



Pre-K Program Making a Difference

A year ago, Bettyjo Bouchey was worried about whether her son would flourish in kindergarten due to a disability that not only affects his physicality, but also his ability to learn new skills quickly and adapt to new social situations.

But after spending last year in Tamarac's Pre-K program, Gavin started this year with not only the skills he needed to be successful but also helped classmates learn what teachers expected, showed them around the school and quickly made friends.

"He really is a new boy," Bettyjo Bouchey said. "I think that was a big self-esteem booster for Gavin. He was so proud, he could show classmates where the playground

was and he knew people in school already. We're very grateful as a family to be a part of that first Pre-K class."

Gavin's story is a common one for students who were part of Tamarac's Pre-K program last year, noted Principal Karen Lederman.

"The kindergarten teachers all come to me and say what a difference they notice in the students who went through Pre-K," Lederman said. "They are now the role models for the incoming kindergartners."

Now in its second year, the Pre-K program helps children most in need of extra assistance by providing a structured learning environment that helps them start kindergarten at a similar learning level as other students.

"The whole idea of this was to level the playing field and it has done that for these children," Lederman said.

Pre-K teacher Barbara Baker said the growth in her students is stunning. Children are screened before they enter the program and tested regularly. Their scores in areas such as concepts, language and motor skills often start in the lowest percentiles and finish at the highest levels.

Much of the class time is focused on structured activities, working on skills such as pre-writing, learning letter sounds, and concepts such as cooperation. Students are also assigned classroom jobs such as turning off the lights, sweeping, and handing out mats which teach students responsibility.

The Pre-K program is currently limited to 20 students as the cost to expand it would be prohibitive, particularly given the financial challenges all schools are facing. But the program remains one of the district's priorities given the difference it provides for children.

"Ms. Baker's kids know what to do. They're leaders," said Bouchey. "It's amazing to see them develop. You think it comes naturally but it's a lot of hard work."



Teacher Barbara Baker works with this year's Pre-K students.

District Priorities for 2010-11 School Year Adopted

The Board of Education adopted District Priorities for the 2010-11 school year at its December 17 meeting, finalizing a process that began with dozens of teachers, parents, students, staff members, administrators and community residents coming together to discuss the future of Tamarac schools.

"The District Priorities will help us develop our school budget for next year," explained Superintendent Lou McIntosh. "We have limited resources so these priorities help us define what our community believes is most important. Hopefully New York's budget crisis doesn't impact our ability to fully carry these recommendations out next year."

The District Priorities focus on more than a dozen recommendations including continuing the Pre-K program and a Secondary School mentoring program, reviewing school safety protocols and investigating alternative funding sources. The entire list of District Priorities is available on the school website, www.brittonkill.k12.ny.us.

The development of the District Priorities started with the annual District Planning Priorities Day held in October, where 47 participants talked about what the school district's priorities should be for the 2010-11 school year. The same process was followed the year before to develop district priorities.

Individuals broke up into groups to brainstorm together and then created lists of what they considered priorities. The list was refined and the Board of Education adopted it after making further revisions.

"We wanted to hear from all our community stakeholders so we could identify what areas and issues are most critical to the success of our students while still being mindful of the limited resources we have," McIntosh explained. "I was particularly pleased to see students volunteer their time and offer suggestions since it's their education we're ultimately discussing."

Fifth Grade Classes Work Together

This school year, two fifth grade classes at Tamarac join together twice a week for “town meetings” where students work together on projects or discuss issues they’re concerned with.

When students felt some classmates weren’t showing others proper respect, for example, they called a town meeting where they talked about what respect means and why it is important.

“Town meetings are a way to establish community,” explained teacher Dana Rosenberg, who developed the idea for joint classes with fellow fifth grade teacher Nicolle Motzer. “We work together on projects and have an open forum to discuss things.”

The idea for the joint classes – named TT-RAC 41 by students – started over the summer as a way to increase student interaction and help prepare them for the transition to middle school. “We had a town meeting the week before school started. About 95 percent of the students attended,” Motzer said.

Students not only meet together twice a week for “town meetings” but each student has a partner in the other fifth grade class to work with daily on writing, math and other academic areas.

When students were studying the U.S. Constitution, they created their own Preamble and Bill of Rights, including “the right to persevere and work our hardest” and “the right to be educated in an environment where people are respectful, show self-control, and are appreciative of one another.”

“It was a way of relating U.S. government with rules of the classroom,” Rosenberg explained.

“And we wanted them to know they have ownership of their education, and their own freedoms and rights,” Motzer added.



Cafeteria Deposits Now Online

Tamarac parents can now put money in their children’s cafeteria accounts online.

A new cafeteria computer system provides parents with a secure, online payment system. Parents also can check how much money is in their child’s cafeteria account and print out a history report of the meals they’ve purchased within the last 30 days.

