

Spotlight on Woodstock Education

Town Boards and Community “Meet and Greet” to be held! The Woodstock Board of Education invites the Woodstock community to join us and your other elected officials at an informal “Meet and Greet” event to be held on Thursday, January 31, 2008 at the Inn at Woodstock Hill, from 7:00 p.m.- 9:00 p.m.

The purpose of this event is purely social. We hope our citizens and our elected board and commission members and other officials will better get to know each other as individuals, away from the constructs of official roles and responsibilities. Trustees of the Woodstock Academy are invited, as is our Superintendent, Dr. Francis Baran, and the Headmaster of Woodstock Academy, Mr. Rich Foye. A cash bar will be available, along with light snacks. The Woodstock Middle School Jazz Band (see below) will be featured with a performance around 7:30 p.m..

Please note that this is a social event and not a “Public Meeting.” To comply with requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, elected officials may not discuss town or board- related business.

Mr. Richard Naumann of The Inn at Woodstock Hill is generously making available this lovely venue and is donating light refreshments to make this event possible.

To help us plan, we ask that you please R.S.V.P. to let us know if you will attend. Please respond by Thursday, January 24 to WBOE Secretary Mrs. Carol Andrzejcik at 928- 7816 or andrzejcik@woodstockschoools.net. Space is limited.

We look forward to seeing you on January 31st.

Sincerely,
The Woodstock Board of Education

Student Highlights: Woodstock Middle School Jazz Band

Come hear them swing! The Woodstock Middle School Jazz Band will be featured on Thursday, January 31st at 7:30p.m. at the “Meet and Greet” at the Inn at Woodstock Hill. The Jazz Band was formed by WMS band director Tim Cassell one year ago to provide an alternative instrumental style to the school’s young musicians. The Jazz Band has rehearsed pieces that include Blues, Swing, Big Band, Latin and Fusion styles. Along with learning concert repertoire, the group develops fundamental jazz approaches such as rhythm and improvisation. Seventh and eighth graders auditioned for a place in the band. Members include: on Trumpet: Thomas Green, Victor Strama, Liam Adams, Dylan O’Hara, Katherine Hatch; on Alto Sax: Oliver Kelly, Cassie Guilani; Zachary Bartolomei, Katie Houlihan; on Tenor Sax: Timothy Syriac, Katie Walsh; on Baritone Sax: Jeffrey Pilipaitis; on Trombone: Nathan Giamundo, Matthew Wendel; on Guitar: Andrew Hebert; on Bass: Max O’Neil; on Drum: Tyler LaChappelle, Wendell Butler; and on Keyboard: Amber Kelly.

Question to the WBOE: How do I express my concerns and suggestions to the Woodstock Board of Education and get a response?

The Woodstock Board of Education (WBOE) strongly encourages parent and community involvement in setting educational priorities and in executing on key initiatives. We are also receptive to hearing your concerns, complaints and ideas. Community input is critical in defining our educational vision and improving student achievement. Several means exist for citizens to provide input, and several exist for the WBOE to respond.

The newly-created “Ask the Board” forum receives comments, suggestions and questions from the community and will respond in this column, and on our website, as feasible and appropriate. (Contact asktheboard@woodstockschoools.net or mail to the WBOE’s attention, 147a Rt. 169, Woodstock, CT 06281.)

Additionally, the WBOE welcomes comments from the public during the two “Citizens’ Participation” sessions scheduled in regular meetings. This venue can be frustrating because it is a one-way street and, in general, we are not able to respond to questions here. Citizens’ Participation is a valuable means of collecting input from the public. We don’t engage in discussion in this venue for several reasons. First of all, WBOE communications with the community should be discussed and represent a majority view of the Board. This is not possible within the confines of Citizens’ Participation. While each Board member is entitled to his/her own opinions and positions, in general, only with majority consensus does the Board speak as a whole. Secondly, while citizens can speak to any matter during Citizens’ Participation, the WBOE is limited in its meetings to discussing only those topics on its agenda. Thirdly, sometimes a citizen’s question will require information to be gathered, researched or analyzed. In these instances the Board may direct Dr. Baran (or a Board subcommittee) to gather the information and report back in a later meeting. Dr. Baran is always available for questions and discussion from parents and from the community. He can be reached at the address above, or at 928-7453, or at baranf@woodstockschoools.net.

