

October 2006



BEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# Superintendent's Bulletin

## From the Superintendent of Schools

Each fall we return to school energized by the summer break and eager to begin the important work of providing optimum opportunities for the children we serve. Since the inception of MCAS rankings and AYP ratings, we also return awaiting word from the Department of Education as to whether or not we have “made the grade” as a system and in each of our schools in terms of Adequate Yearly Progress. To date, Bedford has made adequate progress in terms of the state and national goals. However, as we await the official notification each year, we do so knowing that the closer we get to 2014 and the expectation for universal proficiency in both the aggregate and the subgroups, the more challenging it becomes for us to achieve the standards the state of Massachusetts has adopted as part of NCLB. While we can take pride in the fact that our state has set performance standards that are among the highest in the nation, we do so knowing that most Massachusetts schools will be labeled as “failing” sometime in the next eight years.

In June 2005 MassPartners for Public Schools issued a chilling report, Facing Reality, citing the inevitability of that failure. That report, which was endorsed by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, the state’s Principal Associations (MESPA and MSSAA), the state’s Teachers’ Associations (MTA and MFT) and the Massachusetts Parent Teacher Association, outlines a statistical trajectory to failure. This report draws the conclusion that by 2014, 1286 (74%) of the schools in the state will fail to make AYP in either the aggregate, the subgroups, or both.

As I consider the implications of this for Bedford, I do so with the perspective of an educator who welcomed the Education Reform Act of 1993, the launching of the standards movement and the focus on ensuring an equitable “opportunity to learn” for each and every child we serve. As an educator, I believe that disaggregating student achievement data helps us identify cohort groups that may be underserved in our schools. What I take exception to, however, is the exclusive use of MCAS data as the only measure of achievement for a student, a school, or a school district. In the MassPartners report, Facing Reality, the authors highlight some standardized indicators of success that, I believe, should be part of our state and national “report card” as mandated by NCLB. Those indicators include:

**NAEP Performance:** Massachusetts’s 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders are first in the nation in reading as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

**SAT and ACT Performance:** Massachusetts is one of the top four states in terms of the preparation of high school graduates with scores in the top 20 percent on both the SAT and ACT college entrance exams; and

**Advanced Placement Exam Performance:** Massachusetts’s students have the fourth highest average Advanced Placement scores in the nation.

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I endorse the MassPartners position that we need to broaden our look at student achievement by including multiple measures for assessing that achievement. Let's hope that decision makers at the state level consider that perspective before 74% of our schools are labeled as failing.

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## Teaching to Content Affinities

Mel Levine on Teaching to Students' Strengths

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In an interview with pediatrician/author Mel Levine, *Educational Leadership* editor Marge Sherer elicits the following points:

"For the most part, adults who are leading worthy lives are doing so by mobilizing their strengths and affinities," says Levine. "If we want to prepare kids for adulthood, one of the most important things we can do is to celebrate their strengths, those assets with which they're going to find meaning in life and be able to make contributions... One of the main goals of education is helping kids over time figure out who they are."

It's vital to identify children's "content affinities," says Levine. "A content affinity is an area of content toward which a child is drawn for some obscure reason. A particular kid loves cars. Someone else is into sports statistics. Another child loves fashion... When I was a little boy, I loved animals... By the way, parents don't get to pick affinities. Affinities just arrive on the scene and you wonder where they came from or where this kid came from."

Affinities can be a golden opportunity to improve skills, says Levine. "It's been shown that the best way to learn how to read well is to read about something you know a lot about and feel passionate about. One of the ways we can leverage skills is by continually pegging them to a child's affinities... An awful lot of important skills can ride the coattails of your affinities. If you combine affinities with strengths, you begin to carve out a potential career."

"If I were the principal of a school, I would establish a policy that every 4<sup>th</sup> grader picks a topic he's going to stick with. And at the end of three years, the student makes a series of formal presentations. In the meantime, he reads every book in the library on spiders, and he does three art projects and four science projects on spiders. When the family goes on vacation, they photograph spider webs. And at school when there's spider in the boys' restroom, he's called in for a consultation."

