



## **Parent's Independent School Network Awards, April 2010**

*(Text below is from award application submissions)*

### **1) Preventive Food Pantry at Boston Medical Center**

BB&N holds an annual all-school food drive for the Preventive Food Pantry at Boston Medical Center. The drive was started in 2003 by BB&N parents. 2010 will be the 8th year of the drive. The drive is scheduled to run from Wednesday, February 17 – Friday, February 26.

Boston Medical's food pantry provides, free of charge, medically and nutritionally appropriate food for many of Boston's neediest children, new mothers, and pregnant women. The BB&N food drive is an extremely worthwhile project that helps to provide healthy food to the thousands of poverty-stricken families that Boston Medical's food pantry serves. As an urban school, it is a wonderful opportunity for BB&N to help with an urban problem.

The Food Drive is also the only all-school community service activity at BB&N. This drive allows students to participate from beginning (collecting the food) to end (actually delivering and stocking the shelves at the food pantry). It is also an opportunity for cross-campus cooperation and community building among students, parents, and faculty.

### **2) Tobin AfterSchool Science Club**

During fall sport season, the high school students devote two hours of their Wednesday afternoons for seven weeks going down to the neighborhood school to conduct the learning activity. The project takes place at the Tobin Community School as one of the activities offered by their after-school enrichment program. Volunteers are assigned to a handful of students for the duration of the season. BB&N students teach children how to construct project, periodically incorporating a question and answer discussion to relate things to science. At the end, the separate groups all come together for a recap on the day's activities. Each participant can take their own experiment home.

The program's popularity can be seen in the children's enthusiasm during our weekly lessons. The Tobin children cheerfully march in every session and cannot wait to meet their group leaders. They show a clear interest to interact with BB&N leaders, asking questions as they wish to increase their understanding. With this program, the BB&N

students build a connection between BB&N and its surrounding community. The BB&N students also gain leadership experience as they are charged to lead the small group. This program also helps high school students appreciate their academic skills and realize the value of their education.

During the economic downturn prior to the 2009-10 school year, I realized how much of the impact this would have for the public schools like Tobin. I spent several weeks over the summer designing a number of low cost lesson units to replace the science kits we previously ordered from a supplier. I am very proud to say that this action saved the Tobin Community School \$500 to \$1200 without reducing the quality of our program. The After-School Science club expects to continue over the years and my model will serve a cost-effective means to keep this program alive.

A PIN grant would allow this program to become accessible to children who were previously unable to attend (for many households in the Cambridge community, even the \$40 materials fee is a heavy burden). Furthermore, it would allow us to expand the program further, exposing more areas of science to more children. We believe that this program has children genuinely excited about science by supplementing their classroom knowledge with hands-on applications; any assistance in spreading its impact to more children would be greatly appreciated.

The following is a list of topics covered by the after-school science program:

- 1) Compasses
- 2) Rockets
- 3) Airplanes
- 4) Structures
- 5) Water cycle
- 6) Object
- 7) Tangrams

### **3) Community Service Afternoon**

Community Service Afternoon is an annual event held at the BB&N Upper School. Upper School students participate in an afternoon of community service at local organizations. The purpose of the activity is to instill a spirit of service to others, and to promote the importance of group work. Community Service Afternoon was held in 2009 on November 18.

On that day, 125 students traveled to 11 organizations in the Greater Boston area: Associated Early Care and Education, Cambridge Community Center, Charles River Conservancy, Community Servings, Ellis Memorial and Eldredge House, Greater Boston Food Bank, Sancta Maria Nursing Facility, West Cambridge Youth Center, West End House, Women's Lunch Place, and Youville House.

Most of the students had direct contact with the people they were aiding. At Associated Early Care as well as Ellis Memorial, students worked with children in their classrooms, playing with them and reading to them. At Cambridge Community Center, West End House, and West Cambridge Youth Center, our students worked with children in an after-school program doing homework, playing games, etc. At Sancta Maria Nursing Facility and Youville House, our students interacted with the elderly residents, playing music for them and spending time with them.

Although Community Service Afternoon lasts for only a few hours, students and chaperones always return feeling that their work really mattered and that they made a connection with the people they were aiding. It also serves to inspire students to continue doing community service work.

#### **4) Knit Baby Blankets for Hildebrand Family Center (2nd Grade)**

*Project Coordinator: Candida Monteith, Woodwork Specialist, BB&N LS Art Dept.*

For the last seven years the 2nd grade class at Buckingham Browne & Nichols School has knit a richly colored baby blanket for a newborn staying at the Hildebrand Family, Self-help Center, Inc. Hildebrand is a community organization that serves hundreds of families in Cambridge and the greater Boston area. There are two important aspects to this project that are extraordinary and deserving of attention. The first is that the entire process is done completely by loving 2nd grade hands. Secondly and most importantly, because of the labor involved in creating this one-of-a-kind blanket, both the baby and parents are given a rare and unique gift. Just think how wonderful the parents must feel knowing that 40 children worked very hard to create a blanket which will keep their baby wrapped in Community Love starting at birth. It is a true lesson on community giving for all involved.

The children, who are 7 and 8 years of age, get so much out of hand-making and giving this irreplaceable blanket as a gift to a baby in need. The children learn that they have the capacity to help and make a difference in a baby's life. Being young children themselves they can easily remember the affection they felt when their parents wrapped them in a blanket given by someone special. Additionally, the lesson of helping someone less fortunate is very separate and distinct from helping a friend. It provides them with the base knowledge that community service is an internal satisfaction and that the simple act of making and giving the blanket will make a difference in the life of the baby and that's a wonderful lesson for a child, of any age, to learn.

