



MR. GILBERT'S PARENT UPDATE



Superintendent of Schools
Woodbridge School District

woodbridge.k12.ct.us



March 29, 2017

Hello Beecher Road School Families,

I hope this *Parent Update* finds you well and anticipating some great spring weather ahead. In this edition, I would like to provide a current budget update as well as the status of the School Resource Officer (SRO) position, currently held by Officer Lynch.

Last week, the Board of Education communicated their plans to continue the services of a full time SRO at BRS for the 2017-18 school year. The board also approved my recommendations to make reductions to the 2017-18 budget in order to:

1. Fund the SRO (originally contained in the Town Police budget) and
2. To respond to the Board of Finance request to review our budget for potential reductions.

The following *reductions* were presented and approved by the Board of Education:

• Technology replacements	\$ 100,000
• Part-time custodian	\$ 26,410
• One teaching assistant	\$ 35,519
• Total Reductions	\$ 161,929

These reductions allowed for the funding of the School Resource Officer position in the amount of \$127,000, as well as producing a total budget reduction of \$34,929.

This past Monday, March 27, the *Town Board of Finance* further reduced the Board of Education budget by \$ 165,071. The BOE will receive my additional reduction recommendations, and take action on those reductions at their special meeting on Monday, April 3, at 7:00 in the BRS library. The BOE budget that will be presented at the Town's public hearing on April 17, will be a total of \$ 14,218,502, which represents an increase of \$ 449,466, or 3.26% over current year spending. Thank you for your past and continued involvement in this process.

Community Readers Help Us Celebrate Read Across America



BRS and Superintendent Gilbert recently hosted the annual *Read Across America* event that promotes reading throughout the country. It is held in March to honor the birthday of children's author, Dr. Seuss.

Organized by BRS Library Media Specialists, Woodbridge community members were invited to visit Beecher and read to students. Guest readers arrived with

their favorite picture books and, together with students, made connections to their stories and lives.

As you know, reading plays an integral role in lifelong learning. Our thanks and appreciation go out to our community readers, teachers and students for making this event a success.



Thank you to our readers. Seated (L-R): Jessica Cebulski, Phoebe Browning, Gina Prisco, Nancy Pfund, Margaret Hamilton, Nancy Maasbach. Standing (L-R): Lori Patrick, Tony Anastasio, Joe Dey, Police Chief Frank Cappiello, Tony Genovese, Bob Gilbert, Larissa Crocco



Deputy First Selectman Beth Heller reads to 2nd graders.



Board of Education Chair Margaret Hamilton reads to 3rd graders.

Kindergarteners learn computer code



Kindergarteners program their Code-a-Pillar

Coding and programming have come a long way in the last few years. At Beecher the technology team is introducing coding and programming in a fun and hands-on way to kindergarten and first grade students. By learning the basic skills of coding they direct robots around the room to complete tasks.

In kindergarten, each week students become more familiar with the idea that coding is language people can use to control machines. Currently, students are learning how to guide a *Code-a-pillar* through the room to "snack" on treats inspired by their book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. Students program the Code-a-pillar by snapping different directional blocks together in a specific sequence to arrive at a snack.

First graders use programmable *Bee-bot* robots to reinforce sequential directions and mathematical concepts and skills. Students work in pairs and small groups to program the Bee-bot by pressing the buttons on its back to move the Bee-bot through a maze.

Coding and programming skills continue up the grade levels with different age appropriate programs and activities. These experiences, beginning with our youngest students, give students the foundation for true programming skills: logical and creative thinking, problem solving, working collaboratively, perseverance and communication.

Upcoming

- **School Play: *Jungle Book*** March 30, 4:30, and March 31, at 6:30
- **Special BOE meeting:** April 3 at 7 PM
- **Spring Recess:** April 10-14

Students recognized for Achievement, Involvement, Commitment and Service

I recently attended the 12th annual *The South Central Area Superintendents' Association Student Awards Ceremony*, held at Cascade in Hamden. At the event, I had the honor of presenting awards to BRS grade 6 students, Sam Anastasio and Ava Boulton.

