

Bridges: connecting school and community



The Education Report of the Woodbridge School District

Summer 2010

As I approach my fifth year as Superintendent of Schools for the Woodbridge School District, I have come to appreciate, more and more, how committed the citizens and leaders of this town are to supporting education at every level. This annual report will highlight the comprehensive type of education that is being provided at Beecher Road School. We invite you to read about many of the exciting events and learning opportunities that have taken place at Beecher Road School over the past year. While doing so, you can take pride in knowing that you, the citizens of the Town of Woodbridge, have played a big part in making it all happen. As we look back on another successful school year, we look forward to your continued support in the new one. Thank you.

Dr. Gaeton F. Stella – Superintendent of Schools

Woodbridge School District earns kudos in independent appraisal

Independent feedback is a means of getting information that helps an organization improve. It may also affirm what's going well. This spring, our school district had the opportunity to get that feedback in a very formal way. An organization called the Tri-State Consortium, made up of educators from high performing school districts in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, conducted an on-site visit for several days. The group of 14 educators from school districts in Fairfield County and nearby New York included superintendents, curriculum directors, reading specialists and teachers. We asked the team to examine our language arts curriculum and provide very specific feedback.



Members of the visiting team shadowed students, and interviewed teachers, administrators, parents and children. The Tri-State team examined evidence boxes dealing with several important indicators. They also asked qualifying questions

and probing questions of a representative group of teachers and administrators. In addition, parent, teacher and student surveys were shared with the team.

On the final afternoon of the visit, the team leaders and the Executive Director of Tri-State met with our administrative team to share some initial thoughts and reflections. They included the following affirmations:

- The content and tenor of the school has changed since the last Tri-State visit about six years ago. There has been a dramatic change for the better. Everyone should be proud.
- The collegiality and professionalism among teachers and with the administration was apparent.
- There has been great improvement in many areas, including curriculum and student outcomes.
- David Abbey, Superintendent from New Canaan, who participated in the first Tri-State visit to BRS had this to say: "I'd forgotten that I have been here. There is a stability here that welcomes the teacher's voice. There

are fewer differences and more tolerance."

- The stability of the administrative team has been a positive factor.
- The district has a vision and it is apparent that hard work is taking place.
- There is a very grass-roots, hands-on, child-focused culture.
- Parents interviewed were very complimentary about the school. Some compared experiences of older siblings vs. younger siblings. The parents were complimentary about the consistency and the way children came home invested in learning and with joy.
- Student interviews also supported the positive changes that have taken place.

As requested, the team was asked to serve as critical assessors and make recommendations as to how we could take our program to an even higher level. Of the many recommendations, here are two examples: 1] It is suggested that the district continue the adoption and implementation of Columbia Teachers' College reading and writing workshop model units of study consistently across grades K-6. 2] Clarify the specific goals and structures of the Professional Learning Communities.

The full report will be online this fall at the district web site, (www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us). See Tri-State Report.



Science study intensifies at BRS – Up in 2010*:

- Reading about popular science topics
- Electronic resources boost science research presentations
- Kindergarten students use the science lab for the first time
- More hands-on minds-on science lab activities than ever

In support of the readers and writers workshops initiatives, the district created classroom libraries of both fiction and non-fiction books, and provided consultants throughout the year to advise teachers who were implementing the new initiative. Science, reading, and library staff collaborated to ensure that in addition to books about popular children’s science topics such as dinosaurs, rockets and extreme weather events, non-fiction titles in support of science standards were also purchased. One outcome of the Columbia training has been an increased interest in integrating science with reading and writing.

Teachers from second grade worked with the science coordinator to fully integrate non-fiction reading and writing with a science *standard* (state required unit of study) about plants and seeds.

The unit was implemented this past spring, and teachers reported high levels of student motivation and high quality writing produced by their students. Integration of science and language arts in support of science literacy is happening at other grade levels as well. In third grade students completed



a written *adaptation* project in the spring. Meanwhile, fourth grade students wrote poetry related to their study of ecology following their work on the *Atlantic Salmon Restoration* project. And, fifth grade students made extensive use of print and electronic resources while preparing presentations about the senses. Some sixth grade students used science investigations as topics in their digital storytelling projects.

The 2009-2010 school year brought kindergarten students to the science lab for the first time. During three separate visits, students were introduced to different science topics they later pursued in hands-on activities in their own classrooms.

On the accountability side, another science initiative in 2009-2010 was implementing common end-of-unit assessments for each science standard in grades three through six. Use of these common assessments enables teachers to monitor student understanding of science concepts and to reteach areas of particular weakness. Once student performance on common end of year assessments has been analyzed and compared with results from 2008-2009, the effectiveness of unit tests should be clear.

**The state wide Connecticut Mastery Test test in science was given in March 2009 to all fifth graders. Woodbridge was one of the highest performing districts in the entire state, scoring 90.2% of students at or above goal, and 95.7% at or above proficiency. The state average was 59.7% at or above goal.*

Children love puppets. That’s one reason we make them.

