



MR. GILBERT'S PARENT UPDATE



Superintendent of Schools Woodbridge School District

MISSION

Beecher Road School is a caring, creative community that models and inspires the joy of lifelong learning, embraces diversity, and celebrates the unique qualities of each person.

woodbridge.k12.ct.us

February 12, 2018

Superintendent's Message

We are half way through the school year and continue with a flurry of activity, events and information. In this Update we will highlight some of the activity in our *strategic plan*. With all this information comes the need for ongoing communication.

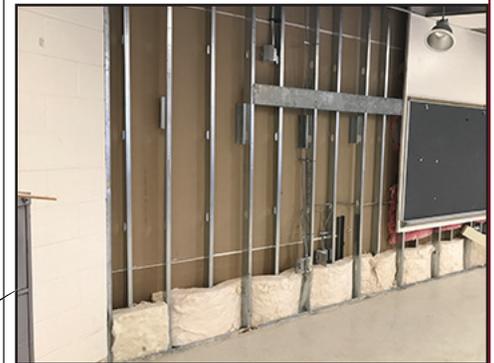
I want to thank all BRS parents for their strong, ongoing support of our school programs, and for the time they spend staying engaged with information we send home, mostly by email. We remind parents of the importance of opening and reviewing that information. I provide this reminder because in our busy lives we know the delete button can be very tempting. Based on data we have, our overall Beecher family population has about a 60% open-and-read rate for information we email home. The flip side is 40% might be missing information that affects their children.

At times we have made decisions to provide hard copy information directly to parents through backpacks. We did this recently with our project TEACH parent notification letter. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and offer our apologies for sending a hard copy of this letter home with students. We sincerely apologize for "missing the obvious" in the letter's content and wording that caused concern. An electronic copy of the letter's content was sent to all parents as a follow up to ensure full communication.

Thanks for taking note of this Parent Update and the information within. Best wishes for 2018.

Everyone's Worst Winter Nightmare

Pictures from our December 30 frozen pipe burst incident. Thank you to all who helped.



Several classroom walls and ceilings ruined



BRS staff pitches in to get needed work done before school opened on Jan. 2.



Third grade students are enriched by new experiences in *Student Choice Cluster Time*. During cluster time periods on Friday afternoons, students select activities that interest them where they can explore and develop skills in varied offerings. The third grade team decides on topics of interest, considering a

myriad of intelligences, and then polls the children. Children make 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choices. Topics students can choose include Nature Crafts and Hike, Comic Book Creators, Sea Shell Art, Tae Kwon Do Toughies, Songs & Music, Cooking, Dance Party, Energetic Engineers, Arts Alive and Fun with Board Games. New cluster time choices coming in March.



Energetic Engineers during Cluster Time

How do the students like it so far? When polled after completing two multi-week sessions, 100% said "yes" to, "Would you like to continue *student choice time*?" And, 95% answered "yes" to, "Does having kids' choice time make you excited to come to school?"

Science, Engineering & Math – With Heavy Doses of Teamwork, Cooperation and Imagination



BRS participated in the FIRST® LEGO® League, an international science advocacy organization for students in grades 4 – 8. With adult coaches to guide them, teams apply science, engineering and math concepts to develop solutions to real-world challenges. They also design, build and program Lego-Mindstorms-based robots to perform autonomous "missions" on a playing field.

This program focuses on three areas: a science project, a robot game and core values. While two of the four BRS teams won awards at the regional competition, winning is secondary to the quality of the overall experience. Teams are rewarded for achievements not necessarily gained on the field – e.g., team spirit, professionalism, cooperation. Congratulations to all of our BRS First Lego teams.



Of the four BRS First Lego teams, The Hawks and The Eagles received awards at the regional robotic competition. Shown here with Mrs. Prisco are The Hawks.

Special Services Director Retires



Clare Kennedy, Director of Special Services for Woodbridge since July 1, 2015, announced her retirement in December. Clare officially retired on January 31, 2018, but has agreed to continue her work in the school and district on a part time

basis while we complete our search for a new director. Before her three years of dedicated leadership here at Beecher, Clare was head of Special Services in both West Hartford and Hartford Public Schools.

We wish Clare well in her retirement and thank her for her contributions to school children in Connecticut, and especially here in Woodbridge.



