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# PARENT UPDATE FROM DR. STELLA SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

March 20, 2013

www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us Woodbridge School District  
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Dear Beecher Road Families,

I'm sure you will agree that this has been a year like no other. In this *Parent Update* you will find current information about adjustments in this year's calendar as well as highlights of next year's calendar. Be sure to note future dates on page 2.

The annual *BRS* kindergarten orientation took place last Thursday evening, March 14. The number of new families that are coming into Woodbridge is impressive. The comment we keep hearing when we interview new arrivals is that they come to Woodbridge for the school system. We were also impressed by the positive feedback that our in-coming families have received about BRS's kindergarten program from outside sources. We have received that same type of feedback year after year. Our focus in this *Parent Update* is: *What's so special about the kindergarten program at BRS?*



Front loader clears the BRS north parking lot after the blizzard of 2013.

## What makes BRS kindergarten so special?



*"What children learn and experience during their early years can shape their views of themselves and the world and can affect their later success or failure in school, work, and their personal lives."*

Noted journalist Henry Adams once said, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the influence of a kindergarten teacher can be seen in a student throughout life: "What children learn and experience during their early years can shape their views of themselves and the world, and can affect their later success or failure in school, work and their personal lives."<sup>1</sup>

More than anything else, the teachers make the kindergarten program at BRS so special. They are a highly educated, well informed, passionate group of child-centered educators who work well as a team. In addition, there is a qualified, dedicated teaching assistant in every classroom, who works directly with children on an individual or small group basis. The usual class size is 19 or below. Classrooms are physically large with lots of instructional and play materials. The classrooms open to a beautiful kindergarten playground where the children have recess on a daily basis. The kindergarten curriculum is comprehensive, combining academics, socialization, play, music, art, physical wellness and character development. The social and emotional development of children is equally as import-

# Kindergarten

ant as the academic growth of each child. There is a team approach to the process of helping every child develop along their individual learning pathway. That team includes literacy, mathematics and science specialists, library media specialists, a psychologist, speech/language pathologist, physical education and health specialists, art and music teachers. Health services are provided by three highly qualified school nurses.

In addition, there are after school and summer programs designed specifically for kindergarten children.

BRS's affiliation with the *Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University* provides on-site consultancy support for an early childhood workshop model in each kindergarten classroom. This approach allows for

choice and growth at the individual child's own pace.

Continual support for the social and emotional development of children permeates daily life in every kindergarten classroom. This occurs primarily through implementation of a *Responsive Classroom* philosophy and includes socialization, play and recess activities.

Equally important, our kindergartners and their families have access to BRS's large well-resourced library and library media center. They have access to a large and well-equipped gym as well as a swimming pool. Last but not least, the 43 acre school campus, which also serves as a wild life preserve and includes a ¼ mile walking and exercise LOOP, is at their disposal 7-days a week.

## Kindergarten! ... here I come!



These are only some reasons why Beecher Road School's kindergarten program is so special. [new symbol indicates end of article]

<sup>1</sup> Occupational Outlook Handbook 2010 - 2011; p 289.

## Award winning students

The annual SCASA (The South Central Area Superintendents' Association) Student Awards Program was held on March 15. At the ceremony, two BRS sixth grade students, Heather Brynn Keevil and Eli Lee, received the Superintendent's Award. They earned the distinction for demonstrating a set of core values that makes them good role models for other students. Their behaviors are seen on a daily basis, both in class and out of class. 🐿



Celebrating the student awards are: (L-R) Yun Jeong Kim [Eli's father], Mr. Ngov [Heather's teacher], Dr. Stella, Mr. Holowienko [Eli's teacher], Eli Lee, Christopher Keevil [Heather's father], Sharon deKadt [Heather's mother], Heather Brynn Keevil, Mrs. Prisco, Sang Cheon Lee [Eli's mother].