Puppetry has the advantage of demonstrating to the students that art can have direct connections with both our daily life and design careers. More simply put, they love making puppets and then using them. In Kindergarten we make owl, eagle and flamingo paper bag puppets in the fall. In first grade frog puppets enhance students’ science activities. In our multi-age group, children become acquainted with the shadow puppet tradition of Java, and we create puppets to use behind a screen.

The largest puppet endeavor was a second grade study unit on African animals. This project was inspired by the *Sog bo*, a traditional puppet masquerade performed in Mali. We emulated the carved and painted puppet heads using newspaper, tubes, and paint, and we used print making to fabricate patterns on muslin bodies. Students had a bright cohort of cheetahs, crocodiles, toucans and water buffalo. They had a tremendous amount of fun engineering beaks and snouts, and were surprised to discover the effectiveness of printing patterns with a simple piece of cardboard to create fur or feathers or scales.



One second-grade class attempted to recreate all the animals in the cast of *The Lion King*. While having so much fun in the creative process, this unit highlighted many aspects of the *Connecticut Education Standards in the Visual Arts*. To name two: understanding and applying different media; and recognizing specific styles and purposes for works of art in different cultures around the world.

Tiger mask by Sebastian - Gr. 2



Mathematics teaching at BRS is based on the idea that learning mathematics with understanding is essential. Conceptual understanding is an important component of proficiency, along with factual knowledge and procedural facility. Students build math understanding throughout the year as they engage in tasks and experiences designed to deepen and connect their knowledge.

As students progress through the grades at BRS, they develop an understanding of major mathematical concepts in algebra, number sense, geometry, measurement, data, and probability. They build computational fluency and use mathematics to solve a variety of problems they encounter in school and beyond.

Kindergarten students developed number sense in a variety of ways. They played math games, used *manipulatives*, such as connecting cubes and links to represent different quantities, and solved daily story problems. Kindergarten teachers incorporated literature, music, and art into their math lessons, giving students a chance to experience math in many different forms.



Young children develop understanding through manipulatives.

In first grade, students focused on *numeracy concepts*, that is the ability to understand and work with numbers. They compared and put in order single digit and two-digit numbers, developed, described, and used a variety of strategies to add and subtract numbers, and analyzed the 100 chart, looking for patterns which reveal the relationships between and among two-digit numbers. First grade students also completed three *common assessments* this year. Common

assessments are tests, the same tests, taken by all students in a particular grade or subject area.

Many activities and lessons in second grade math involved experimental “labs” in which students combined science and math. In one activity, second graders compared the mass of various objects using balance scales. Then, they used gram weights to measure the mass of objects. In a data table, they recorded how many of each weight they used and then they determined the total mass. For example, if they used four 20 gram weights, three 10 gram weights, one five gram weight, and two one gram weights they figured the total by adding $80 + 30 + 5 + 2$. Other labs focused on linear measurement and volume. Students recorded their results in data tables and graphs.

In MAG, our multi age group, math is incorporated into every curriculum area. Students sorted and classified rocks and minerals, collected and recorded data on bluebirds, and used measurement tools. Some MAG students participated in a unit on the stock market. They “invested” money in five companies, and tracked the performance of these companies over several months. During this project students applied concepts and skills involving percent, decimals, fractions, and estimation.

Intermediate grade teachers used the SMART board extensively this year. Teachers created many units with SMART board lessons and activities based on collaboration with their colleagues across the grade level. Students also used websites such as the National Library of Virtual Manipulatives and Math Live 5, in which they conducted mathematical experiments using the SMART board.

Teachers in grades 3 and 4 worked together this year to create common assessments based on state standards. With the goal of raising student achievement, teachers then analyzed the data from these assessments. In addition, students in grade 6 participated in two computer-based grade level common

assessments.

Teachers in all intermediate grades created SMART Goals that targeted a weak CMT (Connecticut Mastery Test) area. Students participated in various mini lessons and SMART board activities that focused on these particular goals.



BRS students compete in the national Continental Math League challenge.

Students in grades 4, 5, and 6 participated in the *Continental Math League* this year. The CML is designed to maximize student opportunities to participate in mathematics as well as to improve their problem solving skills. Students from across the United States participated in these monthly activities. Teachers at BRS kept track of scores after each of the five meets. The top five students from each grade level received recognition for their accomplishments.

A representative from *TD Bank* visited all the sixth grade classes, speaking to students about checking and savings accounts and demonstrating how to fill out a check register. The follow-up questions from the sixth graders were probing and detailed; from this experience they were able to see a real world application of math skills and concepts.



Sixth graders learn real-life math from a banker.



Swimming, tennis, aerobics: not your ordinary elementary health and physical education program

A comprehensive B.O.W.A. (Bethany, Orange, Woodbridge, Amity) Physical Education Curriculum Guide, grades K-12, serves as the backbone of our program. This document was developed by all four districts focusing on the exit level skills of our graduating high school seniors, aligned with state and national standards. The Physical Education program at BRS is among the best in the state. Here are some highlights:

1. The **Kucinkas Loop**, a quarter-mile track added this year, was the newest addition to our program providing a safe area to enhance student's aerobic fitness. It also provided a place to properly train for the Connecticut one-mile run-walk test. Students in all the grades use the loop in various ways to enhance their fitness levels.