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## Elementary Mathematics by Sarah Dorer



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### Assessment

In grades K-5, teachers begin the school year by administering Beginning-of-the-Year Math Assessments to all students. These assessments are designed to assess the number sense of our students. In Kindergarten, this is just an individual interview with a few activities. Later in the year, additional questions are added. In grades one and two, the assessments are a combination of individual 15-20 minutes oral interviews and a few written tasks. In grades 3-5, these assessments are in written form only. The data from these assessments is recorded for each class and used to inform instruction. In the beginning of the year, it is useful to see how much students have remembered from the year before and how much they already know about the curriculum for the upcoming year. This way we can structure review material where and when it is appropriate. These assessments are also used as one measure to identify students for our Title I Math Remediation program, as well as those students who are on the other end of the spectrum and already know much of the material for the year. In this way, we can work to provide students with the instruction that they need.

### New Kindergarten Program

The Kindergarten team has adopted a new math program entitled "Bridges in Mathematics" created by the Math Learning Company out of Oregon. This is the first curriculum that our Kindergarten teachers have found that combines solid math concepts and number practice in a developmentally appropriate manner for Kindergarten. All teachers have already spent time preparing all the

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materials, and previewing the few several months of the school year. The teachers will be receiving Professional Development from the Math Learning Company learning consultants as the year progresses. The teachers are very excited about this new program. It has received very positive reviews from other school districts that have implemented it.

### **Pilot Program**

At the same time as the Kindergarten teachers have adopted the Bridges program for the K math curriculum, we have decided to pilot the First and Second grade components of the same curriculum in two first and second grade classrooms. The piloting teachers are evaluating the several components of this program to see whether we should move to adopting any part of the program for future years.

### **MCAS Review**

Careful analysis of the Spring 2006 Math MCAS scores occurs as soon as the complete data is returned to the schools (usually late September – early October). Data is analyzed and shared with all classroom teachers at the elementary level (yes, even the Kindergarten teachers) to help inform instruction for the year. The MCAS results for each grade in Math and ELA are reviewed for the town at a School Committee meeting later in the fall. If interested, try to attend that meeting.



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## **Social Justice Themes at JGMS** by Brendan Desilets

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During their language arts classes at John Glenn Middle School, students discuss all sorts of literary themes, ranging from serious issues of human relations to comic views of the foibles of humankind. In each of their years at JGMS, all students experience important readings that deal with social justice themes.

Sixth graders, for example, read Katherine Patterson's renowned historical novel *Lyddie*, in which a Vermont girl moves to Lowell, Massachusetts to work in a cotton mill. Here, she encounters a variety of social injustices, some focusing on newly-arrived immigrants, others on the oppression of workers in general. In Paul Fleischman's *Bull Run*, students experience the first battle of the American Civil War, from the viewpoints of sixteen characters, including a Confederate colonel, the sister of a Union recruit, and an African American infantry soldier. In the process, young readers face enduring issues of war and peace.

Many older students explore social justice issues in the context of another famous historical novel for young adults, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* by Elizabeth George Speare. In this award-winning book a teenaged girl named Kit Tyler faces dangerous prejudice in colonial Connecticut. Like *Lyddie*, Kit develops a friendship with a Quaker; but, in 1687, such a relationship is extremely risky.

JGMS students sometimes confront social issues in briefer pieces of reading, too. These pieces include writings on Native

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American experiences, such as “And Then I Went to School” by Joe Suina, and “I Won’t Be Celebrating Columbus Day” by Susan Shown Harjo. Short stories, such as “The Scarlet Ibis” and “Flowers for Algernon,” involve many students in discussions of disability issues; and Dick Gregory’s “Not Poor, Just Broke” offers a perspective on discrimination against the poor in America.

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## Reading Department by Susan Rozen & Linda Volpicelli

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### Reading Department New Staff

The Reading Team has had a very busy summer with new and exciting developments in curriculum and staffing. Two new team members were added, Rachel Fawson and Jennifer Wayne-Bartlett. Rachel, a graduate of Boston College, will be working at JGMS with Sarah Crosby and Robin Talkowski. Rachel brings with her a love of teaching middle school and an eagerness to work with teachers and administrators at JGMS. She is working towards a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in Literacy at Simmons College. We are equally excited to have Jennifer shift gears and join the Reading Department team at Davis School. Jennifer taught first grade for four years at Davis, and Kindergarten for one year.

