



# PARENT UPDATE FROM DR. STELLA SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

December 12, 2013

www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us Woodbridge School District  
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Dear Beecher Road School Families,  
As we prepare for another holiday vacation, we encourage you and your children to enjoy the music, celebrations and joy that comes with the holiday season and the closing of one year and the beginning of another.

I can't stress enough how important it is that we are able to communicate with you as quickly as needs arise. Weather alerts, unexpected events such as unplanned early dismissals, and other issues are what we use the system for. With unpredictable winter weather here, as a reminder, please be sure you are signed up for our *Instant Alert* system.

My very best wishes to all for a happy holiday and a happy new year!

*Gaston F. Stella*

## Focus on writing

One goal at BRS is to work together to prepare our children to pursue knowledge and learning throughout their lives so they can become responsible, caring and contributing members of an ever-changing and diverse global community. One way to reach this goal is through *Writer's Workshop*. Beginning in kindergarten, students at Beecher are immersed in systematic, explicit writing instruction. All students are taught three distinct types of writing: narrative, informational, and argument.

### Why narrative writing?

Most people are familiar with narrative, or story writing. This type of writing remains important to teach because stories are what we hear first. Children grow up listening to and telling stories. Kindergartners begin by telling true stories such as, *The Time I Visited Grandma*. As they progress through the grades, they continue to write stories, but also learn how to incorporate a story into other kinds of writing. Even in the "real world," the best articles, speeches, and arguments include captivating narratives.

### Why informational writing?

Even our youngest students become experts and write informational books titled, *All About Soccer*, or *How to Train a Puppy*. Teaching students to write informational texts teaches them to prioritize, organize and support their ideas. As students move up in the grades, they add research to reports and integrate other relative content. Learning how to write informational texts is critical for future success both in school and beyond. This type of writing includes literary analyses, lab reports, resumes, news articles and websites.



### Why argument writing?

Opinion, or *argument writing* is the newest type of writing in our curriculum. In kindergarten, students write persuasive letters and state reasons for their argument:

*Dear Mom and Dad,  
I really want a puppy. I will take it for walks and feed it all by myself.*

In third grade, students write pieces that extend beyond their personal life and address more global ideas:

*Everybody Should Recycle or Let's Stop Bullying!*

By 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, students integrate research into their essays, and take a stand on an issue such as, *Cell Phones in School*. They include facts, quotes, and statistics in their writing and learn how to make a strong case for their argument.

Argument writing is critical in preparing students to be contributing members of society.

A quote from *Pathways to the Common Core* sums it up best: "*The world would be a better place if people who care about a cause had the courage and the literacy skills to make their views heard.*"

At BRS, we understand. We teach literacy.



## Town of Woodbridge Beecher Road School Renovation Project

Why this project is being presented?  
The building system at Beecher Road School (BRS) is in poor condition. It has an outdated computer system and an outdated heating system. The school currently performs the 100% energy performance...  
What is included and what is the cost of the project?  
Project Budget Subtotal - \$12,188,279  
Project Budget - \$13,125,000  
Total - \$13,125,000

**Learn about major BRS upgrade – being considered now**

I have some important information to share with you. At a Town information meeting on November 20<sup>th</sup>, the BRS *Town Building Committee* presented a project proposal for a comprehensive BRS building upgrade. This was a major first step toward a possible Town referendum on the project. It impacts the school building now and for decades to come, for your children and your children's children. We encourage you to learn more about the project. It's all online:

1. go to the district's website home page, [woodbridge@k12.ct.us](mailto:woodbridge@k12.ct.us)
2. on the lower right corner of the home page, click on *Superintendent's Updates*
3. click on **Town of Woodbridge BRS 11-20 Presentation** where you will find the detailed Power Point presentation that was delivered at the information meeting
4. click on **Beecher Road School handout** where you will find a 1-page summary of the project highlights
5. at the lower right side of the "handout" (#4 above) there is a link to a short video about the need for the project. In the video, Margaret Hamilton, Chair of the School Board, Principal Prisco, faculty members and I share thoughts as to the condition of the building and the need for an upgrade. The video also provides a first hand look at some of the areas of most concern. Take a look.

The Board of Selectmen will meet this month to decide the next steps related to the project. More information will follow.