Starting in early January, the 2nd grade children make their own knitting needles in woodshop. The children are taught to knit by the woodworking teacher, other students, classroom parents and grandparents. Learning to knit becomes a wonderful intergenerational community event. Each child knits a 4" square that is then sewn together by class parents and grandparents to create the blanket. The children take great pride in their knit squares and some children will knit several squares.

The requested funds will be used for the materials: yarn, wooden dowels and “sculpey” clay to make the knitting needles. This is such a wonderful model for grant giving, because they focus on the community in which they attend school.

The students present their blanket and explain the purpose and scope of the project at a special Lower School assembly in the spring. The woodwork teacher will then bring the blanket to the Hildebrand Center (transporting 40 students to the Center is prohibitively expensive and would overwhelm the Center’s facilities). Although direct contact is minimal, the experience to participate in a charitable giving project is immeasurable, especially in your own community.

## **5) The Sustainability Project (Beginners)**

*Project Coordinators: BB&N Beginner Team (Shera Selzer, Anthony Reppucci, Christina Dello Russo, Rania Melki)*

### *How It Began*

For a few weeks the beginner children have been interested in the fallen pine cones, playing with dirt, and in awe of the random greenery that has been sprouting from the mulch outside of our classroom window. It was because of the children’s interest in nature that the teachers thought that a service-learning project on the earth and sustainability would be a project that the children would enjoy investigating.

For a project to be successful it is essential that it meet three criteria. It must be interesting to the children, have enough depth to make learning meaningful, and have the ability to contain activities and investigations that compliment the BB&N Beginner Learning Standards. After much research and teacher brainstorming sessions, it was concluded that a project on sustainability would be worth pursuing.

To begin to pique the children’s interest in sustainability, we told the children a story about a dump and the length of time trash sits in the ground. We then dumped our trash and looked through it.

A discussion then unfolded about landfill, waste, and composting. The teachers then told the students that they would soon be visiting a vegetable farm and at the farm they would be able to see a compost pile. The children were excited about the trip and we wrote down some investigation questions that the children had for the workers at the farm. Here is a list of questions the children came up with:

How do you make things into dirt?

How do you get food?

How do you plant food?

If you have trash in your garden can you take it out and reuse it?

Can we do anything in school to make less trash?

Can we grow things at school?  
How do we make dirt out of our garbage at school?  
How do you make food out of dirt?  
How does food turn into dirt?

Our trip to the Allandale Farm was a great success and the children's questions were answered by the workers. In addition, the children were very excited about the possibility of making their own compost at school with the help of Helen, an Allandale Farm employee and BB&N parent.

When leaving the farm, the children enjoyed walking through the Allandale Farm Store. We ended up buying some cornstalks and gourds to turn our dramatic play area into a farm stand.

The next step in exploring sustainability was for the teachers to document everything the children knew about taking care of the Earth from their own past experiences. In addition to this, we would continue to generate questions to investigate. In performing the two steps above the children would become the leaders of their own learning and learning becomes meaningful. As teachers, we will promote the support necessary for the children's investigations to be successful by providing critical thinking through hands-on learning and inquiry.

#### *Our Learning Unfolds*

During a whole group discussion, the children were asked what they knew about taking care of the Earth. The children's answers ranged from taking care of the animals, not littering, recycling, using less trash, and composting. Because the children went to the Allandale Farm and enjoyed the visit, the teachers thought investigating sustainability by starting with compost would be an exciting and realistic place to begin. All the teachers had to do was successfully get the children excited about it.

Over the next few weeks, the teachers set up provocations around the classroom to feed the interest of the children. A farm stand was set up in the dramatic play area, books about sustainability were brought into the classroom and placed in a thematic book bin, and a bruised pumpkin that was given to us from the Allandale Farm was placed in a tub in our classroom.

The children were so impressed by the changes happening to the pumpkin that the teachers opened up an observation center in the classroom for the children to come over and look and draw exactly what they saw. We call this type of documentation, "draw like a scientist." This pumpkin is still being used to document the decomposition process. During the day the children even started to paint rotting pumpkins on the easel.

As the teachers continued to plan they thought it was important for the children to answer the questions that they had for the farm workers on their own. Therefore, the teachers wrote the questions on chart paper and thought about what compost activities the children could take part in to help them realize the answers themselves.

The teachers concluded that it would be a good hands-on experience for the children to begin to discuss worms and their importance in composting and making nutritious soil. So one day the teachers told the children that it would be great if we could see how food scraps and dead leaves became soil but we were missing something. The children took the bait and mentioned that we could look for worms outside. So after PE we did just that. We went to dark, damp areas of the school grounds and dug up our worms. When we were finished collecting them we put them in a bin with wet soil and leaves to observe them.

After the children had a few days to observe the worms in the bin it was time for them to make their own compost bags. To get the children's minds ready for the activity we read the book *Wiggling Worms at Work*, by Wendy Pfeffer. We then had two small group discussions about how making our own compost bins and investigating worms will help us answer our questions about compost. The children then enjoyed using leaves, vegetable scraps, and a worm to make their own compost bag.

#### *Where We Are At Now*

The giant compost bins we ordered arrived at school and we made a finished list of what can go inside of them. For the past two weeks we have been throwing away our food scraps from snack and lunch into our small classroom compost buckets and transporting them to the giant bins on campus. Soon, the children will be presenting their compost work to their sixth grade buddies and the other grades in their building in hope that they will help in our efforts of sustainability through composting.

#### *What the Future Holds*

Helen, the Allandale Farm employee and BB&N parent, offered to help us make a raised bed vegetable farm for our compost. This will be done in the spring and if the children have enough interest, it will continue our study of sustainability through our next project—The Garden Project.

In addition, the children have been asking about recycling. So we will hopefully get to the local recycle center soon as well.