



Community Letter

winter 2010

Promote a challenging environment creating an extraordinary community of learners

Message from the Board of Education

With the start of a new year, the Board of Education begins the budget planning process for the 2010 - 2011 school year. Meetings held throughout the month of January focus on the successes of current programs and the needs of each school to ensure continuous improvement.

While January starts the budget planning process, cost control efforts take place throughout the year. From negotiations with staff and service providers, to the use of purchasing consortiums and development of programs for special needs students to prevent costly out-placements, administration and the Board are working to control costs.

The members of the Board are tax-paying residents, the majority of whom have children in the school system. Our goal is to provide the best program we can with available funds. We can not accomplish this work alone. We encourage citizens to get involved in the budget process, attend meetings, and watch for information on our website at: www.plainvilleschools.org.

Student Spotlight: *Wheeler*

Mystic Seaport Field Trip

By: Erin Kordik, Grade 5

One of the best field trips we took in fifth grade was to the Mystic Seaport on Friday, November 13, 2009. We learned how the early settlers navigated, what they used for transportation and what they did in their spare time. The early settlers used compasses, telescopes and maps to navigate their way to the new land. They used ships like the *L.A. Dunton* to get around and to transport food and animals to the new land. I learned that the ship's captain would choose the best worker for that day to sleep in the extra bunk in the captain's quarters. The captain's quarters had a wood stove to keep warm, while the rest of the sailors had to use the oven in the kitchen next door. In their spare time the sailors danced, sang songs or rested for more energy. Every year the fifth grade should take a trip to Mystic Seaport to learn about the explorers and have fun!



Wheeler students enjoy a day at Mystic Seaport.

Technology Today

The Technology Department has recently implemented a number of improvements to better communicate with the community. On the district website you can now find calendars for each school. These calendars include information about sporting events, student concerts, and more. Also if you use a digital calendar such as Outlook or Google Calendar, you can subscribe to these calendars so that events show up in your personal calendar. You can find these calendars at:

<http://www.plainvilleschools.org/calendars/>

The Technology Department has also worked to improve communication with parents via Powerschool, the new student information system. Parents or guardians of middle school and high school students can get an account to access their children's grades and attendance. Parents or guardians who do not have an account may contact the school and have one created. Access Powerschool at:

<http://powerschool.plainvilleschools.org>

Lastly, the Technology Department is beginning to work with elementary and middle school teachers over the coming months to enhance teacher webpages. Google Sites, which is part of the new collaboration suite provided by Google to schools at no charge, will be used to publish these.

Budget News

The budget season is now fully underway. The budget calendar is listed on the Plainville Community Schools website and all meetings are open to the public. Meetings will take place throughout January with a Board of Education budget scheduled to be approved at the February Board meeting. Throughout March and April, the Board will meet with the Town Council to discuss educational needs and there will be public hearings on the budget for community input.

As work begins on crafting the 2010-11 budget, there are a number of areas that are being examined that may cause significant increases from the 2009-10 budget. First, because administrators gave concessions during 2009-10 in the form of a furlough and elimination of annuity payments, this line item will increase significantly in 2010-11. Second, because the bulk of Title I ARRA (stimulus) funds will sunset at the end of this year, most of the costs that were paid for through these funds will need to be absorbed by the Board of Education budget. Third, we are planning

for higher special education costs due mainly to a due process case in which the district is currently involved. Finally, while the current draft of the teachers' contract calls for no step or general wage increases, there will be some certified staff members who have obtained additional degrees which will increase this line somewhat. In addition, it is anticipated that the 2010-11 budget proposal will make some attempt to restore some of the positions lost in the current year.

The Board of Education has worked hard in the past to keep costs down and improve efficiency. There are two recent studies that show that the Plainville Board of Education continues to do more with less. First, at a recent joint meeting of the Plainville Town Council and Board of Education, the town manager presented information from the CT Taxpayer Association that shows Plainville had the 11th lowest tax rate increase in Connecticut over the last 10 years.

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Lego League at MSP **By: Jake Masco, 7th Grade**



Lego League Advisor Camille Westfall, with students Ryan Cyr, Dyllan Martin, Jake Masco, Nick Violette, and Nick Zaleski.