Our newest staff members: Benjamin Ollodart, first grade long-term teacher and Rebecca Lewis - cafeteria monitor

DATES

- Feb 12:** WBOE Finance Committee 6:30 PM District Office Conf Rm followed by Special BOE meeting at 7:15
- Feb 13:** School-wide Jump Rope for Heart 6:15 - 7:30 PM
- Feb 19-20:** Winter Break
- Feb 26:** WBOE Facilities Committee, 6:00 PM District Office Conf Rm
- Feb 26:** WBOE Regular Meeting 7:00 PM, Presentation on Responsive Classroom, Stella Library
- March 1:** Read Across America Celebration 8:45 - 10:00 AM
- March 16:** Report Card Distribution

School Survey Coming Again This Spring
Questions continue to pertain to general areas of school operation as well as questions addressing school climate. We will extend this survey to staff as well as an age appropriate version to students in the upper grades. More information will be shared before the survey drops.

Why?

Learning through research, investigation and presentation is at the heart of 5th graders' Genius Hour

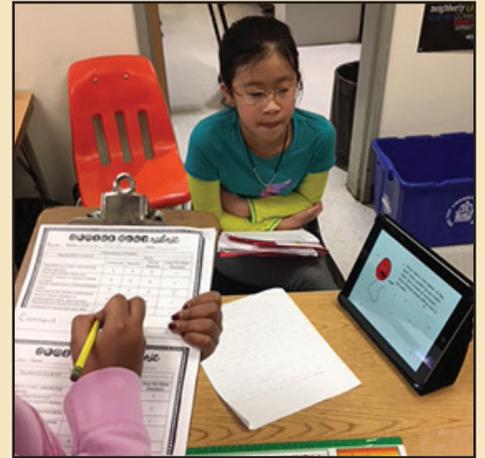
Fifth graders recently wrapped up the first round of *Genius Hour*, a concept used by Google to drive their employees to pursue ideas of interest and create their own projects. This initiative drove students to engage in research projects around an area of personal interest – to ask why.

Once introduced, students brainstormed areas of interest and decided on one driving question. That question was the driving force behind all their research for the 8-week program. Students worked with staff members throughout the school, read about their topics in the library, researched digital resources, and interviewed experts to learn more about their topics.

With that done, the young researchers built and developed models and posters, and created visual, digital and written presentations to share with their classmates and teachers. The experience culminated in a grade-level symposium prior to the December holiday recess. Self-evaluation included reflection on the process along with peer-evaluation based on preparedness, communication and presentation skills, and visual and digital models.

As a result of *Genius Hour*, self-motivated students investigate research topics that they might not otherwise pursue.

The next round of projects begins in March.



Thinking behind the self-evaluation and peer-evaluation aspects of *Genius Hour* are guided by a rubric.

Changes Recommended to the TAG Identification Process

The TAG (*Talented and Gifted*) Committee and the administration recommended changes to the TAG identification process at the BOE curriculum subcommittee in January. The ID process being considered would start in 2018-19 and would move from the current individual testing of *recommended* students to a process of assessing *all* students during third grade.

Assessing all students for giftedness coincides with an upcoming shift in TAG programming and philosophy: All students have gifts, talents and interests and, therefore, a *Schoolwide Enrichment Model Philosophy* is in our best interests.

Programming and initiatives in Enrichment Clusters and Project-Based Learning are two examples of how we are providing enrichment to all students now.

2018-19 School Budget In Process

- * Superintendent's recommended budget of \$14,722,785 (2.64% increase over current year) unanimously approved by BOE on December 11
- * Budget adds 1.5 positions to our current staffing for increased enrollment and special education needs. Contains many cost efficiencies, shared services, new revenue streams
- * Presented to Town Boards in January
- * Town Board meetings: Feb 20 and Mar 7, next steps in the process

Embracing Diversity in Planned Ways

A group of about 20 parents and staff form our Community-Diversity Committee. A part of our strategic plan, the committee is currently focused on two topics:

1] Planning a "pop-up" event in Woodbridge tied into the *International Festival of Arts and Ideas in New Haven*. Hold *Beecher Day* and tie in with our existing ArtsWeek. Involve families, staff and students. Include the Student Council to give students a voice in the plans and highlight the diversity within our community that would include customs, culture, the arts, cuisine and more.

2] Planning a community resource database for teachers to access help that supports instruction. Connect with New Haven's vast resources; connect with more community members throughout the school year and reach out to find and encourage others.



Subgroup of our Community-Diversity Committee in planning session