### Massachusetts Department of Education: Secondary Reading Grant

In addition to these staffing additions, the Reading Department had a busy summer bringing teacher training and new curriculum to the classroom. To further work on the *Secondary Reading in the Classroom* initiative that began two years ago at JGMS and BHS, Sarah Crosby, Susan Rozen, and Robin Talkowski applied for a new grant from the Massachusetts Department of Education. For the third consecutive year the district has been fortunate to receive grant funds that will allow the two schools to continue this important initiative.

Last year the Reading Leadership Teams, consisting of teachers and specialists from the middle and high school, worked on implementing a program of ongoing assessment in the classroom. At the middle school the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills) was introduced to the 6th grade to assess student’s fluency and comprehension. This fall the middle school team will have Carol Tolman, an educator and consultant, come to the school to present on the use of data to guide instruction.

At the high school, the GRADE (a test of vocabulary, comprehension and listening skills) was implemented at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level with plans to have the same students tested in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. The GRADE will be scored at the school on a Scantron and results will be made available to teachers and administrators (Ken Lord is designing a database to be used by the District this fall). The purpose of this is to guide instruction and screen for students with reading difficulties. Nicole d’Entremont, High School Reading Specialist and Kristen Tocci, High School English teacher, are assisting the English

department in the administration of this assessment to all 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students this year.

This coming year the high school and middle school teams will work on content-specific reading strategies and skills, and then subsequently introduce these strategies and skills to content area teachers. Susan Rozen will provide strategies to team members as well as the background and knowledge they need to teach reading in the content areas. Team members are Jake Sullivan (History Department Chair), Christine Larimore (Math), Clint Huff (Math), Nicole d’Entremont (Reading), Kristen Tocci (English), Justin Jourdan (English), Deborah Savarino (SPED), Rich Carson (ROTC), and Heather Kurzman (Science). Sarah Crosby and Robin Talkowski will provide strategies and instruction in reading skills to their leadership team. Team members are Rachel Fawson (Reading), Beth Gurney (SPED), Paul Loscocco (504 and Study Skills), Brendan Desilets (English), Joe Casey (Social Studies), Charlie Pucopolo (Science), and Nadine Coletta (Science). Support from Jayne Rotsko at the middle school and from Jon Sills at the high school has made the work of the team possible.

### Massachusetts Department of Education: DOE Content Institute Grant: Tragedy and Hope: Investigating the Human Condition through Drama, Fiction and Poetry

For the past six years Bedford has been fortunate to be the recipient of funds to implement a Massachusetts Department of Education funded summer Content Institute. As part of the summer Content Institute, professors and specialists come to Bedford to teach 35 teachers from both Bedford and districts throughout Massachusetts. Professors from Harvard University, Boston University, and the University of Washington, who are experts in their fields, presented Macbeth, Night, Medea, Antigone, To the Lighthouse, and The Things They Carry to the attendees. An interdisciplinary unit in Expressionism in literature, art, theatre, music, and film was taught. A doctoral student of Elie Wiesel from B.U. teamed with a classics professor, and presented the Judeo-Christian view of tragedy versus the Greek and Roman classical view of tragedy. Also, a specialist from Brookline High School taught the art of the Socratic Seminar and another taught how to bring drama

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into the classroom. In addition, Susan Rozen instructed teachers in the development of curriculum units using DOE standards and the use of creating lessons based on backward design pedagogy. Susan also presented strategies for reading difficult text and Dennis Walsh taught aspects of technology and assisted teachers in the use of MassONE, the DOE set of web-based tools designed to support PreK-12 standards-based teaching and learning. Participants will present their curriculum units during fall workshops run by Susan Rozen.

### **Curriculum Workshop: Developing a Linguistic Curriculum, 6 – 12**

Susan Rozen, Robin Talkowski, Nicole d'Entremont, Rachel Fawson, and Ellen Ratichet met this summer to begin the development of a grade 6 – 12 curriculum for teaching phonics and structural analysis because a number of secondary students are still having difficulty decoding and understanding multi-syllabic words found in their content area classroom texts. When these students reach middle school or high school and the texts and vocabulary become more difficult, their underlying decoding problems become evident. In many cases these students are otherwise high achievers who have compensated for their difficulties. Even students who have received instruction in phonics in the earlier grades may need reinforcement of these skills as they proceed through their school years.

