



Parent Update - March 24, 2010 From Dr. Stella – Superintendent of Schools

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New Growth and Renewal For BRS



After a long grueling winter, the ever increasing signs of spring are a delight to see and hear – new foliage on the trees, birds chirping, animal life prospering and happy children coming to school with what seems like a hop in their step. It's a pleasure to walk the campus during the late morning and early afternoon to watch students running and jumping as we return to more frequent outside recess time. Spring has always represented a time of renewal and a time of new growth in nature. In our school community a similar process is taking place. This Superintendent's Parent Update will provide you with information about that new growth.

Technology: Transforming Teaching and Learning

During the past three years a transformation has been taking place at BRS. Mobile computers in the hands of teachers and SMART Boards at the front of the classrooms have created dramatic changes in how teachers and students interact with curriculum. Here are a few glimpses at transformational moments:

A grade level team of teachers sits around the table during a team meeting with mobile computers in front of each teacher. One teacher's computer is connected to the SMART Board and he is standing at the board manipulating charts. The team is comparing results of recent assessment data. Members of the team quickly collect resources online and assemble lessons to address the identified needs.



In second and third grade, students learn concepts of regrouping with two-digit addition and subtraction when using an interactive website which enables them to regroup tens into ones instantaneously. Because the regrouping occurs with a touch at the SMART Board, students are able to see immediately how one "ten" regroups to ten "ones."

Teachers utilize SMART Boards for many aspects of the daily routine including greetings, schedules, transitions, and lessons. When home ill, many teachers now use the mobile computer to email daily lesson plans as SMART Notebook files directly to the substitute teacher.

SMART Boards enable students to interact with information through more of their senses. Brain research has shown

that humans learn in many different ways, so presenting information through a variety of the senses is critical in the classroom. SMART Boards allow students to view pictures and words, to hear words and sounds, and to interact with all these through touch. Additionally, this multi-modal interaction actually keeps students more attentively focused for longer periods of time.



The pervasive use of mobile computers and SMART Boards has energized learning at Beecher Road School in new, 21st century ways.

Point of Pride: The News Is Out, "Woodbridge Education System Ranks High"

Connecticut Magazine (March 2010 issue) has just released its survey of the best small towns. It broke the state's 75 small towns into groups according to population: 6,500 – 10,000; 3,500 – 6,500; and below 3,500. Woodbridge and 22 other towns fall into the 6,500 – 10,000 category.



The survey compared five factors based on official data: *Education, Economy, Cost of Living, Crime, and Leisure/Culture*. Of the 23 towns that include Woodbury, Litchfield, East Haddam, Essex and Old Lyme, to name a few, Woodbridge ranks #10 out of 23 when considering all five factors. However, when broken down farther, Woodbridge **education** ranks #3 out of 23, with Easton at #1 and Redding at #2.

Woodbridge spends slightly more per capita on library resources than do the rest in our group and voter turnout ranks #2.

>> For all the details, check this issue out in the Woodbridge Library.

LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

At this time, barring further storm days or other events, the last day of school is June 23.

BRS Critical Friends: Tri-State Consortium* Coming in May

The *Tri-State Consortium* is a group of the highest performing school districts in the greater Metropolitan New York area that have voluntarily chosen to work with one another on educational improvement. Together they examine performance data to develop a rigorous framework for systemic planning, assessment and continuous improvement. Serving as *critical friends*, the group seeks to advance teaching and learning and share *best practices* among member districts by applying the Tri-State assessment model in their examination of each other's programs.

A team from the *Tri-State Consortium* will visit BRS from May 5-7. The visiting team will be comprised of 10-15 educators from tri-State districts in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Teams often include superintendents, assistant superintendents, curriculum supervisors, principals and teachers. In effect, the team members will serve as *critical friends* assisting us to assess our *Language Arts* program. The team will be presented with questions that the district wants answered concerning our program. Evidence will be examined, classes will be visited, staff, administration and parents will be interviewed.

Since the start of the 2009 – 2010 school year, a BRS Tri-State steering committee, led by Co-Principal Ms. Torre, has been planning for this visit. The preparations include a self-study process, collection of evidence to support curriculum strategies and outcomes, as well as gathering data on student performance.

As a result of this visit, it is expected that the Woodbridge School District will be provided with insights to bring student performance to new heights. In addition to looking at tangible evidence, the visiting team will examine results of student, parent and staff surveys, interview administrators, Board members, parents, students, and shadow students.

* > <http://www.tristateconsortium.org>

Math Curriculum Progress Presented

On March 15, BRS mathematics specialists Ms. Molot and Ms. Schnitzer gave a comprehensive, well-received progress report to the Board of Education regarding the ongoing mathematics curriculum review. A rich dialogue among Board members, teachers and administrators followed. Work on the curriculum will continue through the summer and into next year.

For an in-depth look, see the *Power Point* presentation on the district website: > www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us > click on *Math Curriculum Information* on the upper right side of the home page.

Board of Education Members Recognized for Tireless Effort on Students' Behalf

March 15 was officially proclaimed *School Board Member Day* by First Selectman Ed Sheehy and Superintendent Guy Stella. Among kudos for the Board members, the official proclamation highlights the role of an excellent public school system for a quality community. The fact that Woodbridge has such a system is the result of the efforts of many, not the least of which are Board members. They must make difficult decisions while responding to demands for higher standards. These men and women, exemplary public servants elected to their positions, deserve recognition and thanks for their countless hours of volunteer service to public education and the children of our community.

Proficiency in Spanish is the Goal

The goal of the Woodbridge Spanish program is to develop spoken and written proficiency in a language other than English while providing students the opportunity to acknowledge and embrace another culture. Learning a second language at the elementary level helps students develop listening and problem-solving skills, memory and creativity.

To achieve this goal, many thematic instructional units have been taught and more are underway. A few examples follow:

- The new sixth grade unit of study is about travel. Students learned about the 24-hour clock and types of schedules. They had the opportunity to look at authentic train and plane schedules through the use of the SmartBoard.
- Fifth graders are continuing to learn about topics related to a visit from an exchange student. They learned about the members of the family, adjectives related to physical and personality traits, the parts of the house, and furniture.
- Meanwhile, fourth grade students have learned to recognize and use vocabulary related to greetings, the calendar, numbers, classroom objects, school subjects, and places in the school.
- Students in the third grade have learned to recognize and use vocabulary related to greetings, numbers (1-100), days of the week, months of the year, the calendar, school supplies, colors, fruits, and vegetables. Many of these topics have been aided by the SmartBoard.
- Thus far, students in second and first grade have been expanding their knowledge of greetings, the calendar, weather, shapes, numbers, family and pets through SmartBoard technology, small projects, games and songs.
- In Kindergarten basic greetings, farewells and interpersonal questions have been learned through music or conversations with puppets.

This is just a sample of the rich and varied activities, assessments and projects in our world language program.

BRS Teacher Wins Prestigious Grant



Please join me in congratulating Nancy Smerekanicz, BRS sixth grade teacher. Ms. Smerekanicz has won a fully funded grant to attend the prestigious *Honeywell Educators Space Academy* at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama. Just one of three teachers from the state of Connecticut chosen to participate in this high quality one-week

program, Ms. Smerekanicz will be 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.

My best wishes to you all,

Guy F. Stella