2. The **state-of-the-art swimming program** at BRS is the only school in the state that teaches elementary students about aquatic safety, stroke development and aquatic fitness. Students in first and second grade participate in a one-week program called *Learn to Swim*. Children are exposed to water safety and learn how to swim or swim better. Students in grades 3-6 swim throughout the winter months for a total of 10 hours. They focus on aquatic safety, circle swimming, diving, treading water, lap swimming, entering the water from various heights, underwater swimming and much more. In fifth and sixth grade, students capped their swimming program with a *Swimming Olympics*, which, we must admit, was just spectacular. In 2009 the Board of Education and the *Woodbridge Recreation Department* together purchased a portable electric lift to assist special needs children and the elderly to enter and exit the pool. Teachers in the program used the lift extensively each week with many special needs students throughout this past year. The lift is there for community use. Just ask any of the *Recreation Department* lifeguards, and they will gladly set it up for you.

3. The **newly renovated tennis courts** are used to expose our students in



The state's only elementary school swimming program...

grades 3-6 to the sport of tennis. Students in grades K-2 use the tennis rackets/courts for many lead up activities and to get the children excited about playing tennis.

4. In our **fitness room**, the *judgment free zone* at BRS, we have *state-of-the-art progressive resistance hydraulic machines* built specifically for children and many more pieces of fitness equipment.

Fitness is something you see in all of our physical education classes. We make fitness fun. Our goal is to expose the students to many different ways of exercising so that they will continue to exercise and stay fit their entire lives. BRS students "have the fitness edge."

5. The *North Gym* is equipped with **mat-*t*ed walls, rock climbing walls, climbing ropes, a cargo/spider climbing net and a new rubber mat floor** to reduce injury risk. The *South gym* is also equipped with many basketball hoops, ropes, gymnastic rings and a climbing wall.

6. The primary and intermediate schools both participate in **Jump Rope for Heart** every year while teaching various jump roping techniques.

7. **Gymnastics** is a special part of our curriculum. Students are exposed to small and large balance beams, whittle equipment (climbing equipment's movement exploration), low parallel bars and basic tumbling skills.

Competition is not part of the primary grades (K-2) physical education pro-

gram as it is extremely counterproductive to skill development. In the intermediate grades (3-6), competition is used in a variety of ways while students learn to apply the skills they learned in a game setting. Sportsmanship and teamwork are concepts that are "sprinkled" throughout every lesson to teach our students about winning and losing. At BRS, all of our students find success in physical education.

We invite you to take a walk or jog around the Kucinkas loop located on the north end of the school any school day after 3:30 – and all day, any non-school day.

We are in the process of updating a *comprehensive health curriculum*. The health staff has used state and national standards and guidelines to teach the students many different topics, with resources pulled from many places.

Students in K-2 focused on dental health, nutrition, hot and cold weather injuries, and bicycle safety. Grades 3-6 students teamed up with the staff from library and technology to create health projects. Students chose and researched health related topics such as the five senses, water safety and dental health. Older students were able to pick from the major human body systems like the circulatory, nervous, digestion and endocrine. These health projects allowed the integration of technology, library and health. All students finished with *summer safety* and concentrated on skin safety.



The school's largest classroom: books, people, and technology

The Library Media Center functions as the largest school classroom, accommodating a number of classes and teachers at the same time. It supports the school district's mission: *all students will become independent readers, writers, learners, thinkers, and problem solvers.*

Toward that end, a key component of that mission is the development of *information literacy* skills in students. The *American Library Association* defines information literacy as a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use that needed information." At BRS we incorporate information literacy skills and technology skills into a variety of school-wide projects.

This past year, students used research and citation skills for health projects, accessed country information through databases and websites for Spanish projects, and explored a myriad of science and social studies topics through student-oriented databases.

Books, of course, still play an essential part in a child's education. Matching students and "just right" books continues to be a focus, in continuing support of the *Columbia Reading and Writing* initiatives.

How to find a "just right" book:

- Look at the cover.
- Read the title and the author.
- Read the blurb in the back.
- Flip through the book.
- Read the first page.
- Count words you don't know.
- Use the *5-Finger Rule*:
 - 0-1 Fingers—Too Easy
 - 2-3 Fingers—Just Right
 - 4-5 Fingers—Too Hard

Am I a "just right" book for you?



The Lion and the Mouse, by Jerry Pinkney

In addition, the Library Media Center developed a special Intermediate classroom library collection. This collection supports a non-fiction unit that includes a variety of titles that appeal to the special interests of students. The Library Media Center and Language Arts staff continue to collaborate to enhance and expand the classroom libraries to meet the ever-changing needs of our students.

In support of visual literacy and literary devices, the Library recently displayed a gallery of Political Cartoons created by sixth grade students. This annual event has been met with ongoing student interest and enthusiasm. Former BRS students, now in college and beyond, continue to return to the school to enhance the Political Cartoon program with their skills.

The Library Media Center fosters strong ties between the school and community at large. Celebrations include state and local officials as guest readers for Read Across America, Woodbridge Business Council guest readers and Awards ceremony for the Holiday Reading Challenge, Student-Parent Book Clubs, Student-Parent Reading and Writing Celebrations, the Governor's Reading Challenge, and PTO collaboration and promotion of the Nutmeg Awards. Reading partnerships with the Woodbridge Public Library and the Amity Middle School help students transition their reading through the summer months and beyond.