Their teachers, Daniel Chase and Nancy Smerekanicz, and their parents were also on hand to share the honor. These awards are presented to the students who exhibit high academic achievement, strong extra curricular involvement and an important commitment to community service.



Sixth grade students Sam Anastasio, (2nd from left) and Ava Boulton (2nd from right) display their awards. Their teachers, Mr. Chase and Ms. Smerekanicz, join me in honoring these students at a recent Superintendents' Association luncheon.

Second Graders Have a Seat on Antarctica and Explore the World



The Earth Balloon touched down in BRS's South Gym for a day of learning and amazement for second graders.

In second grade, an introduction to maps and geography is part of the Social Studies curriculum. As with all learners, especially young ones, hands-on experience is an effective way to cement learning. Field trips can strengthen learning.

In our case, BRS second graders and their teachers went on an *in school field trip* to the *Earth Balloon*. This trip was a very hands-on, bodies-in, minds-engaged activity.

The Earth Balloon was set up in the South Gym. One by one, each second grade class came to pay a visit to Mother Earth spending time inside and outside the balloon. The to-scale size of the balloon was very important to students' understanding of land masses, the dominance of water on the planet and various biomes around the earth. Sitting inside the balloon on Antarctica's land and ice mass, students looked up at the world above us.

Teachers and students thought that this program exceeded expectations.

For the second time in as many years, 14 fifth and sixth graders who are members of the BRS Student Council recently spent the afternoon at the Woodbridge Senior Center. Together with the seniors, they played BINGO, had lunch and enjoyed intergenerational conversation. Members of the Student Council, who are also members of the BRS band, played a few musical numbers, including "Let it Go" and "Do You Want to Build a Snowman?" from *Frozen*. The visit is part of the council's and school's focus to provide experiences for students that will support their growth as responsible, caring and contributing members of our community.

BRS Student Council members spread youthful cheer at Woodbridge Senior Center



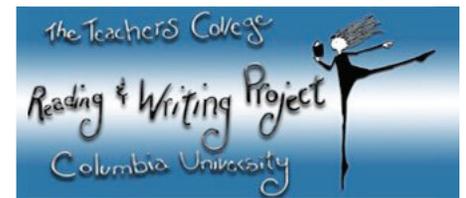
Castanets, guitars, stylized dance: Flamenco comes to Beecher

Learning to embrace and learn about other cultures, fifth grade students got a taste of flamenco dancing in two half-day workshops last month sponsored by the PTO. Melinda Marquez, a flamenco dance teacher in New Haven and Barnard College in New York City, conducted the educational programs.

The students learned about the history of flamenco dancing, the professionalized art-form based on the various folkloric music traditions of Southern Spain, and the basics of flamenco music. They then had the chance to learn and practice several flamenco dance steps. Percussion, essential to accompany the dancing, was provided in part by some students. The stylized guitar work, specific to flamenco, was provided by Ms. Marquez's accompanist.



Flamenco Artist Melinda Marquez



Reading and Writing Workshop (RWW) is one of the most important components of language arts instruction at BRS – and it has been for many years. RWW is an approach to teaching that requires student-centered, responsive assessment-based instruction with a goal of creating independent lifelong readers and writers.

Our partnership with Columbia University has helped us to stay current with best instructional practices and grow our teachers into highly effective practitioners of reading and writing. BRS is considered a project school for RWW with frequent interaction with the university.

Elements of the RWW approach include specific segments in lessons that adhere to the model; e.g., duration, direct teaching of objectives (mini-lesson), read-alouds, independent reading in "just right books" and sharing. Teachers work to assess each student and provide specific books and lessons suitable for the specific needs of students, all within the Units of Study.

Want more? > district website: Teaching and Learning > Curriculum > Language Arts > Readers Workshop or Writers Workshop