

THE NEW EXCHANGE

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New Technology Plan Focuses on Improved Communications

The Blind Brook Technology Department and the Technology Planning Committee are pleased to announce that the new Blind Brook Technology Plan has been completed in fulfillment of the State Education's Department criteria for Federal funding. The three-year plan outlined for 2005-08 addresses some critical areas, notably 1) improving professional development for teachers in order to maximize technology integration in the curriculum and enhance student achievement, and 2) improving district-wide school/community communications via a newly designed district website, remote access to Channel 77, improved telephone services, and expanded use of parent and community email databases. The new plan unfolds around the following five goals:

- I.** Increase the integration of interactive instructional technology in the classroom to promote student achievement;
- II.** Expand sustained, ongoing professional development in the instructional use of interactive technology;
- III.** Integrate the student information management system for data analysis, instructional decision-making and benchmark assessments to enable the school district to become a networked organization focused on student achievement;

IV. Upgrade network functioning and voice/data transmission for user-friendly and immediate remote access to instructional technology and student



**Social studies teacher
Mark Greenwald at his Smart Board**

data as well as meet the needs of the increased numbers of users on the network.

V. Identify, evaluate and implement technological solutions to ensure reliable communications, safety and security for the entire school/community.

Each of the five goals of the Technology Plan, reflecting the district's emphasis on technology integration, student achievement, professional development and improved communications, contains specific objectives for meeting these goals.

Some of the objectives for meeting the goals articulated in the plan include:

- *Securing web-based server options and professional development software to increase the potential for off-site user access for professional staff, students, and parents to district resources;*
- *Improving web site interface for all users—professional staff, students, and parents—to enjoy updated access to district information;*
- *Evaluating combined telephone and Internet solutions to improve voice/data communications district-wide;*
- *Expanding the instructional use of wireless personal response system devices for students;*
- *Continuing the Smart Board installation and desktop replacement plan introduced last year to maintain optimal functioning;*
- *Integrating the student information databases with a variety of assessment software for testing/data analysis in conjunction with No Child Left Behind.*

continued on page 4

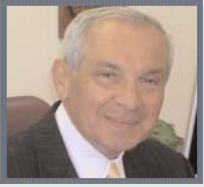
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SUPERINTENDENT'S CORNER



Dear Residents,

When the Blind Brook Board of Education invited me to return as

school superintendent in the Spring of 2003, they cited three critical goals: 1) initiate a capital construction project to meet escalating enrollment; 2) recruit a new leadership team; 3) reverse the academic decline.

The recent approval of our \$18.2 million Bond Referendum and appointment of eight new administrators since 2004 place us well on the road toward achieving the first two goals. But what about progress in student achievement and school performance?

At our November 7th Board of Education meeting the entire administrative team joined me in reporting very favorable trends in academic improvements. Using State tests, Regents exams, SAT Verbal/Math scores and Advanced Placement results, we have achieved marked improvements over the past three years.

At the elementary school level we have strengthened our mastery level performance in Math and ELA to over 50%, making Blind Brook very competitive with high performing Westchester County districts.

Our Grade 8 Earth Science Regents

pilot has proven to be a huge success. For the past two years Blind Brook Middle School has attained proficiency (96%) and mastery (53%) rates well above our competitors. With virtually all eighth graders taking Earth Science Regents, our students can now access a five-year sequence of Regents and Advanced Placement courses prior to graduation. Blind Brook High School's mastery performance (85% and above) consistently outpaces high performing schools in virtually all Regents testing areas.

Since 2003 our combined average SAT Verbal/Math scores have improved annually from 1190 (2003) to 1210 (2004) to 1250 for 2005. Finally, while the number of Advanced Placement exams written increased from 100 in 2003 to 250 in 2005, Blind Brook students have continued to exceed national and regional performance levels.

Although much room for improvement remains, we have reversed the academic decline and earned a ranking of fifth place out of forty Westchester high schools earlier this year from *Westchester Magazine*. Blind Brook has also polished its image on *Newsweek's* Advanced Placement study by moving to within striking distance of the top 100 schools ranked nationally.

These achievements, however, raise

some essential questions that our faculty, students and community must address in our Strategic Planning process over the next few years.

