



# The Wallingford-Swarthmore District Newsletter

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## Students Welcome New Faces, See Familiar Ones in New Places

By Ferg Abbott, Director of Human Resources

Wallingford-Swarthmore School District had a very active hiring season this year, addressing many vacancies in our six schools and five buildings. Throughout the spring and summer, building and district staff worked to fill these positions by hiring 19 new employees, transferring 16 current employees to new positions, rehiring 10 individuals who had worked for the district in the past and combining several part-time positions. With an eye towards fiscal responsibility, the District saved close to a million dollars through retirements, and by leaving less critical positions unfilled.

Teachers new to the district go through an extensive hiring process that begins with the screening of resumes in two separate stages to determine which candidates should be interviewed. After the first interview, successful candidates perform demon-

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**Many of WSSD's newest employees met at an orientation session in late August.** From left to right: (front row) Erik Hollingsworth (SHHS), Abigail Polgardy (SHMS), Kaitlyn Cardell (SRS and WES), Jennifer Parmenter (WES), Kathleen McLead (SHHS); (second row) Jeff Kahn (SHHS), Julia Schrader (SHHS), Jacquelyn Angelucci (SHMS), Nancy Tang (SHHS and SHMS), Elizabeth Buongiorno (SHMS); (third row) Jeannie Pietrzak (SHHS), Rebecca Berman (WES), Ellen Yarborough (SHHS), Danielle Perricone-Munn (SHHS), Hadley Schmoyer (SRS); (back row) Courtney Lynch (SHMS), James McLaughlin (SHMS), Jenna Werley (SHHS), Dan Peterson (SHHS). Not pictured are additional new employees Emily Roggie (NPE), Morgan Segal (SHHS), Jennifer Vallieres (WES), Paulette Gehrman (SHHS), Kathleen Freeman (SHHS), Rebecca Haynie (NPE), Dominique Barclay (The Kids' Place), Chris Matsanka (SHMS), Lisa Palmer (Administration) and Angela Tuck (SRS).

## Chinese Classes Debut at High School and Middle School

Ready for something new? This fall, for the first time, WSSD students will be studying Chinese – the first non-European language ever in the district’s curriculum.

It is a departure for the district, but one that makes perfect sense, said Superintendent Rich Noonan: “I’m a big believer in expanding language programs, and there was strong interest in our district in Chinese language instruction. It’s just part of a larger movement in education, where there is an explosion of growth in learning non-western languages.”

Strath Haven High School Curriculum Director Mark Linkins concurred: “Given the importance of China on the international stage and as an economic power, this language is going to be valuable to our students in their lives after school. As with all languages we offer, culture and the roots of language and thought will be a component within this curriculum to provide students with a context for the study of Chinese.”

Nancy Tang has joined the staff as the teacher of Chinese in both the middle and high school. Nancy taught the language for three years at The International Academy in Troy, Michigan, and prior to that at the American Chinese School in Birmingham, Michigan.

“For students whose mother tongue is English or another western language, the difficulty of Chinese lies in two areas; one is phonetic tones; the other is the characters of its writing system,” Nancy noted. “I propose two principles for the beginner students for their first year: First, intensive training will be given to students at the phonetic stage, focusing on helping students establish the concept of tones. Second, talking comes before text reading; vocabulary learning comes before character identification; character identification comes before character writing. So besides speaking, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years of my teaching will be focused on reading and writing,”

At Strath Haven Middle School, 33 sixth graders represent the first class of students at the beginning of the language sequence. Two sections will take the class throughout the year, throughout middle school and into



Nancy Tang

high school. At the high school, 28 students comprise the Level One class for fall 2011 and spring 2012.

“I wasn’t sure what numbers to expect,” Mark Linkins said. A preliminary survey of students indicated a high level of interest, but there was attrition between the survey and registration, Mark said, perhaps due to a “novelty factor.” Also, high school students - already at least three years into another language program - face logistical difficulties when attempting to fit Chinese into their schedules. Consequently, most SHHS Chinese students are upperclassmen who have already completed foreign language requirements and take the classes as electives.

“Going forward, there will be more sections representing a progression of levels as the middle school cohort moves up through the curriculum,” Mark said. “We would like to offer an Advanced Placement (AP) class once we have students with the basis needed.”



