



Brookfield Public Schools

Winter Newsletter

Superintendent John W. Barile



Launching into 2016!

Happy New Year! As we begin 2016, I aim to inform the community about key accomplishments, current events and upcoming news in the Brookfield Public Schools. Please accept my sincerest appreciation for the support you have afforded the students, faculty and administration during this time of significant transition. As I have stated before, with the support from families and community members we will ensure that our students become well educated, exceptional young people who shape the future.

Successful organizations, teams, schools, and individuals have many similar attributes. Focus, determination, commitment, talent and effective resource allocation are among them. However, unless we are goal driven and results oriented, no level of talent or resources will help us achieve our mission. That is, having all Brookfield Public School students acquiring the knowledge and learning the skills outlined by our curriculum and standards to high levels. Everything that we do must be about teaching and learning. We must always ask, “*How does this effort/initiative, etc. help students learn?*” If the initiative or activity does not contribute to the academic and behavioral learning of our students, then we must reconsider why we are spending time and money on it.



As I met with stakeholders to determine areas of focus, common themes emerged; coherent curriculum, instruction, and assessment and expectations; timely communication of adjustments, and accurate communication of student learning to parents; involving parents in authentic learning, focusing professional learning, doing fewer initiatives better, and bolstering the support for student’s specific learning needs. The Strategic Planning Committee convened on January 15th to collaboratively develop the district goals which will guide our school system for the next three to five years. It is anticipated that this plan will be ready for publication in June. The ultimate objective is that all Brookfield Public School students learn to high levels. By selecting several high yield strategies that concentrate our efforts on achieving our goals we will increase our opportunities for success. The faculty and administration look forward to working with the Board of Education, parents and community to make our school district the exemplar for education that all others look to as a model of excellence.

Finally, budget development is exciting because we have the opportunity to plan the next school year for our students. The budget is a financial statement of our values and beliefs about educating our students. On January 20, 2016, the Board of Education adopted the 2016-2017 school budget. Please follow the links to learn more about next years budget ([Superintendent Budget Letter](#) and [Budget Power Point](#)). It's important for you to understand the undergirding budget assumptions, budget drivers, and budget goals that are three of the cornerstones of the proposed spending plan; the fourth cornerstone being the District Improvement Plan. Please [click here](#) to view my most recent budget conversation video.



*The sole
reason for
the
existence
of our
profession
is the
student.*



Brookfield High School

The first half of the school year at Brookfield High School saw a commitment by the staff to continually set high expectations for students while providing them with meaningful and engaging learning experiences. We spent time researching, discussing, developing, and finally adopting a set of Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations. We will spend the second half of the year developing rubrics to assess students' mastery of our newly established learning expectations. This work coincides well with our upcoming professional development days focused on teaching argument writing and integrating an instructional approach that fosters increased opportunities for students to demonstrate authentic learning. Our Capstone project has been revamped with the driving force coming from our student committee. They have been focused on spreading out the planning work throughout the year and making the projects more meaningful. Our School Improvement Plan, based on the District Improvement Plan, ensures teachers are providing students with opportunities to demonstrate their abilities to read critically, write arguments, and solve problems in authentic situations. Thankfully, the town has supported our efforts to continually improve our facility over the next couple years. The auditorium has been the initial focus of time and money with the roof replacement completed in December.



BHS Special Chorus

A new stage floor is nearly finished with lighting and sound improvements coming next.

Two new and exciting programs have begun at BHS under the leadership of Stephen Baldwin, Director of Athletics and Cara Reinhardt, Speech & Language Therapist. Mrs. Reinhardt initiated the implementation of a chapter of the nationally recognized *Best Buddies* program. The main mission of *Best Buddies* is to enhance the lives of students with and without educational disabilities through one to one friendships. Marcia Stiman, a BHS Life Skills educator has also been an integral part of the development and facilitation of this friendship program. Simultaneously, Mr. Baldwin with the support of Mrs. Reinhardt and Mrs. Stiman, have begun a *Unified Sports* Program where students with disabilities are paired with typical mentors/athletes as a way to enjoy physical activity & sports, experience positive competition, build relationships with other students, and learn team work and mutual support. We are grateful to both students and faculty for their leadership in getting both of these programs off to a fantastic start!



State Champs!

Whisconier Middle School

R.J. Palacio's best-selling book, *Wonder*, was added to the 5th grade curriculum this year. In a collaborative effort between our 5th grade literacy and health teachers, we launched the school year by tackling the important topic of bullying. It was inspired and made possible by a generous grant received last year from the Brookfield Education Foundation and the CT Core Standards Professional Learning Mini-Grant. This unit helped to create a learning community among our students that encourages the recognition of the talents and abilities of all students and that friendships matter. The reading of the novel, class discussions, character development and analysis, and the connection with *Confessions of a Former Bully* by Trudy Ludwig taught simultaneously by the health teachers has left a lasting impression on our fifth-grade students.



