

Half-Day of School – Friday, March 25

Due to the number of snow days that the district needed to take this year, students will have a half day of school on Friday, March 25 instead of the originally scheduled day off for Staff Development Day.

Tamarac Elementary will dismiss at 11:40 a.m. Tamarac Secondary will dismiss at 10:32 a.m. We apologize to parents for any inconvenience this may create.

Board of Education Directs School Officials to Limit Property Tax Increase to 2%

Looking for guidance as they develop the 2011-12 budget, school officials were directed at the March 8 Board of Education meeting to limit a property tax levy increase to 2 percent next year.

The district will present more of the draft 2011-12 school budget at the next Board of Education meeting on March 22 at 6:30 p.m. in the district auditorium. Interested individuals are encouraged to attend.

While the budget is still being developed, it will include no district employee layoffs, will not impact class sections at the Elementary School, and will not require the elimination of any course offerings at the High School.

All current varsity and JV sports would also be offered. Modified sports will be offered although some reductions are under consideration. The Middle School would maintain its RAPP mentoring program and both full day kindergarten and pre-kindergarten would continue.

Superintendent Lou McIntosh explained the district was initially looking at a number of layoffs as it faces a \$1.3 million cut in state aid, as proposed by Governor Cuomo. But the district will instead use \$441,322 in federal jobs funds it received in December to offset those layoffs, which the federal money is specifically intended for.

“The money has to be used for either creating new positions or retaining positions that you would otherwise have to reduce,” Mr. McIntosh explained.

The district also plans to use \$685,868 from its unreserved fund balance to deal with the proposed cut in state aid. Two district employees have also indicated they will retire, saving the district further money.

The Board of Education will hold an additional meeting to discuss the budget on April 5 at 6:30 p.m. The Board is scheduled to adopt the 2011-12 budget at its April 12 meeting. The community vote on the budget is scheduled by the state for Tuesday, May 17.

For more information on the budget or to e-mail us a question, please visit www.brittonkill.k12.ny.us.

Tamarac Students Take On Issue of Bullying

In February, Tamarac Middle School and Elementary School students came together to take on the issue of bullying by putting together a video and musical performance.

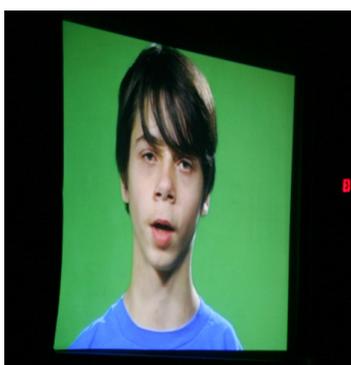
Through funding from a federal Learn and Serve America grant, musicians Fernando Bustamante and Dustin TaVella visited Tamarac music classes to work with students to create lyrics for a song about bullying.

Mr. Bustamante and Mr. TaVella challenged students to think about the impact of bullying and the underlying reasons for it. As students talked about their own experiences, they created lyrics for a song titled “Watch Me Change”.

“The best part about music is teamwork,” Mr. Bustamante told a group of students. “The more people who work together on a song, the better it is.”

At the end of the week, more than 100 students took to the stage to perform their song while classmates filling the district auditorium cheered them on.

“Open up your eyes and recognize who we’ve terrorized and apologize,” students sang. “Watch me change my ways, stand up, stand up, for better days.”



Middle School students also showed a video they created through the school’s TV Production class. The video took on the issue of bullying with candid testimonials from students discussing the hurt they’ve felt from bullying.

At the end of the presentation, student Eion Falance and Will Heatley encouraged classmates to respect each other. “Don’t look the other way when you can help,” Will said. “Have the courage to do what’s right.”

Music teacher Ann Kolakowski said the project had a profound impact on students. Students who are reluctant to participate in group projects not only took part but were leaders in writing the lyrics, she said.

Working with professional musicians like Mr. Bustamante and Mr. TaVella helped a great deal, Mrs. Kolakowski said, because students looked up to them and related to them.