Reading is fundamental to life-long learning and the BRS Library is dedicated to and plays a central role in supporting this important school mission.

One World | 6,500 Languages | Our children come from all over the world and learn to speak English

For children learning to speak English as a second language, progress has been aided in several ways. Here are two: regular classroom teachers had the opportunity to participate in individualized professional training activities to develop specific instructional strategies, lesson planning and second language skills acquisition to assist the English Language Learner (ELL) student in the classroom. In addition, an emphasis was placed on providing ELL students with a strong support system, which involved small group ELL instruction, technology support, and supplementary language arts instruction.



As with so many curriculum areas, SMART Board lessons reinforced literacy skills and provided the ELL student with a new interactive and visual way of learning new information.

Top 10 Most Spoken Languages

1] Mandarin Chinese	6] Portuguese
2] Hindi	7] Bengali
3] Spanish	8] Russian
4] English	9] Japanese
5] Arabic	10] German



Share Your Story | In Sixth Grade – A Digital Storytelling Project

First of all, what do we mean by digital storytelling? Digital storytelling is “combining the art of telling stories with some mixture of digital graphics, text, recorded audio narration, video and music to present information on a specific topic.” There are a number of different types of digital stories, such as personal narratives, historical themes and events, and works of fiction. For our project we chose a documentary format that focuses on the theme, *Share Your Story*.

Employing many skills essential for 21st century learning and working, we find that digital storytelling is an exciting and effective learning tool for students and teachers alike. Throughout the digital story project, students are eager and committed participants who enthusiastically take ownership and pride in their new found abilities to “tell” their stories.

Our students develop the necessary skills to produce their digital stories through a tiered approach, teaching successively sophisticated technical skills in a series of three to four mini projects. The students learn how to take digital still photographs, create music soundtracks, record narration, use digital video cameras, and import these media into the *iLife* suite of software on their group’s computers. Students then “publish” their work in an appropriate manner for their audience.

The power of technology to support teaching and learning and enhance creativity comes through in a robust way. By working in teams, all students gain vital skills in cooperation and group decision-making, essential to produce a final product. A central educational goal in Woodbridge is to “use appropriate information and technology to create written, visual, oral and multimedia products to communicate ideas, information or conclusions to others.”

Implications for the future are inherent in these projects

As technology evolves, digital storytelling will adapt but the core skills that are taught are the most important. An essential emphasis of the project is not the ability to use a specific computer application, but to develop a better understanding of how to use writing to express your ideas, thoughts and feelings. Digital storytelling also teaches students how to prepare their writing to be taken beyond the written page and be shared with audiences in a variety of ways. By using the Digital Storytelling project, students have a better understanding of how what they write can touch and impact others.

Note: Digital storytelling started in Woodbridge two years ago as a result of teachers James Crawford and Nancy White developing a project with sixth graders that won a statewide award.

Lifelong reading starts here

For a few years, the Woodbridge School District has been working with Columbia University to implement two literacy programs: *Readers Workshop* and *Writers Workshop*. All primary classrooms (K-2) implemented *Readers Workshop* and *Writers Workshop* during the 2009-10 school year. The implementation was supported by the purchase of leveled books* for classroom libraries. Children routinely “shopped” for their “just-right” books. Students, including the most advanced readers, were enabled to move successfully along their individual literacy pathways, and as the year progressed, increased their independent reading time considerably.

We are truly developing life-long readers and writers.



Classroom set of leveled books

* Leveled books are specifically written for children who are at various stages of learning how to read. A continuum from very easy to difficult characterizes the nature of leveled books.

Book Clubs:

Read it. Talk about it.

This spring, students in grades 3-6 participated in *Book Clubs*. Book Clubs are one part of *Reader’s Workshop*, the approach used to teach reading at Beecher Road School that developed at Columbia University.

Teachers form small groups of students into several clubs. Each club reads the same book, writes about the story, and has discussions to share their ideas. Each grade level reads certain genres, such as mysteries, tall tales, fantasies, historical fiction, and books with strong social issues. Successful book clubs require students to comprehend at a high level, as well as work cooperatively in a group.



Teachers and students were all very enthusiastic about these clubs. The students’ conversations were interesting, thought provoking, and often lively. Below are quotes from some third graders who participated in a Mystery Book Club.

- *I enjoyed being part of a book club because it’s easier to solve the mystery in a group. If you talk about the story, you will understand the story better.*
- *Book Clubs helped me be a better reader because I stopped once in a while and put some sticky notes on the pages. I have to say, sticky notes help me stop and think about what’s happening in the book by not rushing.*
- *I enjoyed Book Clubs because it was fun hearing everybody’s ideas and excellent reasons.*
- *Being part of a book club helped me as a reader by helping me remember not to pick just one person, but to think about other people as suspects in my mystery.*



SMART Boards liven instruction

As we enter the new 2010-11 school year, all classrooms in grades one through six, and most specialists' classrooms, will be equipped with **SMART** Board technologies.