To use the system, please visit the school website, www.brittonkill.k12.ny.us, and click on “Cafeteria/Menus” on the left side of the screen. The Food Services webpage provides resources about how to use the new system and a link to the online site.

“With technology being integrated more and more into our daily lives, we decided to look into offering online payments for the cafeteria,” said Gail Lathrop, Director of Business Operations. “This is something our parents have asked about and now we have the ability to offer that.”

Parents who would prefer to continue to pay by check can continue to do so. If you have any questions about this system, please contact Cafeteria Supervisor Joy Wright at 279-4600 ext. 2208.

Want More School News?

This year, Tamarac schools have started a monthly eNewsletter featuring school news and announcements.

The eNewsletter can be downloaded from the school website, www.brittonkill.k12.ny.us, or you can receive it automatically each month by subscribing to Brittonkill eNews, the district’s e-mail notification system.

To sign up for eNews, visit the school website and click on the “eNews” logo on the right side of the screen.



District Earns Award for Communications



Brunswick (Brittonkill) Central School District has been recognized for outstanding achievement in educational communications by the New York School Public Relations Association (NYSPPRA).

The district earned a second place award in the "Newsletter" category for its district newsletter, "The Communicator." The NYSPPRA's annual competition featured more than 400 entries from across the state in 14 categories.

"This year's winners should feel especially proud of their awards which recognize excellence in school communications," said Marcia Kelley, NYSPPRA President and School Information Officer of the East Syracuse-Minoa Central School District. "Entries were judged by a distinguished panel of professionals from around the country. The judging was very competitive."

Tamarac Honor Rolls Announced

Tamarac Middle School and High School recently announced their honor rolls for the first quarter.

In Tamarac Middle School, a total of 94 students earned a place on the Honor Roll, which requires at least an 89.5 average. An additional 73 students earned a place on the High Honor Roll, which requires at least a 94.5 average.

In Tamarac High School, a total of 126 students were named to the Honor Roll, which requires at least a 90 average. (There is no separate High Honor Roll in the High School).

To see lists of students who earned a place on the honor rolls, please visit the school website, www.brittonkill.k12.ny.us, and click on the Middle School or High School webpages. Congratulations to all our students!

High School Students to Attend Classes During Regents Exams

Tamarac High School has decided to hold classes during this year's January 26-29 Regents Exams week.

In previous years, students in grades 9-12 did not have to come to school during these days. But with less than 30 students expected to take Regents Exams in January, the District decided to hold classes this year.

Students that need to take the exams will be able to do so in a designated area.

"We decided to make this change to increase the number of instructional days for students," said Principal Richard Pogue. "But since some families may plan vacations around this time, we wanted to let parents know well in advance."

If you have any questions, please contact Principal Pogue at 279-4600 ext. 2402.

Community Comes Together for Playground

Tamarac Elementary students have a new piece of playground equipment to enjoy thanks to the Brittonkill PTSA, local fire departments and community volunteers.

The new equipment, which is designed to look like a fire engine with monkey bars, ladders and other features, was purchased through donations and fundraising efforts organized by the Brittonkill PTSA.

"I can't begin to thank the PTSA and the community enough for this. They have been wonderful," said Principal Karen Lederman. "All the children love the new fire truck."

The PTSA raised nearly \$14,000 to purchase the new playground equipment through an ice cream social, a raffle, T-shirt sales, and many other fundraising efforts organized for over a year.

In November, volunteers spent part of a Friday afternoon and all day Saturday installing the new playground equipment. Volunteers included members of local fire departments, parents, teachers, PTSA members, school administrators, and other community residents.

Lederman noted there are more plans to add playground equipment such as swings, as well.

"Now that we know we can do it, we'll do it again," Lederman said.



Students Participate in Benefit Walk

More than a dozen Tamarac students, parents and faculty members volunteered their time on a cold Saturday, Dec. 5 morning to participate in the Winter Walk for the Homeless.

The annual event supports Joseph's House in Troy and raised approximately \$20,000 this year for the shelter. Joseph's House helps approximately 700 people in need each year by providing meals and assistance.

The walk not only is Joseph's House largest fundraiser of the year but also is designed to give supporters a sense of what it might feel like to be homeless in the area. Congratulations to our students, parents and faculty for helping with this great cause!



Historical Society Seeks Members

The Brunswick Historical Society is seeking members for its organization which in partnership with the school district has helped to preserve the history that makes Brunswick a special place to live, work and visit.

Over the past few years, for example, the Historical Society has worked with students to produce a documentary on Brunswick schools and provides regular trips to the Little Red School House.

The Historical Society is dedicated to all residents; its activities with the students are inspired by the past with the goal of informing the future.

If you would like to learn more about memberships to the Brunswick Historical Society, visit the school website, www.brittonkill.k12.ny.us for a membership form or visit the Historical Society's website, www.bhs-ny.org.

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