

the Millbrook

Central School District

MESSENGER

Spring 2010



Thinking Maps®

We have all experienced the challenge, and sometimes the frustration, of trying to learn new information or use a new skill. In school, students are asked constantly to understand, to remember, to organize, to summarize, to explain, to plan, to apply, to define and to make connections between new topics and the countless other things they have studied. Because human beings tend to learn best visually, a program called Thinking Maps® has been introduced throughout the Millbrook Central School District to assist students with their learning and teachers with their introduction of new content.

The program was originally piloted among approximately twenty K-12 teachers during the 2007-08 school year. On the heels of that success, all principals participated in a 2008 Summer Institute,

and a team of both teachers (Jessica Quint, Linda Wenkert, Bill Burrows and Susan Gagnon) and administrators (Christine Ackerman, Brian Fried and Lloyd Jaeger) became certified trainers for the program. This made it possible to train all remaining District faculty during 2008-09. Thinking Maps® has now become a student learning resource at every grade level and teachers are using them in virtually every subject.

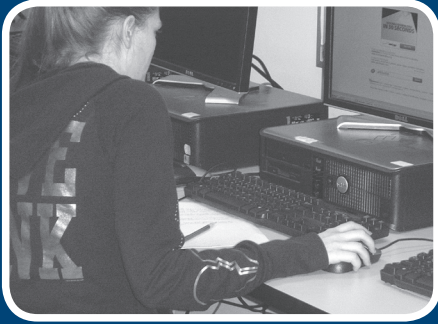
Thinking Maps® help students to organize or present information within one of eight possible visual representations of a basic thought process or structure – define, describe, classify, sequence, compare/contrast, analogy, cause/effect and whole-to-part relationships. The “maps” assist students to filter ideas and discover patterns in what they are learning, to find relevant relationships, and to make subjects personally and emotionally meaningful. Because each map is content neutral, the thought processes connected
(continued on page 2)

Message from the Superintendent

In this issue, we proudly share brief profiles of this year's many K-12 educational enhancements. These reflect our District goals and our continuing commitment to improve students' daily learning opportunities. Within these pages, you will read about stronger science programs, building level improvement initiatives, K-12 teacher training, technology integration, community partnerships, literacy development, arts-in-education, and our acquisition of grants which are supporting both enrichment and innovation. In the segment on Thinking Maps® you will learn how we are applying visual learning research and critical thinking to enable students and teachers to be more effective in their presentation and comprehension of information. At Millbrook High School, the college and career search process has evolved dramatically and new college credit courses will be available for 2010-11. A new Learning Center has opened at MHS to support every student's studies; and Elm and Alden elementary schools are individualizing reading instruction with new



(continued on page 8)



From College Counseling to College-Level Courses

It is the college acceptance season for Millbrook High School seniors, and our juniors are just starting their college selection process. This year we have an expanded catalog of college-level courses and a new web-based Naviance software program to help them to manage their college searches. It is not surprising then that Millbrook High juniors and their parents are feeling increased confidence as they get ready to begin their senior year.

The high school now proudly boasts several teachers who are qualified

to serve as adjunct professors for SUNY Dutchess and Marist College. Next school year (2010-11), these teachers will provide a new variety of college-credit bearing courses in such areas as mathematics, history, English, foreign language and science. These will be taught at Millbrook High School and exclusively for our Millbrook High School students. The exact DCC and Marist offerings will be available on the high school website in mid-April.

In March, eleventh-grade students and their parents were introduced to Naviance, our state-of-the-art, Internet-based, approach to college and career planning. Juniors completed a Personality-Type Assessment and Career Interest Profiler. These programs match the students with careers for which they may have an interest based on their survey responses. It will

allow students to investigate these prospective careers, including: job descriptions, video clips, related occupations, the skills necessary to do well in a particular field, educational requirements, and salary ranges.

Naviance also allows students to search for specific colleges using criteria such as content major, location, cost, acceptance rates, religion, and other important factors. The program enables MHS to track where our students are accepted and ultimately which universities/colleges our graduates have attended. It will allow our current students to contact MHS alumni who are attending universities/colleges they are considering. It will show students unnamed academic profiles for our alumni who were accepted, wait-listed and denied by the universities/colleges to which they *(continued on page 3)*

(*“Thinking Maps®” continued*)

to them can be used in any subject. In this way, Thinking Maps® increases students' confidence as they confront new knowledge, master their content and move toward higher levels of thinking.

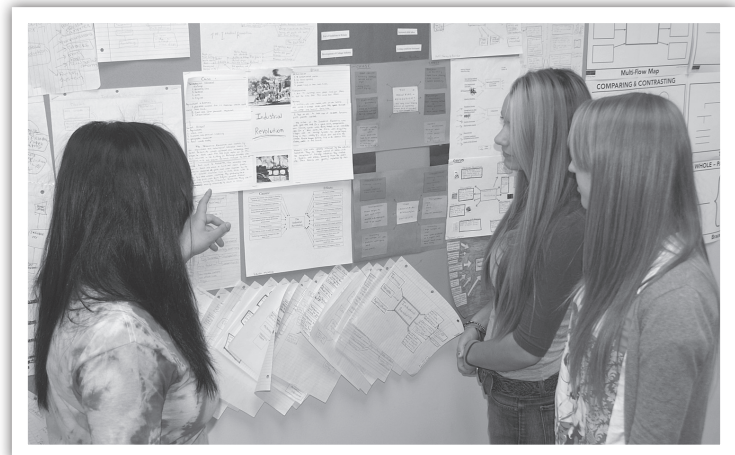
There is a focus on the consistent use of this tool for all students throughout the District and the program is reaching the point where all students have some level of familiarity with using them. Middle School Principal Brian Fried has already witnessed the benefit. “Teachers see Thinking Maps® as an effective tool especially because students are now coming into the middle school with these skills. We no longer need to teach Thinking Maps® in isolation but rather how to integrate it into more advanced class work. Students can now use Thinking Maps® to mediate their own learning.”