The combination of SMART Boards and notebook (laptop) computers for all teachers has transformed the classrooms at Beecher Road School. Teachers collect resources and develop lessons using their notebook computers and then the SMART Board in the classroom turns the notebook and the teachers' lessons into interactive instructional experiences.



During the 2009-2010 school year, teachers received six hours of special hands-on training to understand the extent of SMART Board technology and develop innovative lessons for their classrooms. Funding for these sessions was made possible by a grant from the Federal *Enhancing Education Through Technology* project.

The sound of music in 2 & 3-part harmony

In the 2009-2010 school year, *General Music* students in the primary school focused on building music literacy skills (reading and writing music) through songs, rhymes, games, dances and other class activities. Students were also exposed to world music, folk dances, and folk music. Finally, each grade studied famous music composers from the various music eras.

The *BRS Chorus*, students in grades 4-6, achieved many goals. They came in not knowing what a chorus score (octavo) looked like, and left knowing how to read and sing in two and three-part harmony. The chorus performed in five languages: Spanish, English, Korean, Japanese and Chinese. They were exposed to history and culture, learned singing techniques, and learned how to approach practicing music. Near the end of this past school year, the chorus performed for our sister school in China during a Skype video confer-

Partnering with Chinese students, teachers and parents grows

During the past three years, BRS has been developing a *partner school* (sister school) relationship with *Heze Primary Experimental School* in the Shandong Province of China. During a working visit to the school in Heze in April 2009, BRS Technology Coordinator, Rick Wood, worked with teachers and leaders of the school to establish videoconferencing between the two schools.

This past year, students of BRS interacted with students in Heze via the Internet on six different occasions. Students exchanged science projects and information about holidays and culture in both countries. At the final videoconference of the year, students in both schools performed music and shared poetry.

"Each new group of teachers and students attending a videoconference is not sure what to expect and each time I have observed the transformational effect it has on students and teachers alike," says Mr. Wood. "I was transformed by my visit to the school last year. Everyone treated me with such graciousness and respect. It is exciting to watch children here walk away from this experience with a new perspective on their counterparts in China. They see children who are just like them in so many ways."

In addition to the student video exchange, teachers and parents have been

meeting their counterparts in China. Teachers have shared curriculum and instructional methodology while parents have discovered that they share the same concerns about their children's education and they all spend plenty of time transporting children to activities.

Plans are underway for more opportunities during the upcoming year for students, teachers, and parents to continue this exchange using this free online communication.

A proposal emerged, as school leaders conversed during these videoconferences, to have the two school systems apply jointly for a Confucius grant. If the grant application is accepted a specially trained teacher from China will be sent to BRS to help promote Chinese culture and language as well as support a closer relationship between the two Sister Schools. The Chinese government will provide the funding for this exchange. This proposal is still a work in progress.



Mr. Wood at our Partner School in China.

ence. The response abroad to the chorus' rendition of *Mo Li Hua*, (a traditional Chinese folk song) was overwhelming. Students in China clapped along in a unique sweeping motion while the BRS students sang. The look on students' faces was memorable and priceless.

5th Annual BRS Invitational Music Adjudication

On June 4 music judges gathered at BRS to look at area school music groups and give specific feedback and awards. BRS music groups fared extremely well:

- BRS Indoor Guard *Gold* • BRS Percussion Ensemble *Gold*
- BRS String Ensemble *Platinum* • BRS Chorus *Gold*
- BRS Concert Band *Gold* • BRS Jazz Ensemble *Gold*

The judges used score sheets with specific criteria for each performing unit and applied a numerical score with the rank of Platinum (...defined as "sets new standard"), Gold, Silver, Bronze, Merit.

More music awards - See page 9



Three Eagle Scout projects benefit BRS

The BRS community benefitted from the work of three Boy Scout Eagle projects during the 2009-2010 school year. Last fall Alex Carpenter revitalized the BRS *Nature Trail*. The project included clearing the trails of branches, trimming back the trees, laying wood chips on all the trails, installing new signs to mark the stations and installing a split rail fence along the school's north entrance so students would not have to enter the road to access the trail.

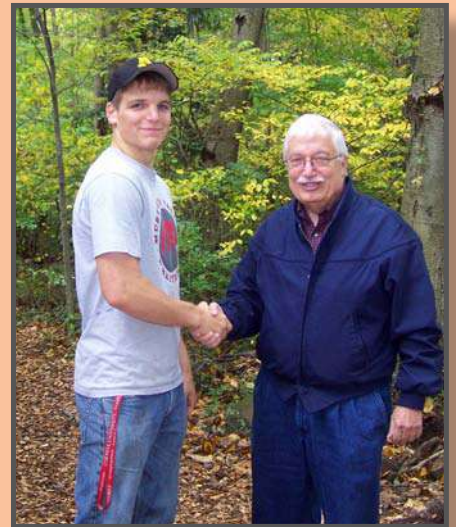
This spring Adam Konwerski added to the *Nature Trail* revitalization by installing ten wooden benches throughout the nature trail and also identifying many trails by lining them with rocks and

small trees. As for the benches, Adam prebuilt each one, set all the posts in concrete, then sanded and stained each bench.