1. Does competitive benchmarking and comparison with high-performing Westchester County school districts reflect the "Blind Brook Way"?
2. Do we agree that more rigorous Advanced Placement courses strengthen the overall academic curriculum?
3. Do we agree more rigorous Advanced Placement courses help students become more competitive for selective colleges and universities?
4. Does the community expect Blind Brook to remain a pacesetter in national and regional comparisons, e.g. *Newsweek's* Top AP schools, Standard and Poor's Ranking, *Westchester Magazine's* Annual Evaluation?

Academic advances in a competitive Westchester market is tough work, but no more difficult than answering these challenging questions. Welcome to the dialogue.

Ronald D. Valenti Ph.D

A Report from the Special Education Department

The IDEA: Past & Present

In 1997 and again last year, the United States Congress reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) making some fundamental changes in the law regarding Special Education and Students with Disabilities, and requiring that general education and special education programs be intertwined. With these changes, the basic premise of special education instruction itself changed significantly.

Special Education is no longer a removed place for students with disabilities to go to but rather a range of services designed to support students in accessing the general education curriculum along with other students.

These changes have important implications for the Blind Brook School District. In order to begin to understand the new impact on our special education services and budget, some history and background of the IDEA is helpful.

The original IDEA, enacted by Congress in 1974, was as much a civil rights law as an education law. This legislation created a due-process right for students and parents, shaped the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), established the concept of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and fashioned the blueprint for the Committee for Special Education (CSE).

The IDEA reauthorization of 2004 builds on its original premise.

Continued on page 4

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

CHARACTER EDUCATION

At a recent school board meeting, I had the pleasure of presenting a certificate of achievement to the three senior student leaders of the High School Soup Kitchen. For the past four years, these three young adults, Marc Desmond, Alex Markowitz and Gavin Romm, have organized fellow high school students in preparing and serving food weekly to those less fortunate. Although the Soup Kitchen is a visible example of Blind Brook students making a positive difference in their community, it is only one example of character education in our district.

Character education is not an afterthought in Blind Brook, but rather an integral part of the curriculum. Our schools facilitate service opportunities but it is our students who take action. Despite the fact that your child may leave the door open, her room a mess,

or his teeth unbrushed, character education is pervasive and meaningful in Blind Brook. I know this because those same "it's-all-about-me" kids are making you proud every day by helping others.

They start young. At BMP-Ridge Street School, for example, third, fourth and fifth grade students escort younger students off the bus and to their classrooms daily. For their dedication to helping others, these students will gain membership into the Green Key Society.

A significant percentage of our high school student body have voluntarily organized or joined a public service organization. Students contribute their time and energy as members of the Human Relations Club, Habitat for Humanity, DARE Club, SAAD Club, Peer Leadership, Project Prevention, Straight and Gay Alliance, and other

clubs in and beyond school. Most recently, for example, the Student Senate organized a successful blood drive resulting in our community's generous \$1,500.00 donation to the Andrus Children Center in Yonkers.

Our children continuously exhibit quality of character and teach others the value of citizenship. In this way, they make a difference in the lives of fellow students and members of the community who may never know their names but who will always remember their acts of charity.

We may set the table for character education at Blind Brook, but it's our children who bring the feast.

Lawrence D. Engle
President
Board of Education



Community Service Throughout Our Schools



Members of the Community Service Club and their Advisor, Jane Romm

In its eighth year, the Blind Brook Soup Kitchen continues to serve about one hundred meals every Thursday evening at St. Peter's Church in Port Chester. Between twelve and fifteen students supply a hot meal, and converse with folks who are experiencing some tough times. Our Blind Brook students do their best to make everyone feel at home.

The program is led by student leaders. Seniors Gavin Romm, Alex Markowitz and Marc Desmond have received an award from Westchester Legislative Council for Youth for their devotion to our soup kitchen for the past three years. Junior

Celine McBride is our student leader for her class.

In other news, sophomore Dana Silverstein has spearheaded a new Peer Tutoring Program which is a runaway success. Not only was the program a good idea to start, Dana made sure it came to full fruition. High School students provide not only homework and study help to middle schoolers, but they also offer camaraderie to the middle school students, bridging the transition from Middle to High School.