“It provided a great opportunity for students to share together how they felt about bullying,” Mrs. Kolakowski said. “It really was a group effort. The students all felt like they had ownership of the project.”

To see more photos, please visit www.brittonkill.k12.ny.us.



Staff Development Day Provides Opportunity for Faculty and Staff to Improve Education and Safety



While students enjoyed a half day on Jan. 28, faculty and staff were at work learning about new state education standards, sharing best practices to help students succeed and practicing CPR training in the event of an emergency.

Such activities are just part of Staff Development Days, where faculty and staff spend the day working together to continually improve Tamarac schools.

Nicole Lindeman, Director of Curriculum and Assessments, explained such training is important as education is always changing. State mandates require it as well. For example, New York requires teachers to have 175 hours of professional development every five years as part of their certification.

“As educators, we’re expected to learn and grow just like our students are expected to learn and grow,” Mrs. Lindeman explained. “Staff Development Days provide us an opportunity to come together and grow and learn together to better help out students.”

During the Jan. 28 Staff Development Day, faculty attended workshops such as ones to review standardized test scores to help teachers better understand students’ strengths and weaknesses so they could help them be more successful.

Other workshop topics included reviewing changes in curriculum as the district aligns its educational programs to the new state education leaning standards.

Faculty and staff also reviewed procedures to keep students safe. Elementary faculty and staff, for example, learned about playground and classroom safety from the district’s insurance carrier.

Custodians, bus drivers, clerical and other staff members spent part of the day reviewing and practicing CPR training in the case of an emergency.



Lisa Overocker, a Health and Safety Officer from Questar III, led a workshop that reviewed proper CPR methods, including the differences of helping a child, adult or infant. She covered changes to established protocols, such as a new emphasis on chest compressions.

“The reason compressions are the most important is you have to get the oxygenated blood to the brain,” Ms. Overocker explained.

Students Make Blankets for Homeless Shelter

When infants, children and teens leave Joseph’s House and Shelter in Troy, they’ll have a fleece blanket to comfort them thanks to Tamarac students.

Students in the Reaching Academic and Personal Potential (RAPP) program have volunteered their time in recent weeks to stay afterschool and make no sew fleece blankets for Joseph’s House.



“Joseph’s House is a place where people can go when they’re in need of help,” explained seventh grader Adam Whittet. “We’re going to surprise them by going there and giving them about 30 blankets.”

“It’s fun. The guys are doing most of the work,” added classmate Garrett Winters with a laugh, drawing a look from eighth grader Brandi Garrow. Also volunteering their time was Chris Large, Jacob Watson and John Wienman.

Teacher Mary Gilpatrick, organizer of the RAPP program, explained the no sew blankets – created by taking sheets of fleece fabric, cutting the edges and tying them – was a fun way for RAPP students to get involved in a service learning project that helps the community.

RAPP is the district’s Middle School mentoring program that provides support for students to help improve their school performance and increase their chances of success.

“I’ve been so pleased with their commitment and how they consistently show up each week to work on the blankets,” said Ms. Gilpatrick. “It’s a great project.”

Soccer Players Help Refugees Form Own Team

Refugees from the Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Bhutan, Nepal and Iraq living in Baltimore, Maryland were able to form a new soccer team thanks to the Tamarac boys soccer teams.

Tamarac students collected shin guards, soccer balls and monetary donations to send to the Baltimore chapter of Soccer Without Borders, a community-run organization that helps youth refugees acclimate to a new country through soccer.

While the youth come from diverse backgrounds, they share a passion to play soccer. Soccer Without Borders, through the assistance of donations such as the ones made by Tamarac boys soccer teams, provides the youth with their first opportunity to play in an organized soccer league with their own equipment.

Tamarac students received a thank you letter from the director of the Baltimore chapter of Soccer Without Borders, thanking them for their donations and explaining what it meant to the program’s youth. Great work!