Phonics skills such as the ability to use decoding rules to sound out unfamiliar words, will be taught and reinforced through a sequential program embedded in grade appropriate vocabulary lessons, thus students will learn new vocabulary as they learn these skills. Supplemental lessons will be developed for high school students to introduce decoding of more advanced multi-syllabic words.

In addition to reinforcing phonics skills, understanding the component parts of words and their derivative meanings will help students remember the words as well as recognize and understand new words. Structural analysis skills such as the ability to use familiar word parts such as base words, prefixes, and suffixes, and the ability to use Greek and Latin roots and affixes to help to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words will also be taught as part of the curriculum. Both instruction in phonetic rules and structural analysis will also help develop better spelling skills. Robin Talkowski provided the model for the format, scope, and sequence of the lessons.

### **DIBELS Update**

Last year Bedford began an assessment initiative that involves every classroom teacher in grades K – 6. Each year students will be given DIBELS, which is a three-minute fluency screening (fluency is an indicator of student's ability to orally read words with automaticity and is important indicator of reading ability). The classroom teacher individually administers the DIBELS to each student three times a year in the fall, winter, and spring. Results are used for progress monitoring, scheduling decisions for the upcoming year, and as an indicator of which students need

specialized instruction.

Andrea Salipante and Robin Talkowski trained teachers on this during workshop days. This initiative has meant much work on the part of principals, reading specialists, and classroom teachers. At the Davis this summer, Jenny Brown, Davis principal, worked with Susan Rozen to further plans for the continuation of the use of DIBELS in the classroom. Andrea Salipante, with Jennifer Wayne-Lawton's assistance, also organized a full workshop day for all teachers K-2 in which teachers practiced administering the test. Andrea and Jennifer were assisted by Pat Flaherty-Dawson and Valerie Flannery (Grade 2), Marcia Hall and Susan Nocera (Grade 1), and Tom Flaherty-Dawson and Jane Lang (Kindergarten) all of whom worked with their grade level teachers. Jenny Brown gave an introduction and overview.

As part of the New Teacher Orientation day, Sarah Crosby trained the incoming elementary teachers in the use of DIBELS. Sarah trained teachers to both use the assessment and make instructional decisions, such as grouping, based on students' results.

On August 31, 2006 another workshop, lead by Linda Volpicelli and Susan Breslin, was held for all Lane School grade level teachers, SPED teachers, and teaching assistants. This workshop incorporated a review of DIBELS and practice with the assessment procedures. In addition to the DIBELS training, the workshop included reading, phonics instruction, writing, and assessment. The newly revised 6 Trait Writing rubric and exemplars were presented. Through grade-level discussions teachers were able to ask questions and feel comfortable with the revised writing rubric and the scoring process.

This year a stronger emphasis is being placed on phonics at Lane School. Linda Volpicelli and Susan Breslin provided teachers with instruction on the six syllable types and how they can incorporate them into their spelling and vocabulary lessons in grades 3-5. Syllable types were explained and sorting games were played to assure the confidence level of each teacher.

### **A Look Ahead: Curriculum Trainings and Initiatives**

Jennifer Wayne-Bartlett began her job with training in *Project Read* which was selected as the program of choice for Jennifer's work with at-risk students.

What use to be a small group of six student Reading tutors from the high school has expanded and 14 high school seniors will be going to Lane, Davis, and Hanscom to help classroom teachers and specialists in grades 1 – 4.

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Jennifer Wayne-Bartlett and Andrea Salipante have scheduled a welcome-back meeting for the Davis Senior Tutors Program on September 29. Twenty-five tutors are expected to attend and be ready to begin working with children by the end of October. Jennifer and Andrea will also be attending the Lesley University Literacy For All conference in November.

Robin Talkowski and Sarah Crosby will be attending a training for trainers of CRISS; this will enable them to teach CRISS strategies to teachers at the JGMS. CRISS is a program designed to teach teachers important reading strategies.



