



## **WAITSFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT March 2011 Report**

### **Waitsfield Elementary School Mission**

- It is the mission of the Waitsfield Elementary School to support students in the achievement of high academic standards; we believe that all students can master challenging academic material and we expect them to do so.
- It is our mission to foster a safe, comfortable and challenging learning environment. It is our mission to help teach children respect for themselves and others, and teach them to accept responsibility for their actions.
- It is our mission to enhance global awareness and acceptance of diversity.
- It is our mission to make a positive difference in the lives of each of our students.

### **Principal's Report: Fifty Years Strong**

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Waitsfield Elementary School. Like many, upon reaching the half-century mark, we are reflective upon what has been accomplished and what we hope to achieve in the years ahead. While we've gone through different stages over the years—from open classrooms to several year class groupings, we like to think that within those changes, we've remained a steady asset to the community. We are actively engaged in insuring that the services we provide match the needs of this community. Below is our plan for keeping ourselves “fresh”.

## Staying Fit

**Fiscal Fitness/Budget.** The Board of School Directors has consistently worked to keep school's budget trim while maintaining a high quality educational experience for students. Last year, the budget brought forth was a 2.3% decrease in spending from the previous year. This savings was realized without reducing programming, by taking advantage of opportunities for savings that included staff retirements. While this year's budget is an increase of 1.6%, it represents a decrease of per pupil spending by .4%. Federal and state funding, the common level of appraisal, and state mandated initiatives are beyond the control of the Waitsfield School Board, but there is ongoing close management of that which does fall within their purview.

**Facility Fitness/Capital Improvement.** Despite care, our building has begun to show its age. Over the past year, we've crafted a capital improvement plan outlining our anticipated facility needs for the next several years. (A copy of this plan can be found on our school website, [www.waitsfielelementary.org](http://www.waitsfielelementary.org) under "School Board".) Last year, we accessed grant funds to replace unit ventilators that were part of the initial school construction fifty years ago. Additionally, we replaced tile throughout the original part of the building; this tile has small amounts of asbestos within it and we preemptively replaced it before issues developed. We have instituted regular cleaning of our ductwork system, as well as a planned cycle of painting. Looking ahead, there is insulation work needed to improve the efficiency of our facility. We are currently looking for grants and saving money towards that work. By regularly making contributions towards our capital improvement budget and completing ongoing work, we are looking to insure that our building is in good shape to effectively meet our needs going forward.

**Mental Fitness/Professional Development.** A perusal of detail in the annual budget shows that the Waitsfield Elementary School staff has been active in professional development—we have used the allocated amount (and shifted a bit more in) for the last several years to pursue professional development relevant to the goals of the school. Several of our staff members have achieved masters degrees in the Vermont Math Initiative, a program designed to support the development of master math instructors. From exploring brain research to effective reading intervention strategies, staff are staying current with educational research and practices as well as modeling being life long learners.

## Staying Connected

**Connected Preschool – Sixth grade Experience.** “The Roots of Success”, a report commissioned by the Vermont Department of Education, last year reported that collaboration and alignment of curriculum by teachers is a significant factor in the effectiveness of a school. In looking at many Vermont schools, it was found that those that had an effective, cohesive education system were able to outperform others. Waitsfield Elementary School staff is highly competent and dedicated to our students; our focus for improvement over the past two years has been to better coordinate the work that we are doing, from our math curriculum to our behavioral expectations. This past year, staff has worked on how we teach scientific inquiry, insuring that we are scaffolding instruction from one year to the next and using consistent language. With the implementation of a new math program in kindergarten – 5<sup>th</sup> grade, we have met monthly (or more) to support one another in coordinating our instruction and approach. Grade cluster teams meet biweekly, as do the full staff, working on action plan goals as well as other initiatives/topics of shared responsibility. While the artistry and individuality of each educator is deeply respected, we balance this respect with commitment to consistency of curriculum and collaborative accountability for our work.

**Connecting the Whole Child.** In addition to the rigor of our academic program, we are attentive to the arts; balanced development of the physical, emotional and intellectual needs can be found throughout the school.

- Our “Winter Outdoor Program,” puts all 1<sup>st</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade students skiing or boarding Wednesday afternoons January- March and focuses upon building lifelong wellness skills and habits.
- The drama program in the school supports theater extracurricular activities for children in 2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Throughout the year, three plays are performed by 2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> grade students, as well as a musical by the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade students. This year’s 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade musical, “Mulan” will be performed on March 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>— you’re invited to join us at Valley Player’s Theater.



- The WES Band and Instrumental program currently serves over 85% of the students in 4th through 6th grade. While all students participate in weekly music instruction, involvement in band/instrument lessons is voluntary and available to all students.

A comprehensive health and guidance curriculum is offered to all kindergarten – 6<sup>th</sup> grade students through weekly lessons delivered by our school counselor and nurse.

**Connecting with the Community.** Maintaining a connection to the community around us is an important part of our school’s health—our students are the future stewards of our town and world. Forming relationships with and learning from the community forms a meaningful backdrop in which students can apply their learning—as well as helping them know that there is a broad base of people who care about what



they are doing each day. Community connections include special projects, such as the town orchard, where students are caring for the saplings planted last summer to support a fruit bearing resource for the whole community. These

connections might occur through ongoing curriculum work, such as collecting data about the health of the Mad River. Or it might look like developing ongoing relationships, such as occur through the “Everybody Wins” reading mentoring program where community members weekly

join a student partner to share in the love of reading. (We're always looking for more adult mentors—if you've got an hour a week to share in a love of books with a child, please join us. We promise it will be time well spent!)