## Bellow Speaks on Tech Tools in School

Teaching tools have evolved over time, from the slate and the abacus to the blackboard and the calculator. Now, the blackboard and the stick of chalk are becoming obsolete as well, replaced by “smart” whiteboards and projectors delivering digital information.

Not long from now, these too will be replaced by smaller, more portable devices carried by the students themselves, said technology guru and educator Adam Bellow in a lively, interactive presentation to K-12 teachers on the subject of technology in the classroom. A nationally prominent author and speaker, Bellow noted how much times have changed since his student days, when computers were quarantined in a lab. Now, computers are scattered throughout the entire school

building, from classrooms to libraries, and are omnipresent in the lives of kids.

In a message sent by his iPad, tech-savvy WES 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Dave Mendell described the seminar with Bellow. “Adam Bellow sent many important and inspirational messages to the teachers of

**“...The ‘same old way’ of doing things is no longer enough to help our kids of today learn.”**

WSSD via a ‘back channel discussion board’ after his presentation. He challenged us to continue to push the envelope and keep finding ways to engage our students at every level. He encouraged us to take risks everyday and learn... and he reminded us that

the ‘same old way’ of doing things is no longer enough to help our kids of today learn.”

Mendell continued, “The fact that this was a district sponsored event sends a very good, clear message that our leadership recognizes the importance of continually identifying best practices and strategies for helping all students in the WSSD achieve at the highest possible levels.”

Bellow told how he has watched schools struggle to come to terms with the technology in students’ backpacks and pockets, even confiscating cell phones each morning and returning them each afternoon. Instead of confiscating cell phones, Bellow suggests that cell phones could be excellent assistants to students throughout the day – functioning as calculators in math class, reference books in history, cameras in art class, and more.

Added Stephenie J. Cairone-King, who was a “back channel moderator” during Adam Bellow’s presentation, “As a Computer Science educator at Strath Haven Middle School, I found his presentation to be informational

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**A nationally noted speaker, Adam Bellow recently addressed WSSD teachers at an interactive presentation on the future of technology in our schools. Before taking the stage, he chatted with SHHS sophomores Rachel Silverstein, center, and Anna Meaney.**

*A talk with...***Curriculum Director Denise Citarelli Jones**

Denise Citarelli Jones is a familiar face in a new place this year. Formerly Assistant Principal at Strath Haven Middle School, Denise has made a transition to the position of Curriculum Director for the Middle School and Strath Haven High School.

"In my old job, I usually spent four to five months developing the Middle School schedules, so I'm very familiar with the curriculum from that perspective," Denise said recently. "I also worked as a curriculum coordinator in my former school district that used a curriculum review cycle as the basis for refining and refreshing curricular efforts. In this job, I will develop a similar curriculum review cycle plan, help to align the common core standards to it and take a deep look at what we're doing in the core areas - science, writing/reading, math and social studies."

Denise said curriculum review will become a permanent element of curriculum development throughout the Wallingford-Swarthmore district, asking the existential questions that conscientious educators try always to answer. "Where are we? What are our successes and shortcomings? Do we need to think in terms of deep revision or gradual change? A lot of districts undertake this process; we have too, but not always in this comprehensive way."

The pilot program concerns math, Denise said. "Math is so im-

portant in our district; it has such an impact from beginning to end of school, on developing problem solving abilities, and on test performance which dictates college choices. We are several years into existing programs in all our schools, so this is a good time for a review."

Advisers from the University of Pennsylvania have been involved at the outset, Denise said. "Penn is asking critical questions; they conducted interviews as a team. Their researchers are intimately familiar with the high school's CME program and the Everyday and Connected Math programs in our elementary and middle schools, so their recommendations are especially informed. They are available on the district website," Denise said.

However, economics dictate that engaging Penn can't be an across the board approach, Denise says, and the review process will lean heavily on the school district's internal resources. "We need to do as much as we can internally, then look to a qualified outside group to ask questions we didn't think of."

In Spring 2011, teachers from each grade in each district school responded to a user experience survey, which generated data and also was the first step in forming review teams. "When a subject area (such as math) is just starting



the "review" phase of the cycle where the data gathering begins, we will form vertical teams from among interested teachers," Denise said. "We want each team to have a representative from a range of grades in each building. K-12 subject area teachers will be represented, as well as special education and gifted teachers. We may also add a representative of the administration to these teams.

"The team will meet every six weeks or so to share data, discuss feedback, develop surveys, and travel to other districts where programs and/or instructional practices are finding great success. An integral role for team members is to communicate progress to their individual schools and to receive feedback so that decisions are not made in isolation."