### Technology expands the learning experience

As digital technologies continually become more mobile and more quickly accessible everywhere, Beecher Road School is moving forward to provide learning resources for students throughout the day.

During the next several months,



digital resources currently used in school by students will begin to be made available to students at home and other places outside of school hours. By making resources available to students beyond the classroom, the goal is to enhance and expand the learning experience, not replace it.

The first resource to be rolled out is XtraMath, an online environment for practicing math facts. The use of XtraMath in school began with second graders, (pictured above), and is extending through sixth grade. Using time at home to expand the practice of math fact acquisition means that more time in school may be devoted to other math skills.

During the next few months, we will keep you informed as additional resources become available.

*BRS students practice for Winterguard as they perfect their precision flag twirling moves.*



### Budget proposal to be delivered

The Superintendent's Proposed Budget for the 2014 – 2015 school year will be presented at the December 16<sup>th</sup> School Board meeting, which will be held in the Library Media Center at 7 PM.

### Dates to note

- December 20<sup>th</sup> is a full day of school. (Note: It is a "half-day" for Amity.)
- Holiday vacation: December 23, 2013 – January 1, 2014

### Thank you, Safety Patrol.

Every school morning at BRS, as you enter the main North entrance or the South entrance, you will encounter a dedicated group of fourth, fifth and sixth graders helping to support and guide students as they enter the school. They are the members of our school's safety patrol. These dedicated boys and girls serve their school community by coming early, usually before 8 AM, in all kinds of weather, including rain, sleet and snow. They also assist at the end of the day at dismissal time. Ms. Jill Colomonico, Ms. Kathy Holowienko, Ms. Kit Dunbar, Teaching Assistants, with the support of Principal Gina Prisco, Assistant Principal Nancy White and administrative assistant Lola Johnson, serve as the moderators. Thank you to all!



### Winter Weather

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



### Nothing's better than sharing your thoughts about a good book

Fifth graders, along with their parents and guests, recently engaged in a vibrant multigenerational Book Club at which students demonstrated their thinking strategies and conversation skills. In preparation for the event, students and their loved ones read the novel *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli. The culminating experience took place in Mrs. McCollom's and Mrs. Brown's classrooms. Parents, grandparents, and BRS staff were astounded by the rich conversations contributed by both children and adults in an atmosphere rivaled a coffeehouse filled with friends buzzing about a favorite book. *Maniac Magee* provided an array of discussion topics surrounding deep themes of prejudice, racism, homelessness and poverty. In the end, students came away with the idea that one person can truly make a difference and the most important thing is *home*.

Father and fifth grade son share thoughts about *Maniac McGee* at the multigenerational book club.



### Annual capital budget request heard by Town

Last week, the School Board's Approved district Capital Budget was presented to the Town Boards of Finance and Selectmen. At the beginning of the presentation, I stated that the district's Capital Budget requests were based on the following beliefs:

1. We want to be good caretakers of the facilities and good stewards of the grounds that are entrusted to us. We have a strong commitment to improving and maintaining the BRS grounds and facilities.
2. We realize that these assets are resources that not only serve the children of our school, but also belong to the citizens of Woodbridge.
3. We realize that we are partners with the Town in caring for them.
4. We realize that our job is to present the needs we see to maintain and improve the grounds and facilities as well as to monitor the use of technology.
5. It is our belief that money wisely spent today will contribute to the success of our educational mission and, at the same time, save taxpayers money in the future.

The highest priority of the Woodbridge Board of Education in the Capital Budget is the major building upgrade of Beecher Road School.

Other items on the Capital Budget included requests for funds to support the technology program, paving of crumbling sections of the roadway in the north and south parking areas, concrete work on damaged side walk areas near entrances to the north and south entrances of the school, cafeteria replacement equipment and funds to repave and expand the entrance pathway in the rear of the north building leading from the locked gate to the primary playground in order to provide emergency vehicles with easier access, e.g. fire trucks, ambulances. For greater detail, see the Power Point presentation shown to the Town boards.

1. go to the district's website home page, [woodbridge@k12.ct.us](mailto:woodbridge@k12.ct.us)
2. on the lower right corner of the home page, click on *Superintendent's Updates*
3. click on *2014-2015 BOS & BOF Capital Presentation*