



PARENT UPDATE FROM DR. STELLA SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

December 22, 2014

woodbridge.k12.ct.us Woodbridge School District
40 Beecher Road (south) - Woodbridge, CT 06525 - 203-387-6631

Dear Beecher Road School Families,

A good school, in addition to attaining academic excellence, must be a place filled with wonder, excitement and a special magic – a magic that generates warmth, joy and a sense of belonging. Beecher Road School fits that description. Walking through the hallways, visiting classrooms and watching holiday presentations and celebrations, we can feel the special love and warmth generated by this season of the year.

As we come to the end of one year, and prepare for the beginning of a new one, I extend my personal best wishes to you. May the love and warmth of the holidays also extend into your homes, and provide you with many opportunities to enjoy your family and friends!

We look forward to welcoming your children back on January 5th. Happy Holidays!



Violinists concentrate on their parts under the able baton of Mr. Letsch

Nothing says “holiday” like music. This year’s winter concert was more than music to the ears; it was a symbol of community support, togetherness and all that is good about BRS. The arts, in all their forms, flourish at BRS in ways unimaginable for an elementary school. We are proud of the hard work our children and staff put in to bringing the arts to life.

Board of Education unanimously passes next year’s budget – now it goes to the Town

Last week I presented our 2015 - 2016 school budget proposal to the Board of Education. Months in the making, this \$13,544,713 proposal was passed by the Board unanimously. We are grateful for their support. The amount represents a 3.8% increase over the funding plan for the current school year. This budget now becomes known as the 2015-16 Board of Education Budget and is sent to the town’s Boards of Finance and Selectmen. This is the first step toward final approval.

The budget contains several important factors that will affect your children’s education. Here are just a few of the highlights:

- § The number of teachers and support personnel remains the same.
- § Due to increasing enrollment at BRS, one additional cafeteria aide and additional hours for a teacher assistant have been approved.
- § The Board of Education Guidelines for Class Size have been maintained providing class sizes that are conducive to more personalized learning. These class size guidelines call for fewer students than is required by the teachers’ contract.
- § Funding for all the materials and supplies needed to maintain our programs has been approved.
- § Additional resources will be put into our revised and enhanced math program.

The next step in the approval process is a presentation to the Boards of Finance and Selectmen. That presentation will take place at the end of January, after which those boards will deliberate over the details.

For more information and details, you can view the budget online at the district website. More information about the public presentation to the Town will follow next month.

Major security upgrade is coming

The need for school security is apparent in today’s world. Unfortunately, no one can argue against the fact that schools need to do more to ensure the safety of students and staff. At BRS you have seen changes in procedures and policies over the past few years that have been put in place to improve security and safety. An additional major change will be implemented in the next few months.

If all goes according to plan, the installation of a *sally port* at the main north entrance is set to begin later this winter. A sally port is a secure entry whereby a visitor enters an outside set of doors, is stopped and cleared, then passes through a second set of doors into the building. The clearing process includes stating the intended business,

showing and verifying identification, and issuing a temporary pass.

Sally ports are already installed in Bethany and Orange schools and are in progress in many others throughout the country.

Additional areas of the school are receiving other forms of security to make it less likely that someone intent on harm can easily access the building.

More details about what is expected from all visitors will be forthcoming as the sally port becomes a part of everyday school life.

SUPERINTENDENT’S PARENT ACADEMY
Topic: INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW STANDARDS BASED REPORT CARD
Date: THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 2015
Place: BRS LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER
Time: 6 PM – 7:30 PM

Year of critical self-study in mathematics continues

As reported in the October 16, 2014 *Superintendent's Parent Update*, this is a year of critical self-study at BRS. The focus is on mathematics. A team of approximately 10-15 educators from the Tri-State Consortium – a group of high performing districts in Connecticut, New Jersey and New York – will conduct a three-day visit serving as critical partners to help analyze our self-study. The visiting team will produce a document of commendations and recommendations that will guide the development of a new strategic plan for our math program.

At last Monday's School Board meeting, the administrative team provided an update that included the following:

- § With the support of our 2 mathematics specialists, Jean Molot and Maureen Krawec, there is a school wide focus on "good first teaching" and differentiation of instruction. That focus involves improving instructional strategies with a student-centered approach that challenges every student at their own learning level. This is a work in progress.
- § Nancy White, Assistant Principal in charge of mathematics, stated: "There is an excitement about math in classrooms throughout the school that I have never seen before." She gave many examples.
- § Principal Gina Prisco spoke about how the new Educator Evaluation Plan is providing opportunities for teachers to share evidence of differentiation of instruction with their evaluator, e.g. small group instruction, differentiated

homework, appropriately challenging activities in the classroom.

- § There is a school wide focus on math problem solving and fluency.
- § A consultant from ACES, the regional education service center, is meeting with each grade level team to unpack standards, deepen understanding of those standards and develop differentiation ideas.
- § An anchor set in mathematics, Investigations, has been adopted for grades 1 – 5. This series supports a more rigorous curriculum, and encourages students to think deeper.
- § BRS teachers are part of a statewide consortium, a think tank, of districts that use Investigations as a tool of instruction.
- § We are working closely with Amity Middle School - Bethany to identify a common math resource for grades 6-8 that will align our sixth grade program with the middle school.
- § Teachers are reviewing research-based instructional resources developed at UCONN that challenge and motivate talented high achieving math students.
- § During this past summer, BRS teachers and administrators were heavily involved in creating an updated mathematics curriculum for our district that is based on Common Core Standards.



BRS teachers, working after school, plan for Tri-State visit.

Part of a global community

A video-conference took place last week between 5th grade students at BRS and 6th grade students from the *Al Akhawayn International University School* of Ifrane in Morocco. What an exciting event!

At the beginning of the conference, I had a chance to exchange greetings with Dr. Steven Trevathan, the Director of the K-12 university school. We also explored future interactions, such as continued video-conferences involving students, parents and teachers from each school.

The event was organized by BRS teacher Mrs. Zdrowski. From her summer Fulbright study in Morocco, Mrs. Zdrowski continues to look for ways to use the relationships she developed to benefit our children and community.

Mrs. Zdrowski will offer a presentation on her trip to Morocco at the Woodbridge Public Library on January 27. A team of Connecticut educators who participated in the Fulbright will join her.



BRS 5th graders have a direct conversation with children in Morocco

State mini-grants come to BRS teachers

Congratulations to our mathematics specialists and teachers in grades 1-6 who applied for and received *State Department of Education* mini-grants for professional development to support our school's yearlong mathematics initiative. A total of \$9,000 was awarded. The funds will be used to further train teachers on how to differentiate math instruction in order to meet the needs of all learners.

Construction update...

During this past week, new lighting was installed in several A, B and C wing classrooms. There will be substantial work done over the holiday recess, including installation of the new chiller on the roof as well as a new micro-turbine that will help power our emergency systems during a power outage. The *Extended Day Program* will be cancelled during the holiday recess due to the work that will be occurring at BRS.

PTO Book Fair is a huge success