Also, this spring Matthew Schwartz started his Eagle Scout project which consisted of sanding, cleaning, priming and applying 2 coats of Alkyd Industrial metal finish paint to all of the swing support bars in the BRS playgrounds. Matthew also refinished the swing gate to the north playground.

Anthony Taddei, the school's physical education teacher, volunteered to supervise each project and provided professional support including operating his own back-hoe to help prepare the sites.

Building character, building community, benefitting the town, saving tax dollars: that's what these projects do.



Superintendent "Guy" Stella congratulates Alex Carpenter on the completion of his Eagle Scout project to reclaim the BRS Nature Trail.



Teaching all children

The mission, vision and goals of the Woodbridge School District apply to all students. The *Special Services Department* is committed to a team approach that provides an appropriate educational experience for every individual child. A continuum of services supports each student with a disability. This means that the services are provided based on an individual child's needs and are adjusted as the student learns and grows.

All students are educated, to the greatest extent appropriate, with their typically developing peers. This concept, education in the *least restrictive environment*, is a foundational principle of the 35-year-old federal law now codified as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Students with disabilities, by law, have access to the general education curriculum, extracurricular activities and other programs available to non-disabled students.

In Woodbridge, we continue to increase our capacity to provide access to the general education curriculum with innovative technology. With new software, students have access to their written work online, allowing them to access the work from any area in the building and at home. Different programs provide students with opportunities

to demonstrate their knowledge by creating products that combine written work, voice recording and pictures.

Students with learning disabilities that struggle with reading now have greater access to grade level text. By using several technology tools that read digitized text, students can now use the same materials as their peers by hearing the written work as they read it. Some printed resources are already available as recordings, most are not. BRS is using both online access to digital text and using the Kurzweil 3000 system that will scan, digitize, and read any printed material.



Students can listen as they read difficult reading material through new "digitizing" technology.

Teaching the talented and gifted

Our approach to serving students with exceptional gifts and talents includes the following fundamental strategies:

- Provide opportunities for students to explore unique interests and apply abilities in small group settings
- Support the development of autonomous learners through the use of reflecting on and evaluating one's own work
- Support differentiated instruction in the classroom
- Provide opportunities to support students' social emotional development

Language arts, math and science coordinators, and art and music teachers are an essential part of the *Gifted and Talented Program*. Through consultation with teachers they provide support for students to explore and develop their exceptional gifts. Through small group learning experiences, students make learning decisions, demonstrate their ability to work independently and take a task of interest to completion.

Technology is a must. Digital storytelling, voice threads, blogs and podcasts are some of the avenues through which students are able to demonstrate their knowledge, their sensitivity, their skill and their commitment to the learning process.



The Visual Arts | *A child's journey through creative expression*

Creative expression is unique to each individual. In any assessment in the visual arts it is more instructive to provide a brief synopsis of the developmental stage children are in and share a sample of a drawing problem and observations regarding the child's level of effort. This year's first term focused on a child's ability to draw human figures crowded in an elevator; the second term focused on the observational drawing of a grasshopper from a photograph; and the third concentrated on the child's ability to solve problems and think creatively inventing a means of travel both safe for the environment and aesthetically pleasing.

Here are samples of activities used at BRS to express the visual arts in grades three through six.

In third grade we began the year with observational drawing. Self-portraits illustrating six different facial expressions were created by observations in the mirror. The art of Maurice Sendak served as inspiration for wonderful murals illustrating "Where the Wild Things Are." Term two focused on observational drawing. "The thing known and the thing seen are not the same." A great way to expand our capacity for putting things together is to draw. Drawing is about seeing relationships and then integrating those relationships into a whole.

Fourth grade began by creating observational drawings of Native Americans later turned into beautiful portraits. This coincided with the study of native culture in social studies. Designers are constantly being inspired by nature. "Mrs. Delany and her Circle" explores the life, world, and work of Mary Delany (1700-1788). Though best known for her almost one thousand botanical "paper mosaics," she used her activities to cement bonds of friendship throughout her life. The fourth grade visited an exhibit of her work in December at the Yale Center for British Art. That trip was followed up at BRS in language arts, visual arts, and science classes. We ended the year with a study of Georgia O'Keefe continuing observational drawing and painting from nature. Some

of the classes explored the use of clay through the creation of pinch pots.

We began fifth grade with a discussion of proportion using the human head. Six self-portraits resulted with different facial expressions. Fifth grade students worked on a unit of study all year that addressed their focus on looking at, thinking about, and responding to works of art. We began by introducing students to *composition* and the *elements of design*. Observational drawings of leaves were done with emphasis on positive and negative space, followed with *volume* by creating observational



drawings of cupcakes inspired by Wayne Thiebaud who said, "The more I drew, the more I improved." And, "Draw until you get it right." And, "Draw the light." Skills improved greatly. We studied David Hockney and his use of color.

Sixth graders were devoted to the head. After observing six different facial expressions in the mirror and drawing them, we followed with the study of Chuck Close. His hyper *realistic style* was appreciated after each class created an 84x108 inch painting of their teacher with each child observing and executing a portion of the larger whole. Developing techniques to capture details of an eye, nose, and a mouth was accomplished. With *Photo Realism* completed, we embarked on the study of *surrealism*. Chris Van Allsburg and Salvador Dali were studied. Photographic montages were created. We reviewed *Pop Art* and then moved on to Picasso and cubism.