## CMT being replaced by new test series

Last Friday was the last day of this year's CMTs (Connecticut Mastery Test). The implementation and administration of the CMTs is a complicated process closely monitored by local and state school officials. In Woodbridge, there is a whole-team approach under the direction of Assistant Principal Nancy White.

You may be surprised to learn, next year will be the last year that CMTs are taken. In 2015 – 2016, The SBAC (*Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium*) series of tests will be administered. These tests are aligned with the *Common Core* curricula and reflect increased rigor and complexity.



BRS has been selected to be part of a SBAC pilot beginning in April. Our third and fourth graders will be tested. The tests will be computer adaptive, meaning that the levels of difficulty will be adjusted for every student. A correct answer will lead to a more difficult question. An incorrect answer will lead to a less difficult question. In other words, the test(s) will adapt to the individual learning pathways of children. Individual student progress will be measured over time. The expectation is that the pilot test will give the school greater insight into how to prepare and be ready for the testing that will take place in 2015 – 2016. 🐿

## Important calendar changes in effect now

With the inordinate number of school days missed due to weather related events this year, a number of adjustments has been made to the school calendar for the remainder of the year. Please note these important changes:

**This Friday, March 22**, previously designated as a *teacher workshop* day, is now an early dismissal (1:10 PM) school day for students.

**April 18 and 19**, previously part of the *spring recess*, are now regular school days. As of now, the spring recess is April 15 – 17. (Subject to change if needed.)

**June 21** is the last day of school for students. It will be an early dismissal (1:10 PM) school day. The previously scheduled June 21 staff day has been changed to a student day.



New kiosk at main entrance of BRS was installed during the February recess. Dr. Stella and Mrs. White did the unveiling. Maps have been placed around the school to aid visitors in finding their way through our unique building layout.

**School Board Member Day** was officially proclaimed on March 18 by First Selectman Ed Sheehy and Superintendent Guy Stella. Among kudos for the Board members, the official pro-



clamation 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 whom 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. 🐿

## Next year's calendar set

It is important, for a variety of reasons, that the BOWA districts (Bethany, Orange, Woodbridge and Amity) work collaboratively in developing a common calendar each year. One of the most important reasons is that of complying with BOWA's cooperative transportation agreement. The calendar for 2013 - 2014 was based on a joint recommendation of the BOWA Superintendents. The Woodbridge Board of Education gave final approval to the calendar at its March 18 meeting.

## Highlights of next year's calendar 2013 – 2014\*:

- **The first day** for students is Tuesday, Sept. 3, the day after Labor Day. This change was made to accommodate Orange, which is undergoing a major upgrade of schools and, therefore, needs additional summer work time. Woodbridge may be in the same position the following year.
- The typical **February recess** was shortened to a 4-day, long weekend including Feb. 17 and 18. This allows for three student days during that week. This recommendation came after a careful reassessment of how to provide make-up days with the least negative impact on instruction.
- The **last day of school** for students and teachers in the new 2013 – 2014 calendar is designated as Friday, June 13.
- **Make-up days** will be added to the week of June 16. Additional days will be taken from the April 14 – 18 vacation break, starting with April 14.
- The calendar incorporates Wednesday, November 27, as a PD (professional development) day for staff, not as a student day. The action results in students having a longer Thanksgiving recess.
- An additional (PD) day is scheduled for March 22, 2014. This PD day is aligned with that of the *Amity School District*. There is a total of 181 student days and six additional teacher professional learning days in the 2013 – 2014 calendar. 🐿

\* To view the entire 2013-2014 calendar, go to the district web site and click on District Information in the bar at the left of the page.

## Plan Ahead: Important Dates

- Shortened spring recess: April 15 - 17
- Last day of school: June 21
- Sixth grade graduation: June 19, AHS 1 PM
- Summer Enrichment Pgm: July 1- Aug 2
- Extended Day & Town Rec: July 1- Aug 9
- First day of school: September 3