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## Elementary Science by Lenore Zavalick

Goals for the 2006-2007 academic year include collecting common assessments and open-response questions for major Science units. We will continue our practice of aligning curriculum to state frameworks, as well as reviewing MCAS results in order to find out which concepts require more review and instruction throughout the school year. Grade 2 teachers just received a \$2,500 grant from the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council to build upon the suc-

cess of Cattail Corner by educating the community in the local river and watershed. Teachers' objective is to use these scenic rivers to "increase awareness and understanding of the river's ecology and natural history".

The big news in the Science world is Pluto's demotion to a "dwarf planet"! Lane School teachers have been provided with several internet links providing information for kids and teachers that explains this change to the solar

system. A new mnemonic device will have to be created to help kids remember the order of the planets without Pluto. Ongoing work throughout the school year includes taking inventory of all science units, K-5, to be sure that teachers have the necessary materials for success. Teachers at all grade levels will be working with the curriculum coordinator as we examine the scope and sequence of our Science units.

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## JGMS Science by Brad Smithson

The science department is very excited to be offering a diverse program of enrichment activities this year. We are beginning to gear up several of our exciting programs. After a successful first year, the Olympiad team will begin preparing for this year's competition in early October. This program is for students who are experiencing success in their science classes and enjoy challenges and friendly competition between several other local schools on projects such as suspension bridges, bug identification, and rockets. Another program that will be starting soon is the Science Fair. This after school activity is open to all grades, and is a chance for the students to further explore a topic that interests them. In its fourth year, the fair has been enjoyed by many students in the past and we are looking forward to another great year!

Last spring Ms. Coletta and Mr. McGrath took 22 students to Florida for a hands-on science trip. The students had a great time exploring the Everglades, snorkeling, swimming with the dolphins, and learning about the aquatic ecosystem. This year a trip is being planned for over the April break to the Grand Canyon and Zion national parks, where the students will be learning about and experiencing natural formations and the desert environment.

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## Elementary Social Studies by Karen Lerra



On September 18<sup>th</sup> students celebrated Constitution Day and Citizenship Day at Lane School. The purpose of this holiday is to honor the rights, privileges, and responsibilities that we have as American citizens as outlined in the Constitution. Students at Lane read and discussed the book, *We the Kids* by David Catrow. It is an engaging picture book about the Preamble to the Con-

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stitution of the United States. It helps children understand the words contained within the document and the ideas behind them. Students at Davis have started a new tradition. A few students each day lead the school in a recitation of the "Pledge of Allegiance" and raise the flag. In addition they have implemented a new school-wide behavior plan that supports the concepts of citizenship and responsibility. Students watched a PowerPoint presentation that reviews the three R's: respectful, responsible, and ready.

Over the summer, work began on the Grade Five Social Studies curriculum. The focus will now be the American Revolution. Students will learn about the important events and people of this time as outlined in the Massachusetts frameworks. A new draft of a scope and sequence was created this summer along with the first unit. Work will be ongoing this year at grade level meetings to complete the modified curriculum.

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## Schools to Careers by Marcia Burns

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Mike Barbacano, a current member of the senior class at Bedford High School had a wonderful experience this summer! For quite a while he has been interested in a career in Law Enforcement. Last year, he was the most faithful participant in the Criminal Justice Speaker Series run during X-Block. While participating in the speaker series, Mike became aware of the Massachusetts State Police Student Trooper Program. The program is run every summer at the Massachusetts State Police Academy, for the purpose of giving high school students a taste of what cadet training is really like.

In order to apply for the program, students must be sponsored by their local American Legion. In Mike's case, the Sons of the Legion at the Bedford American Legion sponsored him, and also shared his tuition costs along with the Officers of the Bedford Police Department.

He describes his week spent by rising at 5:30 a.m., running 2 miles, doing several series of push-ups, sits-ups, high jumps and bench presses, and being told when to do everything (when to start eating, when to stop eating, and to go to bed every night at 10 p.m.) as "the greatest thing" he has ever done!

In addition to the physical fitness portion of the program, Mike got to experience first-hand all aspects of the Massachusetts State Police. He observed officers practicing at the shooting range, saw the Emergency Vehicle Operation (EVO) Course, witnessed the Airborne Division, the SWAT Team, and the Canine and Motorcycle Units.

He listened to presentations about Drunk Driving, Breath-Alcohol Testing (BrAT), Drug and Alcohol Testing, learned about Internet Crimes against children, as well as Internet Security. He even learned how to make a proper Arrest! With great confidence Mike is able to say he "definitely wants law enforcement as a career."

