

BLIND BROOK BEACON

BLIND BROOK



PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Update:

Major Renovation Plan for BMPRSS & BBHSMS

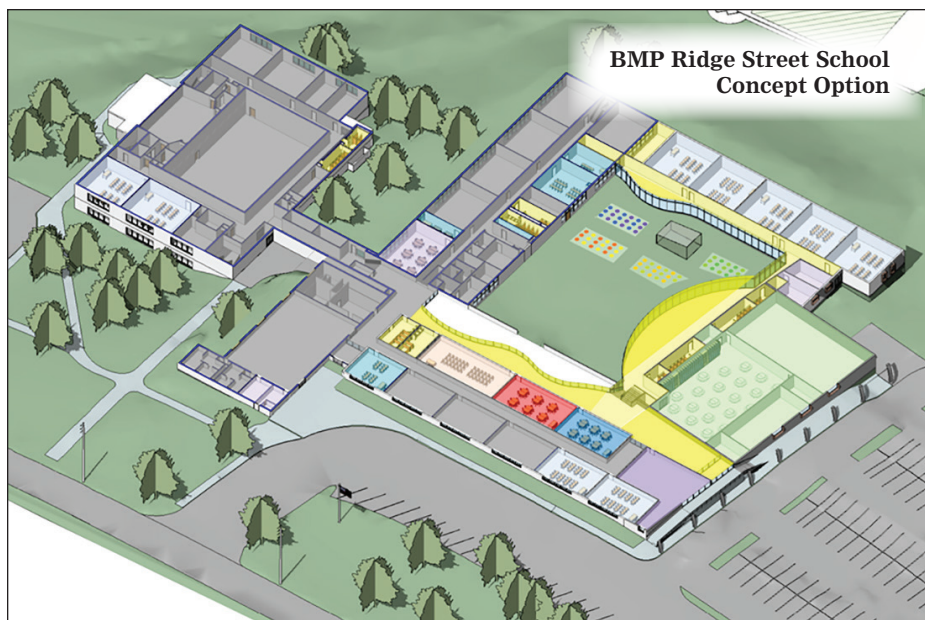
Why it's critical for our District

The Blind Brook Schools are the cornerstone of our community. The quality of the schools is why most people chose to move here, and maintaining their excellence should be of equal importance to all residents.

Academic excellence, as well as providing for the social and emotional growth of all students are the stated goals of the Blind Brook School District. While educational instruction in the buildings is most critical, the importance of maintaining the facilities, and providing a safe, clean, and fully functional environment for students and staff cannot be understated.

The Board of Education has begun the process of conducting public hearings to inform the community about a comprehensive plan to update and reconstruct those buildings that can no longer provide the appropriate learning environment for children. Additionally, the plan will align the facilities with an academic vision for the future.

Two years ago, the Board created a District Facilities Committee to tackle the question of what capital improvements were necessary. Community members with specialized relevant knowledge were recruited to serve on the committee. The



Board also hired an architectural firm and a construction management firm to develop concepts and drawings with realistic solutions and estimated costs.

The primary focus of a proposed project would be the Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School (BMPRSS). Much of BMPRSS was constructed at least 50 years ago and has remained mostly untouched. There would also be smaller, but significant improvements at the Blind Brook

High School Middle School (BBHSMS) campus. Improvements to infrastructure at both campuses would comprise approximately one-third of the total cost of the project. These improvements include replacing old electrical panels and fire alarm systems, as well as drafty windows and outdated bathrooms that do not comply with current law. (A full presentation with further detail is available on the home page of the Blind Brook website.)

The last two major construction projects in Blind Brook were in 2001 and 2006. These projects included the construction of a new middle school, auditorium, cafeteria, turf fields, and running track. Over ninety percent of the combined \$35 million in voter-approved funds were allocated to new construction and improvements at the HS/MS. The work at BMPRSS was limited mostly to the central district administrative offices, and only two classrooms. In fact, the last major construction or renovation at BMPRSS was in 1965!

Please turn to page 3





BBHS Named 2016 Blue Ribbon School

Each year the United States Department of Education works in tandem with state education departments to identify the best schools in the country and invite these schools to apply for consideration as a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. The program, which began in 1982 by then Secretary of Education, Terrell H. Bell, was intended to highlight excellent schools and foster open communication for the sharing of best practices in teaching and learning. This is the second time that Blind Brook High School was singled out and recognized in the category of an "Exemplary High Performing" school. Blind Brook High School last received this distinction thirty years ago in 1986-87.