Three months ago, Team Gear Heads started another season of Lego League. Our team is made up of five members, Ryan Cyr, Dyllan Martin, Jake Masco, Nick Violette, and Nick Zaleski. For most of the members, it was their second or third year. The team was led by Dyllan Martin and me, Jake Masco. We are very lucky that the Middle School of Plainville's technology education teacher, Ms. Camille Westfall, has brought this club to our school. Our practices are two days a week, three hours each. In that time frame, we construct a robot using many types of Legos, create programs for the robot based on the theme (Transportation), prep the display table, and create a presentation on how we can make transportation better in our town.

We are guaranteed two competitions and a 50/50 chance to excel to the state competition which is held at CCSU in New Britain. At the Ragged Mountain tournament which was held at McGee Middle School in Berlin, Connecticut on November 21, Team Gear Heads won the "People's Choice" award. This is awarded to the team that demonstrates the understanding and good practices of the wonders of science, technology, and engineering, while also demonstrating teamwork, spirit, and the thrill of competition. When we got this award we were ecstatic. It took a lot of hard work and effort to get ready for the states. We even brought it home over Thanksgiving break and spent that weekend working on it!

The state competition was a day filled with tons of fun and many surprises. For the first half of the day we were in third place out of 50 teams! At the end of the day we did get bumped back to ninth place, but out of 50, that is excellent. We won first place for Innovative Robot Design and a \$200.00 prize from the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE). We are very sad that the season is over but anxious for the next season to start, which will be in September of 2010.

Good News!

*Great things are happening in our school district all the time.
Following are some of these "good news" highlights:*

LINDEN STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF partnered with the *Affinity Group (Veterans from General Electric)* to support troops overseas, sending letters and packages to those serving abroad...PLAINVILLE HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR MERCURIO EVANGELISTA won second prize for digital art in Tunxis Community College's second annual *Art and Academic Challenge*...EIGHT PLAINVILLE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2009 ALUMNI, PATRICK HAGGERTY, JILLIAN CAVALLARI, ANDREW CIMINO, BRANDY GUARDA, ZACHERY HARPER, CAITLYN LEWIS, MARY MAYNARD, AND REBECCA REEVE earned Advanced Placement (AP) Scholar awards in recognition of their exceptional achievement on AP exams...THE MIDDLE SCHOOL OF PLAINVILLE'S SCHOOL COUNSELING DEPARTMENT sponsored their annual "Costumes for Charity" fundraising event resulting in a donation of more than \$300 to the Plainville Community Food Pantry...PHS STUDENT ATHLETE LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS MARQUILLE JOHNSON, MIKAYLA WELLS, TOM DINDA, CHRIS KUZIA AND ALLE CAPONIGRO, together with SALT ADVISOR JOHN ZADNIK, attended a day long Youth Empowerment Summit (Y.E.S.) for Diversity Conference...THE TOFFOLON STUDENT COUNCIL held a "Hot Chocolate Booth" fundraiser at the school's Holiday Extravaganza raising \$70 and collecting many food items for the Plainville Community Food Pantry...LINDEN STUDENTS CATERINA LABELLA AND JARED DEMMONS, TOFFOLON STUDENTS BENJAMIN CZUPRINSKI AND DWIGHT BURNS, WHEELER STUDENTS BETHANY PELLETIER AND JESSICA MASCO, MIDDLE SCHOOL OF PLAINVILLE STUDENTS JOHN CROWE AND DANIELLE ANGELILLO, AND PLAINVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS JESSICA FOERTSCH, SARAH PROVOST, AND MICHAEL THOMAS, received the *Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents' (CAPSS) Superintendent / Student Recognition Award and Certificate of Excellence* at the 22nd annual *Superintendent's Award Presentation*...THE PLAINVILLE BOARD OF EDUCATION was one of only seven school boards in Connecticut to receive the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education's highest leadership recognition – the *CABE Board of Distinction Award, Level 2*...PLAINVILLE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS has earned three awards in the 33rd Annual Awards of Excellence for Educational Communications Contest held by the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)...PLAINVILLE HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS ALYSE LAMARRE AND ALEXANDER SALAZAR have been awarded the *Farmington Valley Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents' (CAPSS) Superintendent / Student Recognition Award*...TOFFOLON SCHOOL PARA-PROFESSIONAL ANN BUCCHI organized a "Trick or Treat Around the World" community service project with students gathering more than 100 pounds of candy for service men and women and children in Afghanistan....PLAINVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AMANDA CATALANO AND HECTOR RIVAS have been named the first recipients of the "Students Rock" award, recognizing their outstanding contributions to Plainville High School...MSP KIDS IN THE MIDDLE (K.I.M.) participants helped the Salvation Army serving as "bell ringers" raising over \$400 to help needy families in Plainville...MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF AND PTC MEMBERS raised \$580 enabling them to deliver three gift bags to the Plainville Community Food Pantry for local families over the holidays...THE PHS BIOMEDICAL CLUB and F.B.L.A. collected toys to donate to the Hospital of Central Connecticut and Bristol Hospital pediatric wards for children hospitalized during the holidays...PHS DECA MEMBERS helped prep and serve meals for the needy and clear tables at the Plainville Congregational Church's "Food For Friends" event...LINDEN'S STUDENT COUNCIL held a toy drive, collecting a number of toys and gifts for the Plainville Community Food Pantry...THE HIGH SCHOOL'S STUDENT COUNCIL held a canned food drive for the Plainville Community Food Pantry...THE PHS Y.E.S. CLUB sponsored a book drive to benefit our elementary schools.