Citizens are also welcome at all subcommittee meetings and generally will be added to the agenda if requested. Finally, Board members are free to discuss educational issues with members of the community in their capacity as private citizens; s/he would not be representing the Board in that instance.

Occasionally the WBOE convenes task forces or community forums to investigate major initiatives. These provide opportunities for the public to participate in the evaluation and formation of significant initiatives. This was recently done with the Ninth Grade Proposal Evaluation and with the Long Range Planning Facilities Feasibility Study, and the public was encouraged to attend and comment as the WBOE developed its goals last spring.

CMT and NCLB

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a school reform law, enacted by the Bush administration, that changes the federal government’s role in kindergarten through grade twelve education by asking America’s schools to describe their success in terms of what each student accomplishes. NCLB mandates that each state is responsible for implementing measurable academic standards for every child in the areas of reading, math, and science for elementary through high schools. In accordance

with the requirements of NCLB, Connecticut administers the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) in Math and Reading to grades three through eight and began administering a science CMT in 2008 in grades five and eight. Tenth graders take the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT).

Under NCLB, the Woodstock Public Schools are expected to make adequate yearly progress toward meeting the state standards. This progress is measured for all students. Additionally, students are subdivided by economic disadvantage, racial or ethnic minority, disabilities, or limited English proficiency. Woodstock has consistently made adequate yearly progress. However, we are currently in “safe harbor,” essentially a warning zone, for the subdivisions of students with economic disadvantages and with disabilities. Failing to make adequate yearly progress would lead to increasing intervention from the state level in the local school administration and education of Woodstock’s students. NCLB mandates that schools increase the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency in each subject year over year with the end goal of 100% proficiency by 2014.

In 2008, the Woodstock Public Schools performed better than the state proficiency averages in every grade and in every subject. Depending on the subject, Woodstock’s students performed anywhere from 3 percentage points to 16 percentage points better than the state wide average. Over the last three years, Woodstock has outperformed the state averages in every subject, and for the first administration of the science CMT, 98% of Woodstock’s fifth graders and 95% of Woodstock’s eighth graders were proficient compared to 81 and 75 for the state averages respectively. And in math, Woodstock’s students are at least 98% proficient at every grade level. However, there is still work to be done. In particular, there were significant drops in the number of third and fourth graders performing at proficient or higher in reading when compared to the 2007 results. In addition, in writing, students in the fifth, sixth and eighth grades had lower percentages when compared to results from 2007.

One of the major drawbacks of the NCLB accountability process is that the results are compared over time by grade level. This means that the scores of this year’s third grade class, for example, will be compared to the results from last year’s third grade class. This can be misleading as it fails to account for the differences in the composition of each class. Starting this year, Woodstock has begun to compare the CMT results longitudinally, i.e. how do the results from this year’s fourth grade compare to their results last year in third grade. While this comparison is not relevant to NCLB goals it does allow the district to assess class’s progression year over year. The results from this year’s comparison varied widely across grade levels. Over time, we expect that this method of analyzing student improvement will compliment the analysis required in NCLB and better help us target student achievement and progress.

Each year, the administration, in conjunction with the math and language arts coordinators, develops a school improvement plan designed to continue Woodstock’s upward trajectory of improvement. This year’s plan was presented to the Board at its October 23rd meeting. The plan targets specific competencies within each subject and within each grade level. CMT scores from the previous year are analyzed in depth and areas in need of improvement are identified. Specific action steps and performance goals, tied to state standards, are developed for each subject and grade level. Teachers and the math and language arts coordinators use this analysis and information in planning instruction, reviewing lesson plans and assessing student progress in all subject areas.

While the ultimate goal of the school improvement plan is to attain adequate yearly progress in the CMT's, the process of improvement has much broader impact on student achievement in general.

For more specific information on the CMT and CAPT results or NCLB please refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education's website, the district website or call the Superintendent's office.