This year, Blind Brook High School was one of nine New York high schools identified for consideration. We embraced the application challenge and from September 2015 to March 2016 the faculty, staff, students, and parents joined forces to compile the required data and think critically about the challenges and successes we encounter as a learning community. The multi-faceted application set strict word limits on multiple categories including Curriculum and Instruction, Instructional Methods and Interventions, Assessment, School Supports, and Engaging Families and the Community. In mid-September, Mrs. Lambert and Dr. Ross were notified that Blind Brook High School was selected as

a "2016 Exemplary High Performing Blue Ribbon School."

Blind Brook High School was officially recognized in Washington D.C. on November 7th & 8th by the USDOE Secretary of Education, John King. Dr. Ross was present to accept the award on behalf of Mrs. Lambert and Blind Brook High School. More information may be found at the Blue Ribbon official website. The celebration continued at the Blind Brook Board of Education meeting held on November 21st where the Board of Education and the community listened to Mrs. Lambert explain how the Blue Ribbon application process unfolded during the past nine months.

Major Renovation Plan for BMPRSS & BBHSMS

Continued from 1

The facilities at BMPRSS cannot be expected to last much longer without serious implications that could disrupt the day-to-day activities of teaching and learning. Matters of health and safety are also of concern, and need to be addressed. There have been incidents of flooding in the cafeteria and hallways in and around the Kindergarten – 1st Grade wing (aka "Butler Building"), and the roof in that wing of the school cannot be fixed again without making significant structural improvements to the entire building. There are no forced-air ventilation systems in either the Butler Building or the 1955 Library Wing of BMPRSS – a situation that requires attention, and is out of compliance with state building code. Finally, the kitchen and cafeteria are undersized, and do not serve the needs of students as most parents would like. Fresh food cannot be prepared adequately onsite due to space limitations, and the serving and seating capacity of the cafeteria creates a logistics headache for everyone.

On the bright side, solving the facilities problems at BMPRSS also creates opportunity for the future. In recent years, Blind Brook has been incorporating the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) curriculum into many activities and courses. This is an interdisciplinary, project-based approach that blends the traditional core subjects with the hands-on learning approach of STEAM. There are new courses in robotics and computer science at BBHSMS, and K-5 STEAM "specials" courses at BMPRSS. If approved by the voters, specialized facilities at both campuses can be created to accommodate

new ways of learning. The best way to envision this is to imagine the old wood-working, and metal shop classes reinvented with new technology. Blind Brook already has some high tech equipment for students including 3D printers (donated by the PTA and a generous community member), as well as a laser engraver, and wire-bender for student projects. The current space, however, is inadequate.

A modern learning center, called a "Fabrication Lab" (or "Fab Lab" for short), could be constructed at BBHSMS that would allow full classes of students to get instruction, and pursue creative projects that would inspire them (and us!), while truly preparing them for college and careers in their future. A "Maker Space" – a type of "Fab Lab" for elementary school students – could be included in plans for the renovation at BMPRSS.

Another opportunity -- building a performance space at BMPRSS -- could also be included as part of addressing the kitchen and cafeteria issues. A proposed "Cafetorium" that would combine a cafeteria with a functional stage and tiered seating would give the elementary school its own assembly and performance space for a fraction of the cost of building a stand-alone facility, or renovating the "Old Gym" for the same purpose. The enthusiasm and success of the theater arts program at Blind Brook High School has already spread to the middle school, and creating a performance space at the elementary school would help alleviate the demands for the one shared auditorium at the BBHSMS campus. It would also help to avoid the need for cancelling PE classes when the "Old Gym" is being set up for evening

events, and bussing BMPRSS students to the HS for performance rehearsals.

The cost of the capital project under consideration is between \$43-45 million. Fortunately, there are several factors that will help offset the effect on the school tax for property owners. First is low interest rates. Second is approximately \$10 million in building aid from New York State that would not have to be repaid by Blind Brook taxpayers. Third is the retirement of outstanding debt from the previous capital projects in 2001 and 2006. The bottom line is that school taxes for the average home priced at \$850,000 are estimated to increase by approximately \$525 for a six-year period between 2020 and 2026.

Since 2011, the Blind Brook Board of Education has presented to the voters school budgets in line with the New York State Tax Cap Legislation. Last year the tax levy increase was only one quarter of one percent, and it required cuts of almost \$650,000 to get there. These are difficult times for public education, but Blind Brook continues to thrive. A great school district cannot be great, however, without the proper facilities. We ask you to consider investing in our schools. The Board of Education has held the line on spending, but our operating budget simply cannot accommodate the types of renovation and construction that the schools require at this time. We hope that you will take the time to attend one or more of the upcoming presentations on the proposed capital project. The next presentation is on January 9th. We hope to see you there.

Jeff Diamond
President,
Blind Brook Board of Education