The Bedford Public School are most grateful to the Sons of the Legion at the Bedford American Legion, and the Officers of the Bedford Police Department for their support.

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## BHS Early Childhood Education Program by Marcia Burns

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The Bedford High School Nursery School held its annual Open House on Friday, September 8<sup>th</sup> giving the parents, nursery school students, high school students, and staff the opportunity to get acquainted. The following Monday, the school doors opened with everyone feeling quite comfortable!

Thirteen children are enrolled in the Nursery School this year. Two classes of high school students assist in the Nursery School as they study early childhood education and child development. A number of high school students are also enrolled as C.A.S.E. and

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BHNS Interns, which allows them to assist in either the preschool run by the C.A.S.E. Collaborative or the Bedford High Nursery School.

Four high school juniors and seniors, who have completed one of the early childhood major courses at BHS, are taking part in a Practicum experience this year at the Davis Primary School. They are gaining additional early childhood classroom experience working with either a speech pathologist or in a kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class. Without the support of the teachers and administrators of Davis, this experience would not be possible.

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## Promise of Differentiating Instruction by Carol Ann Tomlinson

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Common sense and research suggest that responsive or differentiated instruction benefits learners. It's easy to get so mired in educational jargon and debates about particular approaches to teaching that we forget to draw on the common sense of the classroom. In regard to what we now call "differentiation," for example, we might do well to ask a few straightforward questions. Is it likely that a student will learn fractions in a one-size-fits-all classroom if that student has never mastered subtraction or division? Is it likely that a student will master a 7th-grade spelling list if her spelling skills hover around a 3rd-grade level? Is a student who reads like a high school student likely to have a productive year in a reading program that assumes everyone should move lock-step through a 4th-grade reader?

The observable experience of teachers and their students indicates there is a daily need to examine learner status with regard to desired outcomes so that instruction can be tailored for success. Much of differentiation draws on practices that are at the core of specialty area practices. In effectively differentiated classrooms, teachers use a variety of graphic organizers, reading materials at different levels of complexity, direct instruction in small groups, curriculum compacting, up-front teaching of vocabulary to support reading success, and so on. These approaches - and others like them - have been found effective in the specialty areas of special education, reading,



gifted education, and second language instruction.

Considerable research indicates that students learn best when they work with materials and tasks at a moderate level of challenge for them as individuals, that the motivation to learn is enhanced when student interests are linked to desired outcomes, and that students learn more efficiently when learning preferences are addressed in classrooms.

While most teachers persist with single-size approaches to instructing diverse students populations, both research and everyday observation provide ample evidence that many students are ill-served in such classrooms. We are repeatedly disappointed by test scores indicating a shortfall in student achievement. More disappointing is the number of students from varied economic and cultural backgrounds and achievement levels who become disenchanted with learning because school has failed to connect with them as individual learners.

*Teacher leaders can help educators hurdle four key barriers to implementation JSD, Fall 2005 (Vol. 26, No. 4) Copyright, National Staff Development Council, 2005.*

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## Art Department by Aleta Devaney



The K-12 Art Department is continuing to work on using technology in K-12 art classes. Project MEET is the district initiative guided by Bedford's technology specialist, Sue Collins. MEET teachers learn to incorporate technology into their curriculum in new and effective ways. Whitney Davis (BHS) and Paul Harrington (JGMS) are veterans of the MEET program and Aleta Devaney (HS) and Jill Frazier (Davis) will participate in the MEET program for the first time this year. Bedford High School and the Davis School have site licenses for Core fx, a graphic design and digital art software program with graduated levels of difficulty; making it appropriate for K-12. Aleta Devaney and Jill Frazier will be working on projects in MEET for the high school and elementary levels that will involve students using Core fx and the laptop cart. The student Core fx experience will be expanded with the use of "drawing tablets" some of which were purchased with a generous grant from Art Link, a parents group in Bedford formed to support the visual arts.

There is a new colorful Wetlands Mural at Davis School with over 200 drawings of wetland animals drawn by children at Davis School from the last two years. Jill Frazier, a professional muralist, Colette Shuman-Smith, and parent volunteers, were responsible for the completion of the mural. Jill Frazier obtained funding for the mural from Millipore Corporation, Art Link, BEST and The Bedford Public Schools. To find out more information about the mural, please go to [cattailcorner.blogspot.com](http://cattailcorner.blogspot.com). Click on the links below to view videos of the mural.