Adaptive Physical Education

This school year we chose a selected group of 8th grade students to help assist certain special needs students in their Adaptive Physical Education class two days a week. These 8th graders work one on one with our special needs students (along with a physical education teacher) in developing their gross motor skills and personal fitness level through a variety of interactive tasks and games. Whether it is playing basketball, riding on a scooter, doing yoga or bowling with their peers all the students involved are benefitting from the interactions. A strong bond has definitely developed between these students.

Professional Development Offered Around Nonfiction Reading

Reading for information is not just a skill that your child needs for their Literacy class. It is a skill that students will need to improve in all classes throughout their years in Brookfield and beyond. Whether it is reading books, articles, and/or a documents, our students need background knowledge and vocabulary to deepen their understandings of any concept that is taught. Therefore, it is important that we assess our students' ability to understand informational texts that build their knowledge and prepare them for the thinking and analysis expected under new standards and assessments.



Huckleberry Hill Elementary School

The term "life-long learning" is frequently used in education but not always with great clarity of meaning. At Huckleberry Hill, we define this term, in part, by our staff members' dedication to self-reflection and professional growth as well as their commitment to inspiring the same in our students. This year, HHES teachers have continued engaging in instructional coaching for implementation of the workshop model in reading. This coaching involves classroom teachers collaborating with reading coaches to reflect upon and refine their literacy instruction in terms of language, lesson structure, resources, and expectations for students. Classroom and reading teachers are co-teaching together in classrooms, modeling for students that even as adults we can all learn and grow. In addition, this year we adopted new reading and writing curricula that are aligned with the Connecticut Core Standards and support the workshop model. Teachers collaborate weekly to write lessons, examine student performance data, and share resources, which positively impacts students' learning experiences.

This year Huckleberry Hill students have had a wide range of learning opportunities beyond those in the classroom. HHES students and staff continue to "show their PAWS" (Practice kindness, Act responsibly, Work hard, and Show respect) in an effort to establish a safe and comfortable learning environment for all. Since the bus is an extension of the school, students participate in PAWS bus lessons each fall and this year's bus lesson had a little twist. Students remained on their buses a little later one morning this fall and teachers boarded the buses to partner with bus drivers in delivering the PAWS lessons. It was a great example for students of collaboration as well as adult learning and growth.



Extending PAWS into the community, HHES students are "Acting responsibly" by participating in a recycling program for plastic film/bags sponsored by Trex and in partnership with the Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority (HRRA). In November, students attended an assembly to kick off the program during which they learned how to reduce waste in our community by recycling and reusing everyday items, rather than sending the material to a landfill or incinerator. Beginning in November and continuing through April 15 (Earth Day) HHES families and staff are invited to bring in plastic shopping bags, shrink wrap from cases from bottled water, produce bags, bread bags, Ziploc bags, dry cleaner bags, etc. which will be collected, recycled, and reused in the production of new materials, including Trex composite decking. Our H-Kids student service group and volunteers from Huck's Paw Patch are organizing these efforts to make our environment a cleaner place to live and we're making great progress. As of the end of December, the HHES community has collected 396 pounds of plastic film/bags.



Center Elementary School

The first half of the 2015-2016 school year has been busy and rewarding here at CES. The Center School staff continues to work on improving our school environment and instruction. Two

highlights of these efforts are our recent investment in a school-wide online reading program and development of enrichment specials classes. Beginning early in January, every CES student was introduced to the MyON reading technology. Through this platform, readers will have access to thousands of books online. They will be able to read at home and at school, or hear books read aloud. Teachers can use this technology to enhance classroom reading instruction. On Mondays students attend an extra specials class. During this enrichment opportunity, they explore, investigate, and discover areas they would not normally be exposed to in the regular specials areas curriculum. Students have explored musical drama, 3-dimensional art, and technology during these enrichment blocks.



Center School continues to enjoy recent improvements to the physical plant. After the completion of our cafeteria floor, attention has turned to other areas of the building. Improvements have been made to student bathrooms and water fountains. Preparing for winter has been a priority. The building exterior has received multiple improvements with repairs to the siding and increased electrical coiling to prevent ice damming.

As winter and spring approach staff at Center School will be focusing on professional development instructional goals in literacy and math. Teachers are expanding their understanding of text dependent questions and opinion writing. Mathematics work is focused on instructing students to develop effective problem solving strategies.



Assistant Superintendent

In our **Instructional Division**, the Office of the Assistant Superintendent has been collaborating with school and academic content leadership on a number of exciting projects and endeavors.