Let's Chat With... Andrea Saunders, BOE Member



What is your top priority as a Board member? One of my top priorities is to help better the communication between the BOE and the community.

What is the biggest challenge facing public education today?

In today's economy, the toughest challenge facing education is trying to balance the needs of the schools with the declining town and state budgets.

Why did you want to become a Board member?

I have always believed strongly that in order for kids to become productive citizens, they need to have a good, quality education. I want to be able to help in

that process.

What have you enjoyed most about being a Board member? I have really enjoyed getting to know my fellow board members as well as Superintendent Binkowski and all of the school administrators.

What is your vision for Plainville Community Schools? The vision I see for Plainville schools is to provide our kids with the best education possible in a safe and secure learning environment.

What do you feel will be your greatest contribution to the Board of Education? With an accounting and business background, I hope to utilize some of that knowledge to help me through my first budget process.

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Budget (Continued from Page 2)

The report shows that Plainville's 10-year annualized effective tax rate increase was 2.32%. This increase places Plainville well below the rate of inflation over the last 10 years (2.81%) and the median tax rate increase among Connecticut's 169 cities and towns (3.68%). The lowest 10-year tax increase occurred in Salisbury (1.52%) and the highest in Sprague (7.10%). The only town in the area with a lower tax rate increase over the last 10 years was Berlin with an increase of 2.01%. Increases in our neighboring towns include: Southington (3.78%), Bristol (2.80%), New Britain (2.85%) and

Farmington (3.63%).

Second, a recent report completed by the UConn Department of Economics and published in *The Connecticut Economy* shows that Plainville has a very high level of efficiency when taking into account inputs such as administrator to student ratios, teacher to student ratios, numbers of computers, and annual hours of instruction, and measuring those inputs against cohort growth in test scores. The report shows that Plainville has the exact same administrator to student ratio as the state average and is below the state average in our teacher to

student ratio. In spite of this, Plainville has above average output scores in reading, writing and math. However, a key point to this study is that districts that are running close to peak efficiency cannot improve results without adding additional staff and cannot lose additional staff without negatively impacting student growth. Therefore, while Plainville Community Schools has continued to achieve success over the years in spite of declining resources, it is imperative that the district keep the resources we currently have and build upon our successes to improve programs.



PLAINVILLE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Kathleen Binkowski, Ph.D.
 Superintendent of Schools

Board Members:

Kirby Deegan
Jesse Gnazzo
Anthony Goldberg
Lorri Goldsmith
Cheryl Provost
Patrick Ringrose
Andrea Saunders
Becky Tyrrell
Barbara Willard

*View taped Board of
 Education meetings on
 Nutmeg TV, 6pm,
 Tuesdays & Saturdays
 on Educational Access
 Channel 95.
Schedule:
 February 9 & 13
 March 9 & 13
 April 13 & 17
 May 11 & 15
 June 15 & 19*

Belief Statements

We believe:

- that a quality school system is the core of our community and increases the quality of our lives
- in a safe, caring learning environment that respects individual difference and rejects discrimination of any form
- that optimal achievement for all learners is a responsibility shared by home, school and community
- that all students, faculty, staff, and parents are accountable to participate and maintain a positive learning environment throughout the district
- a high quality curriculum emphasizes the arts, literacy, and technology
- effective communication and collaboration builds trust and respect