ArtsWeek3, the third annual week-long event celebrating all the arts, was an amazing success with **Peace** as its theme. Christo and Jeanne-Claude were the inspiration for our peace gates that lined the driveway between the north and south parts of the school. A silent auction raised almost \$2,000 for rebuilding in Haiti. We topped everything off with a school-wide photograph in the shape of a peace sign. Mystic Paper Beasts and The Big Beat Band entertained us during the week. *ArtsWeek* truly exhibited the talents of many for the enjoyment of all.

Music students continue their unprecedented awards streak

Musical Arts Conference (MAC) – Sponsored Events

Winterguard

- 3rd place MAC Championships *Percussion Ensemble*
- Perfect Season - 6 years running *Marching Novice*
- 2010 MAC Champions

United States Scholastic Band Association (USSBA) – Sponsored Events

- New England Open Champions
- Other 1st, 2nd, 3rd place finishes throughout the season

Connecticut Music Educators Association Sponsored – Events

Southern Regionals

- 7 students auditioned, 6 selected - largest group BRS has ever had at Middle School Regionals



World Language: preparing children to participate in the global community

At BRS, all children study Spanish from kindergarten through grade six using a proficiency-based model. That means, we expect our children to develop literacy skills in Spanish and understand other cultures appropriate for their age by the time they leave sixth grade.

The use of technology is infused throughout the world language curriculum. The SmartBoard is used on a daily basis to enhance language instruction. Starting in Kindergarten, students experience language through technology-based instruction, authentic literature and song, puppet conversations, and hands-on activities. At the intermediate level, the language curriculum is constructed in thematic units to provide a more demanding language experience for students.

In addition to quarterly assessments, a sixth grade exit exam has recently been implemented to keep the momentum of our program moving into the middle school. These language assessments have been developed throughout the school year to raise the standards of language learning and establish a benchmark.

Beecher Road School, in conjunction with Bridgeport's Six-to-Six Magnet School, has been awarded a world language technology grant for the 2010-2011 school year. This grant will provide:

1. Rigorous professional development for our world language teachers
2. A partnership with the Six-to-Six Interdistrict Magnet School in Bridgeport
3. Digital language portfolios for students
4. The opportunity to participate in NOELLA, a technology-based, standardized test aligned with the national standards for world language education.

BRS Teacher Wins Prestigious Grant

Nancy Smerekanicz, BRS sixth grade teacher, won a fully funded grant to attend the prestigious Honeywell Educators Space Academy at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama



this past June. Just one of three teachers from the state of Connecticut chosen to participate in this high quality one-week program, Ms. Smerekanicz engaged in intensive classroom training with many laboratory simulations and experiences for which the Space Camp is known. A trained scientist, Ms. Smerekanicz hopes to use the experience to enhance the district's participation in the K-12 STEM initiative (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) with the other BOWA districts.

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Helping Hands for Haiti

After the earthquake, BRS students participated in a campaign to earn money for Haiti by doing something helpful at home or in the community. A bulletin board displayed hands decorated by the students telling what they did to earn the donation. Students felt a sense of accomplishment as they watched the hands grow. They also learned about the value of money and becoming personally involved in a global disaster. Over \$2,5000 was donated to the American Red Cross for the Haiti Relief Fund.

Let the conversations begin...

Writing about books is essential. But talking about books is absolutely critical.

Grand Conversations have begun at BRS as an integral part of Reader's Workshop. And the students are speaking. We've had great discussions about big, important ideas that really make you think. The books we read, like *Homeless Bird* and *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, were good choices because there were so many events worth talking about.

Grand Conversations provide children a setting to discuss a good book and share their thoughts. It's meant to be as comfortable as sitting around the kitchen table and having a talk about the events of the day.

Students appreciated the chance to facilitate their own discussions. One said, "I like Grand Conversations because the teachers give the students leeway to say whatever they feel about the topic. This makes the experience easier and more enjoyable."

Students stated opinions for future discussions: "I would definitely suggest Grand Conversations for other classes because they are a great way to listen to other people's ideas in an informal and fun way." And, "There were so many ideas to discuss that the conversation could have lasted for hours!"

Woodbridge Teacher of the Year

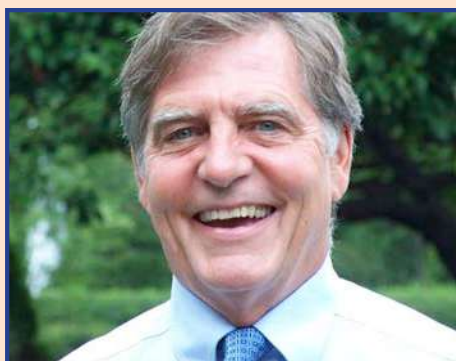
Peter Halsey was recently named Woodbridge's 2010 Teacher of the Year. He earned this honor because he represents what is best in the teaching profession.

Mr. Halsey comes to school every day ready to inspire a love of learning in all of his students and other teachers. For the past several years he served as the grade three team leader. Under his leadership,

the team examined student work and created SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, timebound) goals.

