



# Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake Central Schools *Board Highlights*

A summary of  
Board of Education  
meetings published  
by Superintendent  
of Schools Jim Schultz

Meeting of March 25, 2008

## Board hears review of elementary school assessments

### Program Review

Board members heard a report on overall elementary grade assessment and student learning from English and math department heads LORI MALONEY and BILL McQUAY, PACE coordinator CARRIE SUNKES, and elementary principals JILL BONACIO, RALPH ROTHACKER and TIM SINNENBERG.

The administrators shared passing rates on state English Language Arts (ELA) and math tests in grades 3, 4 and 5 for 2005-06 and 2006-07 for our entire student population and also for special education pupils, PACE pupils and those receiving academic intervention services (AIS).

Ms. Maloney noted that BH-BL pupils are doing very well and continue to improve on state tests. Overall the percentage of pupils passing these tests by scoring at Levels 3 and 4 continues to rise each year. She summarized that "The state assessments are a source of our pride but also very challenging for us."

Teachers look at much more than just passing rates, she said. They "drill down" and analyze the students' data for areas of strength and weakness. One finding this year, for example, was that students weren't doing as well as they could on some reading comprehension questions. Specifically, teachers uncovered the fact that a number of pupils were reluctant to go back to the text of an essay they read in the test booklet and find an answer there — even when the answer to a test question was directly in the text. She thinks this may be due to the rapid pace of technology that today's kids are used to. Knowing this, teachers will be working on more tasks that require pupils to use text information in class to gain comfort with that.

"As with ELA, in math our students are making some terrific gains on the state tests," said Mr. McQuay. Some students continue to have trouble with word or short answer math problems, and the department is piloting new math textbooks that they believe will help students with this in the future.

All three elementary principals described how acceptance of school-wide "SMART" goals based on specific, measurable student results has grown in their buildings.

Mr. Rothacker noted that when Stevens staff wrote their first SMART goals two years ago, that task was imposed on them by the administration, and many teachers didn't really see the value of having a data-driven SMART goal. "I'm extremely proud of where the staff has gone in two years. Now we have teams of teachers asking for data and questioning the data as they learn together," he said. Now staff are coming up with own goals. "We are becoming data-informed. It's opened up a whole new door, a whole new philosophy of educating kids."

Ms. Bonacio has also seen growing acceptance of data-based goals at Pashley. "Now teachers have so much trust with one another that they are sharing data on even strand tests and checking with each other on different ways to convey material to kids," she said. "We're seeing a vast improvement in student learning at Pashley."

Charlton Heights principal Tim Sinnenberg concurred and described this new level of cooperation and data-analysis as also extending to the District ELA and Math Committees, whose members are really listening to teachers and using their suggestions. "There's been great dialogue and great improvements at Charlton Heights. I have teachers coming to me to show me the item analysis of their tests. It's great to see so many teachers working together to improve student performance," he said.

Charlton Heights also set a social/emotional skills goal for the students this year, and the entire staff is working together on concrete steps to build respect for all, complete with ways to measure this.

Carrie Sunkes noted that another growing strength she sees in our classrooms is formative assessments. It's starting to become second nature to teachers to do an assessment after a lesson to check how well students got something and what the teacher can do next to apply that lesson to another task or area.

Summarizing the past two years of work on state assessments and measurable student learning goals, Mr. Rothacker noted that "This is really a paradigm shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning."

*(Continued over.)*

## Action items

Board of Education members approved changes to four policies in the 9000 series of the district policy manual to bring them into conformance with current practices.

Also approved were recommendations from the Committee on Special Education, a request for special athletic competition for the girls softball team, acceptance of a number of monetary gifts to the Fine Arts Department to support music pupils' April trip to compete in Orlando, and authorization of the use of Section 75 of the Civil Service Law to discipline a member of the support staff.

## Discussion Items

Finance Committee chair NANCY DELLA PIA reviewed plans for the March 26 Community Budget Forum at the Ballston Town Hall.

Board members discussed the district's current policy on attendance zones. Our practice has been that as soon as a BH-BL pupil moves to a new home outside our district, he or she can no longer attend a BH-BL school, with the sole exception being that seniors can finish their senior year here if they provide their own transportation. Similarly, a pupil who moves to a new home within BH-BL but in the attendance zone of a different elementary school is currently expected to change immediately to the new school. A few

parents have questioned these policies, and Superintendent JIM SCHULTZ will draft new language for the Board's consideration that sets specific mid-year dates after which the student would be required to change schools.

## Personnel Action

### RETIREMENT

BARBARA PIERCE                      Charlton Heights Senior Typist  
effective 9/16/08

### RESIGNATION

RAELENE NOLL    Grades 6-12 World Language Dept. Head  
effective 6/30/08\*

### LEAVE OF ABSENCE

HEATHER MASTRACCHIO                      High School Social  
Studies Teacher                      effective 5/12 - 6/30/08

### APPOINTMENT

TAMARA DUVAL                                      School Bus Driver  
effective 3/26/08

\*Note: Ms. Noll is resigning only from the administrative portion of her position in order to become a full-time BH-BL language teacher next fall.