### **Continually Growing**

**Action Planning.** As a school, we work to foster and model life-long learning skills. As an institution, we annually craft a school action plan, looking at data to identify areas for improvement and focusing our professional work for the upcoming year on meeting goals in these targeted areas. A detailed copy of the school action plan can be found on the school website ([www.waitsfieldelementary.org](http://www.waitsfieldelementary.org)) under “Administration.” Action plan work for this year has been focused upon: more focused assessment and coordinated early intervention in literacy and math; improved instruction in informational (non-fiction) text; articulation of grade leveled expectations in technology; and further articulation of shared expectations. In the area of literacy, we have reviewed a variety of assessment tools and selected one to allow us to better discuss and track student growth across classrooms, identifying where breakdowns in learning may be occurring. We are using online technology to better track and analyze data relevant to student performance, such as results on the aforementioned literacy assessment. The relationship that is developed with each individual teacher continues to be paramount to student success and we continue to grow in the tools we use to inform the work that occurs with each of those teachers.

**Reflecting World Changes.** While elementary education goals such as teaching students to read, to calculate and to think critically have remained constant over the years, the tools that students use to do many of these skills, as well as to interact with the world around them, are certainly changing. Waitsfield Elementary School prides itself on providing access to and direct instruction in how to use these evolving tools. In addition to having state of the art technology tools, including a mobile computer lab, interactive whiteboards, document cameras, flip cameras and tablets, we employ a technology integrationist who supports staff in teaching



students how to use these tools to pursue learning objectives across the curricula. While I'm sure that the tools will look different by the time our students leave secondary school, I'm confident that our students will be well versed in how to use technology to explore and express ideas. Across our curricula we support critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation. These 21<sup>st</sup> century skills are the tools that have been identified as the ticket to, as President Obama said in the January state of the union address, "win the future."

**Exploring Beyond our Walls.** This year, parents Melinda Kogut and Piper Stover organized a series of presentations and experiences that tapped into community resources to enhance science, technology,



engineering and math instruction.

Four school-wide assemblies brought students in contact with local scientists and engineers, demonstrating how Vermonters are applying their learning in these areas to pursue interesting careers. Seeing how playing with Legos or taking apart a cell phone might lead to an exciting career in engineering has inspired many of our students. Through the guidance of these parents and the support of several community members and businesses, a Lego League has been instituted at the school, providing over 1/3 of our students with an opportunity to explore computer programming and design work. Partnerships

with parents and local businesses to support enhancement of learning opportunities is an example of how we can all work together to provide a depth of experience for our children even in a relatively small, rural community.

### *Looking to the future: The Next 50 years*

This spring, as part of our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday activities, we will unearth a time capsule buried in the early years of the school, as well as bury a new capsule. Time capsules are a good reminder of just how unknown the

future is, including the future of our own school. In the immediate future, we are continuing to look at actively insuring that our school is responsible to the community around us. Around the state, school enrollment is dropping. While it has remained steady at Waitsfield over the past several years, we are anticipating a slight drop in the coming years.

**Elementary Enrollment as of October 2010**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Enrollment</b>	15	15	19	25	25	12	27	17	<b>155</b>

**Enrollment Trends PK-6 (2000-2010)**

<b>'00</b>	<b>'01</b>	<b>'02</b>	<b>'03</b>	<b>'04</b>	<b>'05</b>	<b>'06</b>	<b>'07</b>	<b>'08</b>	<b>'09</b>	<b>'10</b>
156	159	160	170	145	154	171	160	155	169	155

The Board of School Directors will continue to be guided by maintaining quality programming in a fiscally responsible manner, which could mean trimming staff and/or combining with other schools in response to a dip in enrollment. History has shown that enrollment is an unpredictable beast; we're exploring options so that we're best prepared for whatever presents itself in the future.

Some argue that schools have changed little in the past 50 or 100 years. While there are certainly elements that have remained the same, there is much about school that looks and sounds different these days. We are incorporating what we know about the brain and learning into daily instruction. Math instruction works towards a deep understanding, as opposed to following rote rules, for everyone. Technology is woven into our work, from the research we do to the tools that we use to share information with one another. Attention is paid to not only expecting a high level of civic responsibility within our school walls and beyond, but to teaching kids how to do that. Critical thinking and evaluative skills are key elements taught across the curriculum. In the years to come, we hope to continue to work to meeting the needs of the community and reflect the world around us.

With 50 years of serving this community, there is a great likelihood that if you are not a graduate of this school, or have a

child in this school, your neighbors are. We hope you'll join us in celebrating the school as a cornerstone of our community.

Respectfully,  
Kaiya Korb, Principal

**Waitsfield Elementary Student Data**

<b>Support Services</b>		<b>Food Service Program</b>	
Students receiving Special Education Services	14%	Students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch	27%
Students with 504 Plans	3%	Average students served breakfast each day	18%
Students receiving support from our Educational Support Team	12%	Average students served lunch each day	61%



Fun and games at the Waitsfield-Fayston Fire Station

(Photo: V. Capels)