Mr. Halsey is a true colleague to his peers. Being highly regarded by his peers makes him approachable to colleagues who seek advice and counsel. As well, Mr. Halsey actively promotes *Responsive Classroom*, which is an elementary approach to teaching that emphasizes social, emotional, and academic growth in a safe school community. In fact, he is a national trainer in this movement.

Peter Halsey, Teacher of the Year





Taxpayer's Guide to the 2010-2011 Woodbridge Board of Education OPERATING BUDGET

The Woodbridge Board of Education, Board of Selectmen, and Board of Finance approved the funding plan for the school district that took effect on July 1. The budget, with a very small increase, 0.85%, over the previous year, is respectful of the taxpayer while continuing to move the educational system forward.

The operating budget is the legal plan under which the school system is funded. It puts in place the financial wherewithal to pay for one year's worth of expenses that include employee salaries and benefits, books, software and supplies, student transportation, heat and utilities, building maintenance and much more.

Here is a summary of the budget with clarifications for each category. The Woodbridge Board of Education seeks to make the budget process transparent and help taxpayers understand what they are being asked to pay for.*



BRS students and staff form Peace Sign during ArtsWeek, June 2010.

Budget Category	Last Year 2009-10	This Year 2010-11	\$ Amount Change	% Change	% of Total Budget
Salaries and Benefits ¹	\$ 9,490,583	\$ 9,709,223	\$ 218,640	2%	81%
Utilities ²	267,403	248,051	(19,352)	-7%	2%
Heating Oil ³	117,212	134,685	17,473	15%	1%
Student Transportation ⁴	498,116	551,700	53,584	11%	5%
Tuition ⁵	139,307	165,182	25,875	19%	1%
All Outside Services ⁶	879,938	713,899	(166,039)	-19%	6%
General Supplies ⁷	352,997	339,215	(13,782)	-4%	3%
Furniture and Equipment ⁸	57,590	57,940	350	1%	0%
Dues and Fees ⁹	88,565	72,897	(15,668)	-18%	1%
TOTALS	\$ 11,891,711	\$ 11,992,792	\$ 101,081	0.85%	100%

1: Salaries and benefits would be a higher percent increase but through the monitoring of our staff profile we have been able to offer early retirement incentives and reduce staff by one teaching position and one teaching assistant positions while still adhering to the Board guidelines for class size.

2: Electricity, water and sewer.

3: Through a purchasing consortium we will be paying \$2.21 per gallon.

4: In addition to regular school buses, some children require special transportation due to special needs (\$128,300). We also buy the diesel fuel for the buses through the purchasing consortium. That cost is \$52,000.

5: Because some children, due to special needs, require school settings outside of Woodbridge, we pay tuition for their special education. This line item also includes \$3,182 for participation in the regional *Wintergreen Magnet School* in Hamden.

6: Services we purchase or lease. Examples include telephones, insurance, internet, postage, professional development, legal, technical and professional services, substitutes, building repairs, improvements and maintenance.

7: Paper, pencils, books, wax, soap, paper products, band-aids, software, envelopes, library books, subscriptions, etc.

8: In most cases, replacement items are purchased in this area of the budget.

9: *Ezra Academy* school nurse (required by state law), unemployment, memberships in professional associations, miscellaneous expenditures, other fees, etc.

*The relatively small increase in the budget is due to four main reasons: 1] responsible fiscal management and cost savings 2] reduced staff 3] creating a staff profile that lays out future personnel needs clearly. 4] focused spending

For a more complete and detailed look at the operating budget, go to our web site at www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us and click on 2010-2011 budget.

Town of Woodbridge
Woodbridge School District
40 Beecher Road
Woodbridge, CT 06525

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And Much More

Bridges: The Education Report of the Woodbridge School District - Summer 2010

Students' First Day of School

**Beecher Road School:
August 30**

**Amity Middle School:
August 31**

**Amity High School:
August 31**

**Feedback? Email us:
bridges@woodbridge.k12.ct.us**

Visit often – Linger long

We encourage you to visit the Woodbridge School District web site. It contains thousands of pieces of information about the district. Bridges, the print publication you are holding, contains abbreviated highlights about many topics that are explained more fully on the web site. Keep informed about your school district and the people and programs that make it work.

www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us

Woodbridge Board of Education

Sheila McCreven – *Chair*
Dr. Thomas Handler – *Vice-Chair*
Dr. Steven Fleischman – *Secretary*
David Barkin – Dr. Clotilde Dudley-Smith
Margaret Hamilton – Carl Lindsog
Mark Livesay – Dr. Yan Yun Wu
Dr. Gaeton F. Stella – *Supt. of Schools*

*The Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools gratefully acknowledge the dozens of staff members who made contributions to **Bridges**, and to all the staff who make programs and children's minds come alive every day. Thank you.*

The Woodbridge Board of Education holds regular monthly meetings in the Beecher Road School library media center. Go to the district website. Click the link to "Board of Education" > meetings.

The Woodbridge Board of Education, as a matter of policy, does not knowingly condone discrimination in employment, assignment, program or service, on the basis of race, gender, color, religion, natural origin, age, sexual orientation, disability or unrelated abilities to perform the duties of the position.