Denise, who taught high school for 15 years in Upper Darby and West Chester, is especially excited

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## New Hires

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stration lessons that further narrows the field. Once references are checked, finalists meet with the Superintendent for their final interview. Ultimately, each new teacher has been evaluated by students, teachers, department chairpersons, building administrators, and central office administrators.

The new staff brings a wealth of education and experience to the District. New employees hold degrees from such schools as St. Johns and St. Joes; Penn and Penn State; Boston College and Boston University. New teachers' experience levels range from the recently degreed to those with experience teaching in China, France, England, urban and suburban environments, and public and private schools.



## Teachers Talk Tech Tools

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as well as inspirational. Whether you are a tech teacher or a teacher who slowly dips your toes into technology, Adam's presentation incorporated a variety of information that anyone can relate to."

Mark Finlayson, Director of Instructional & Information Technology, reported that many teachers have shared with him that they were motivated by Bellow's presentation and the direction the district has been heading with technology. Numerous teachers expressed that with all of the recent much needed technology upgrades and training opportunities, these are really exciting times to be a teacher in the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District.

Bellow concluded: "The bottom line is that we need to stay open minded when it comes to the ever-evolving world of technology. We must be life-long learners who are curious and remember that we can change the world."



## Denise Citarelli Jones

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about the "Understanding by Design" program, which SHHS Principal Mary Jo Yannacone and her assistant principals have been implementing over the past two years. "Understanding by Design flips lesson planning on its ear," she says. In UBD, teachers and administrators keep the ends in mind as they develop curriculum. "Rather than focusing first what facts must be taught, we start with essential questions like 'How do our students learn? From what perspective are they regarding the material? What questions can we ask students to stimulate their curiosity and contemplation of what they read and hear in class?'

"At the same time, we have to make sure that the content of the curriculum design facilitates assessment of results and effectiveness," Denise says. "Reviewing curriculum from K through 12 is essential to programming for a district. In its most advanced form, a review cycle will inform our professional development in the area of curriculum and instruction -- in other words, in-service days will be used to advance the work related to the framework cycles. Doing this will create a more unified, district-wide approach to teaching and learning."



## School Board

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## No Summer Vacation for WES Construction Team

What did WES do this summer? Wallingford Elementary School didn't go anywhere, but the old school on Providence Road did go through plenty of changes. Construction is on pace to deliver a substantially new school by the first day of school next Fall.

The changes will be welcomed by WES students, teachers and administrators, said Dr. Ellen Milgrim, principal of WES. "Every hour something happens that makes me say 'Boy, we need a new school.' After this school year, we'll have it."

When the project is completed, WES will be a 70,000 square foot, two story building, integrating more than 57,000 sf. of new construction with about 13,000 sf. of renovated space, which consists mostly of an enlarged and improved library, technology room and offices, and conversion of the old gym to instrumental and vocal music rooms. The net increase of 18,000 sf. enables WES to build a new and larger gym and cafeteria, expand classroom size, and increase the number of classrooms to accommodate kindergarten classes as the District's

elementary schools all become K-5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Site preparation for the work is partly visible from the front entrance of the school, but around the back of the school, changes are more dramatic. The playground has been relocated, and playing fields and parking areas were moved as the footprint for the new part of the school has been prepared for construction. No further significant site preparation will take place between now and Spring 2012, says Damion Spahr, VP of Business Development for Reynolds Construction, which serves as Owners' Representative for the School District on the project.

Although construction will proceed at full speed throughout the Fall, Spahr says care has been taken to ensure minimal inconvenience to teachers, students and parents. "There will be very little work going on in the occupied buildings at WES; nothing is

scheduled, though access to the buildings may be required occasionally."

Spahr listed work that will take place on the new building at WES in the next few months:

- foundations will be completed
- the steel frame will be erected
- concrete floor slabs will be poured
- construction of the exterior masonry will begin.

Once school is out next June, the old building will be removed, and renovations will take place on the parts that will integrate into the new school. The entire project should be ready for use by the beginning of classes in September 2012.

So for Wallingford Elementary students, rather than the usual back-to-school ritual, next Fall will mean heading off to a brand new WES.



*Project architects Godshall Kane integrated new and existing elements into their designs for Wallingford Elementary School. Below: Rear view of the new WES, circa September 2012.*