The Community Service Club is another high school community service organization that is very active. Members of the club participate in a pen-pal project with first and third grade students at Port Chester's Edison School. In the spring, students will continue the tradition of taking their pen pals to the Bronx Zoo.

Finally, Blind Brook High School students are collecting new, medium-sized stuffed animals (with no hard items inside) for newly admitted children and adolescents at Four Winds Psychiatric Hospital. Something cuddly and warm to hug helps the children adjust to their new environment. To donate to this program, please call Senior Alex Markowitz at 937-2873. We hope to make this an on-going project for many years to come.

Thank you for your continued interest and support of our community service programs.

Jane Romm, Coordinator
Community Service Program

Thoughts on Financial Planning for College

Greetings from the Counseling Staff!

On November 10, 2005, a representative from Sarah Lawrence College came to Blind Brook High School to do a presentation on financial aid. The workshop was very helpful to the parents of juniors and seniors as they confront college tuition in the upcoming years. But, a family can begin planning and saving for college long before their son or daughter enters high school. Many private schools now cost, including tuition and

room/board, over \$40,000. Therefore, an early start and a responsible plan can help. A college savings plan to consider is the Section 529 plan.

The Section 529 plan, also known as the Qualified Tuition Program (QTP), is one of the best ways to save for a child's college education. A 529 college savings plan is a tax-exempt vehicle which can be started for a child of any age.

There are limits to the amount a family

can contribute annually to a 529 plan. Therefore, it is beneficial to start early. Detailed information regarding college savings and/or 529 plans can be found at www.finaid.org.

If you would like more information on Section 529 plans or how to open one, I encourage you to speak with your accountant or financial consultant. Happy planning!

Christopher Griffin, Director
Guidance /Counseling Services

Technology Plan.... continued from page 1

An important component of the new plan, the redesign of the district web site, is already underway with the project's completion date projected for Spring 2006. Also, the district has begun a cost analysis to evaluate the potential for fiber-optic connectivity to improve telephone and data services. Finally, the district is working diligently with the Village of Rye Brook to forward the Reverse 911 project to ensure a reliable avenue for reaching parents in the community in event of emergency.

Many thanks to the members of the Technology Planning Committee for their time and commitment in addressing Blind Brook's technology needs. Appreciation goes to Caryn Furst, Colin Byrne, Steve Kaplan, Alain Oberrotman, Brian Berk, Don Whitman, Steve Jones, Tom Glickman and Dr. Thomas Wolf.

Christine Burton

Director of Curriculum, Instruction
and Technology K-12



Blind Brook Public Schools
SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE

THE NEW EXCHANGE

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Special Education (IDEA).... continued from page 1

Key elements include:

- *Improving academic achievement and functional performance, including the use of scientifically-based instruction;*
- *Coordinating with No Child Left Behind school improvement efforts to ensure that students with disabilities benefit from these efforts;*
- *Supporting high quality professional development to ensure school personnel who work with students with disabilities have the knowledge and skills to improve the performance of these students;*
- *Increasing dispute resolution options and reducing adversarial hearings and litigation.*

In our next newsletter we'll review the new State regulations based on the IDEA and how they impact us in Blind Brook.

Eugene Wolotsky, Director
Pupil Personnel Services

Blind Brook Cares: Community Service Highlights 2005-06

Ridge Street School students collected food for Thanksgiving baskets for the St. Francis AME Zion Church in Port Chester and personalized holiday cards for the children at the Andrus Center in Yonkers.

First-grade teacher Linda Greco's "Caring Kids" collected donated blankets and sleeping bags to aid victims of the October 8th earthquake in Pakistan.

Second-graders donated toys to the Toys for Tots Program.

Fourth-graders are donating books to needy schools in New Orleans.

The Fifth Grade Student Council held a food drive for the Carver Center in Port Chester.

The Middle School student musicians performed at the King Street Nursing Home.

The Middle School Student Government raised \$800 for New Orleans hurricane relief.

The "Boo-Gram" fundraiser contributed \$350 to Habitat for Humanity and \$350 to the Make-A-Wish Foundation.