Delanie, Age 6

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## Physical Education Department by Jackie Supprise

As your students get older you may hear less and less of what is happening in their school day. We hope you are hearing about their physical education experience. It is no longer the "gym" classes you may have experienced. Physical education has undergone a paradigm shift. No longer is athletic prowess and speed the emphasis of physical education. Students are learning the skills necessary to maintain a healthy lifestyle beyond their school days.

At Davis school students are identifying the body parts that are being exercised, learning the value of exercise, and how play can be exercise. At Lane school students are plugging in and hooking up with technology. How many steps do you take in a day? The average healthy person should take about 10,000 steps a day. Lane school students are watching the number of steps they take during physical activity through the use of pedometers. The Middle School Physical Education staff members have been busy writing and receiving grant funds to provide new technology and programs. Middle school students are having wide and varied experiences. Cup stacking with Speed Stacks to improve eye hand coordination and promote brain activity and heart rate monitors to learn pacing are helping our students at John Glenn Middle School develop skills to support their growth and selection of recreational activities.

High School students are selecting courses based on their interests and own pursuits in physical activity. The more athletically and fitness minded may choose cross training to improve their speed, power, and agility. Students can select cooperative activities for a more recreational experience, or dance to pursue dance interests. Emergency training is available through athletic training and CPR and safety training. Those students interested in an exploratory of athletic activities may select sports activities. All students are guided in these decisions through the fitness concepts requirements.

Whatever the interests, fitness level, or experience, Bedford Physical Education strives to provide your students with the skills and tools to lead healthy and active lives.

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## Assessment for Learning by Vince McKay

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With the arrival of the fall season, the school routines start to settle in. The sense of order that comes with those routines is quickly challenged with the start of the MCAS reporting season! The MCAS and AYP reports arrive on our desks around this time of year, an avalanche of data that we all try to make sense of. There's one pile of data with information on our present students and another pile for students past. How did our school's subgroups do? How did our school do? For those who hail from outside of Bedford, how did our hometown do?

As Maureen LaCroix describes in her accompanying article, the accountability movement has brought a real mixed bag of change to our public schools. The use of MCAS as the sole measure of student, school and district performance is certainly an issue. But in the push for standards, we have experienced a number of positive changes as well. We are, for example, more focused than ever on meeting the needs of our individual students. In doing so, we have brought new energy and focus to the area of assessment. Which brings with it, of course, another pile of data!

In my view, assessment data is meaningful to the extent that it can impact teachers' instruction in a way that helps them with their students, in their class, right now. For example, a student's MCAS scores from the previous year, broken down by content area, can yield some interesting clues into learning gaps that teachers could address. Teachers also have access to additional sets of assessment data – tied to our own curriculum – which improve the picture of student learning needs; this allows for an even better understanding of the student's needs. Research has shown that this type of intervention really works, particularly when teachers are analyzing this data in teams, building on each other's strengths about what strategies work best to reach all students. The effective use of this locally-developed assessment data, in conjunction with the various standardized test scores, is one of our major challenges as educators.

When I arrived in Bedford over the summer, I was pleased to discover a long list of quality assessments currently in use, or being rolled out, in the district. These include the newly implemented DIBELS literacy screening assessment that's being used in Kindergarten through grade six. It also includes a number of common assessments, most developed by our teachers, that are used at the end of units of study at all grade levels. Collecting all of this data is great, as it provides a very rich picture of student learning. This is especially true if the achievement data can show patterns of student progress over time. But the timely access to this data, in the context of a real teacher's actual workday, is where schools have always had difficulty.

One of my significant long-term projects is to develop some tools to improve Bedford teachers' access to all of this data. That is, I will be seeking ways to unify all of those separate piles of assessment reports. In my ideal system, teachers will have easy, desktop access to longitudinal information about students with the stroke of a computer key. I will certainly keep you informed of this data management project as it moves along this year. In the meantime, I ask everyone to continue to wade through those piles, to continue the very important work of looking at the interim assessment data and discussing the results with your colleagues.



Allison, Age 6