Reading and Writing

- A representative from myOn Reading, an extensive digital library platform (<https://myon.com/>) gave a presentation to principals, literacy leaders, and department heads. Center Elementary School is currently piloting myOn Reading.
- A District K-12 Literacy Committee met this fall to discuss curriculum revision and vertical alignment of instruction and assessment of reading and writing.
 - K-4 literacy assessment alignment begins January 2016, including teacher training. Our assessments are from the CT State Department of Education approved menu of assessments (<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=320866>). When assessed, students who do not score at benchmark will receive appropriate small group intervention and will be progress monitored.
 - In addition to K-4 students, all students with identified reading needs at Whisconier will take part in the Elementary Spelling Assessment to be administered in January and Late May. Teachers at HHES are engaged in professional learning activities to support data interpretation and development of individualized and differentiated spelling instruction.
- Literacy Leaders from HHES, WMS, and BHS, with Dr. Ruby, participated in training provided by Teachers College, Columbia University on Argumentation for grades 4-12. They will plan and design professional learning for K-12 teachers in opinion, persuasive, and oral and written argument for the February district PD days. Argument writing across the disciplines is a goal on the District Improvement Plan and is a focus of the CT Core Standards.
- Dr. Ruby is providing the Special Education department heads with ongoing, in-depth professional learning in the science of reading instruction. The sessions are designed in a "train-the-trainer" model to build capacity and support teachers in serving students' literacy instructional needs.
- English Language Learners continue to participate in the web-based Rosetta Stone program of instruction and assessment for English language learning.



DECA Students

Math and Science

- A District K-12 Mathematics Committee convened in December to explore how mathematics instruction is delivered and supported in alignment with the CT Core Standards. The Committee will review published programs with the goal of vertically aligning math instruction and assessment across the grade spans.
- The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) were adopted by the CT State Department of Education at their November 4th meeting. Two teams of two teachers from BHS and WMS will be participating in 40 hours of NGSX (X – Exemplar) training. The training is a professional learning system designed to help these teams of science educators to apply the instructional shifts described in the Next Generation Science Standards to their own teaching. These four teachers will serve as our lead teachers as we transition to the new standards and develop curriculum.
- The CT State Department of Education has created a no-cost, web-based, self-paced program of 15 modules, which offers 15 to 60 hours of structured professional learning for groups of educators (<http://ngss.ccat.us/>). All principals are developing plans to ensure teachers are informed about the professional learning opportunity offered through these modules and to ensure that teachers avail themselves of this information as part of their own ongoing professional learning.

Further Curriculum Work upcoming for the Spring

- The Assistant Superintendent attended PD on the new CT Standards for Social Studies. All schools are completing a matrix of curriculum revision status by grade and subject. Once this project is completed, a gap analysis and subsequent strategic curriculum cycle of revision and evaluation will be developed.



Strategic Coherence Planning kickoff!

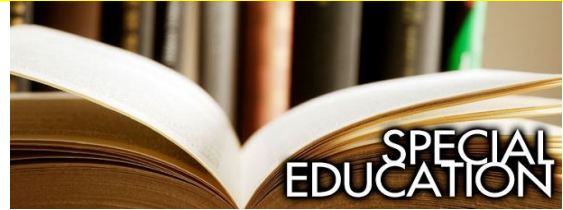
Special Services

"Trending" in Special Services for 2016

Do You Want to Be a Psych-Wise Educator or Parent?

It is commonly understood that research in the fields of education and psychology may take years to be used routinely (and embraced) within the field and become daily practice. Two renowned social psychologists have reviewed and analyzed research in multiple fields, including psychology and education, to allow us to benefit from social psychology's most powerful insights. *The Wisest One in the Room* (Gilovich & Ross, 2015) is a comprehensive review of these vast insights as they pertain to education today.

This Winter Newsletter will focus on two aspects of this exhaustive study and two interventions that can immediately be applied by both educators and parents. First, a bit of research: Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck has focused decades of research on two related questions: First, why do some students achieve better grades and make more year-to-year progress than others who score equally well on IQ or ability tests? Second, what can we do to help the underachiever do better? After decades of research, the answer to the first question is clear.



Dr. Dweck has coined the terms "fixed ability" versus "growth ability" mind -sets. Her book *Mind- Sets (2006)* has become a national best seller. Students with a "fixed ability" mind-set see ability as something static. Accordingly, they are willing to test their mettle only as long as success seems within easy reach. When the going gets tough, they shy away rather than risking failure. By contrast, students with a "growth ability" mind-set see ability as dynamic and something that can be enhanced through effort, perseverance, hard work and a relentless pursuit to overcome a worthy challenge. They set high goals, see initial difficulties not as failures but as challenges to overcome and seek out new challenges that stretch their abilities. Many students with a "fixed" mind -set also think that if you have real ability, you shouldn't have to work hard to do well.

Research investigators have demonstrated that "mind -set" is malleable. In one study, students learned and were taught simple analogies suggesting that intelligence, like a muscle, grows stronger with exercise. The message of existing research should be clear to parents as well as educators. *Psych-wise* parents and educators do not tell their children/ students how smart or accomplished they are. Instead, they praise **hard work** and the **willingness to tackle difficult challenges**. When children are having difficulty, *psych-wise* parents and educators reassure them that the task will get easier with more practice and experience. *Effort, perseverance, risk taking, practice and hard work need to be valued ... desired outcomes will emerge naturally if these guidelines are followed along with high quality instructional practice.*

Mission Statement of the Brookfield Public Schools

To inspire, challenge and prepare all students to live meaningful and productive lives.

Every student is empowered to become a critical thinker, problem-solver, effective communicator, global citizen, and life-long learner through rigorous, relevant and comprehensive educational experiences, expansive student opportunities and active community involvement.