At that site, you will find the December 19, 2012 budget presentation to the Board of Education as well as a detailed copy of the entire budget. Your representation at the January 31<sup>st</sup> meeting is encouraged.

experiment. Maybe I am wearing my pajama pants in first grade. I have even been known to do some sit-ups in Mr. Taddei's gym. I feel it is important for students to see their principal not only as "the person in charge," but also as a lifelong learner who continuously grows along side teachers and students.

Another aspect of my job provides me with the opportunity to assist, instruct and learn all at the same time. Classroom observations and conferences with teachers about professional practices in the classroom continue to excite me. I work with our teaching staff to ensure that the most effective teaching strategies are being implemented. I must admit, when you have a group of teachers that works so hard to accomplish this, the task is a thoroughly enjoyable one.

**What are the major challenges facing you between now and the end of the school year?**

The year is moving so quickly and there is much yet to be done. A few significant initiatives will be a priority as I move forward this year; fortunately much of the foundation has been laid already, because we began the work in the first half of the year.

The first of these challenges is the revision of the *Teacher Evaluation Plan* to meet the requirements mandated by both federal and state legislation. We are fortunate to have a core committee that is committed to learning as much as it can about these requirements. I am confident that we will be able to write a plan that fulfills our needs at Beecher while meeting, and perhaps exceeding, the mandates.

The second challenge involves the state-mandated *Accountability Plan* that insists that every child, in every school, makes progress no matter what their needs. Using data to drive our instruction has never been as important as it is today. The challenge is to use that data to focus our instruction with the accuracy of a laser. A child's individual learning pathway sometimes requires us to

provide additional support, or to raise the level of the academic challenges for those who have already met and surpassed standards. The state assesses and rates how well we are accomplishing these tasks, and gives us a classification. I know that together, we will meet all requirements and earn the highest rating of an "excelling school."

Our most important challenge is to be successful at all of this while maintaining the integrity, passion, and philosophy of instruction that makes BRS the wondrous place it is, where learning is the adventure. We will continue to teach and encourage students to question, see both sides of an argument, and look at problems from every angle. We want to help them develop such a love of learning that it is not a way to earn a grade, but a lifelong journey filled with rich experiences.

**What are your hopes and dreams for Beecher Road School?**

Just as we asked our children for their hopes and dreams for the school year, and I asked the teachers this same question, it seems only fitting that I now be asked. It is my hope to continue the smooth transformation from a two-school model to a whole-school community. With the new administrative team in place, and the amazing instructional staff, I feel very confident that together we can make that happen. My goal is to rise to the challenges set before me, while maintaining the traditions that have made BRS the school it has become. But, as with every success, there is the need to continuously evolve. I will focus my energies on that evolution and strive to move Beecher forward.

BRS is a great school. I look forward to serving as your principal for many years.

*(Editor's Note: Thank you, Mrs. Prisco. We look forward to having you as our principal for many years.)*



Mrs. Prisco distributes personal dictionaries to 3rd graders. The dictionaries are provided by The Woodridge Rotary Club.

**New pool lockers installed**

A total of 102 lockers, 54 single tier and 48 double tier, have been installed in the boys' and girls' pool locker rooms at BRS. The installation began during the December school recess and was completed during the week of January 11. The demolition and disposal of the existing lockers was funded by the Town. The purchase and installation of the new lockers, which totaled approximately \$28,000, was funded through the use of year-end surplus of the Board of Education's 2011-2012 operating budget.

First Selectmen Sheehy, after inspecting the new lockers, stated, "This initiative is yet another example of the collaborative partnership between the recreation department, the school board and the Town."

John Adamovich, Director of Recreation, on seeing the completed installation of the new lockers, had this to say: "This project demonstrates that there is no "I" in team. We did this together."



(L-R) Dr. Stella, John Adamovich, Recreation Department Director, and First Selectman Ed Sheehy delight in the new pool lockers.



*It is with deep sadness that we inform you of the passing of our dear friend and colleague, Clorinda Dzikas. Clor was a valued and beloved member of the Beecher Road family for 27 years. As a teacher assistant, an Extended Day teacher, and a bright and comforting presence working with young children in the summer program, So You're Coming to Kindergarten, Clorinda touched the lives of so many children. A lifelong environmentalist and "nature lover," Clor could be seen early mornings filling the many bird feeders she had lovingly placed around our school campus. A true friend and a kind and gentle soul, Clorinda will be profoundly missed by all of us at Beecher Road School. (School counselors are available to work with children and/or staff members who need support.)*

**Winter Fun In Extended Day**

Now that we are back from our winter break, the *Extended Day Program* is running and looking forward to fun in the snow. Many winter related activities will be offered such as sledding, building snow forts and snow people, art projects, and cooking with a winter theme. Each day we add a surprise activity that is winter related!

In the future we are hoping to offer theater and Lego robotics to our

Extended Day children. Look to our next news update for more information.