The use of the program builds on what is taught on the elementary level, where the maps are woven into the daily lessons, usually posted on SMART Boards™ and throughout the hallways of both Alden Place and Elm Drive elementary schools. Alden Place Principal Tom Libka spoke about how they have improved the way they have been working with Thinking Maps® a few years ago. “When the program was in its infancy in the District, teachers focused on the actual maps themselves. Now they are using the maps as an aid toward a specific objective within a lesson, helping students organize their thoughts. It is a stepping stone for students toward a higher learning.”

At Millbrook High School, Principal Christine Ackerman launched 2009-10 with a focus on helping both teachers and students in the

high school to use the eight maps and their computer software version as a learning tool. She personally taught all students through English classes in the fall. Once students were trained, the program was implemented in all subjects throughout the high school.

Millbrook Central School District has gone one step further in 2009-10 with a series of four school-based “Parent University” workshops. Upon completing their session, parent “graduates” received a downloadable Thinking Maps® software program to help their children use the maps with homework and other assignments. “Without knowing the subject matter, parents can now help their children with assignments by going through the thinking and problem-solving process,” said Principal Ackerman.



Learning Center Opens at Millbrook High School



Where can every Millbrook High School student get help and support for any project, course, or subjects? The new MHS Learning Center has become the place to go. Open every class period and operating since September 2009, the Center was created for the entire school population. It is run by two full-time teachers, Carolyn Hotaling and Maureen Ackerman, as well as a rotating staff of teacher aides. In addition, Math teacher Sophia Sweeny and English teacher Valerie Browne also lend their expertise to students for one period a day.

As you walk into the center, you are required to 'check in' with one of the faculty members. During this process, students discuss their educational goals for the day and choose a work station. As students work towards completing their self-directed tasks, they benefit from instructor expertise, a library of textbooks, computer and Internet access.

Students participate in the Learning Center for a variety of reasons. The Center offers assistance with studying,

homework, make-up work, planning, organization, time management, research papers, projects and college essays. There is an extensive test prep program that focuses on the NYS Regents requirements as well as benchmark College Board assessments like the SAT and ACT. The faculty assists students with résumé writing, job/college interviewing, and college and scholarship applications. In addition, because of its myriad of resources, expert staff, room design and layout, the Center has become an excellent location for students to meet and work on group projects

Students of all abilities benefit from the Center's support for everything from specific skill development to Regents coursework and Advanced Placement studies. Students come during study halls, lunch or after school by appointment. For those students who need additional, structured support, a daily schedule in the Center may be developed for them by the Child Study Team.

The Center's teaching team has

established a welcoming and stress-free environment. "We have tried really hard to help students feel comfortable coming in to ask for assistance," Hotaling said. "This empowers them in their educational journey and gives students ownership of their learning. Ultimately, they are in control of their own grades and success."

("From College Counseling..." continued)

applied to when they were seniors. It also has an SAT prep program, which all MHS students may access and use for test practice.

With the Naviance system and its individual profiles, guidance counselors have powerful resources with which to collaborate with students and parents to develop future plans and goals after graduation. Students and their parents will have ongoing access to Naviance at school and on their home computers. The Millbrook High School guidance department plans to introduce Naviance to the sophomore and freshman classes before the end of this school year.

English Language Arts Initiatives



Literacy is the fundamental building block on which learning is built. The concept is simple: at a young age students need to learn to read so that later in life, they may read to learn. To accomplish this, educators need to put students on a path toward reading success early in their academic careers.

At Elm Drive and Alden Place elementary schools, there are several initiatives that have been put in place to encourage students to be life-long lovers of the printed word. Elementary students now take a new reading assessment exam known as a Developmental Reading Assessment or DRA. This informal test helps identify a student's reading strengths and weaknesses, specifically testing for accuracy, fluency and reading comprehension. A DRA is administered in the beginning of the school year to assess a starting point for each student. At the end of the year, another DRA exam will be administered to measure the level of success the student has achieved throughout the school year. The DRA will check on students' improvement, identify their skill set and provide areas that need improvement.

During the year, teachers give students materials based on their assessed ability that will help them develop their reading skills yet will not cause frustration and discouragement. This is accomplished by organizing students into small groups with similar strengths and needs during special guided reading sessions. Teachers select books from special book rooms, where materials are organized in sets by level and genre. The book rooms are accessible to teachers in all grades, providing a broad pool of various reading level materials and resources. Using these books, students work together taking turns reading out loud, discussing the content and participating in the lesson conducted by the teacher.

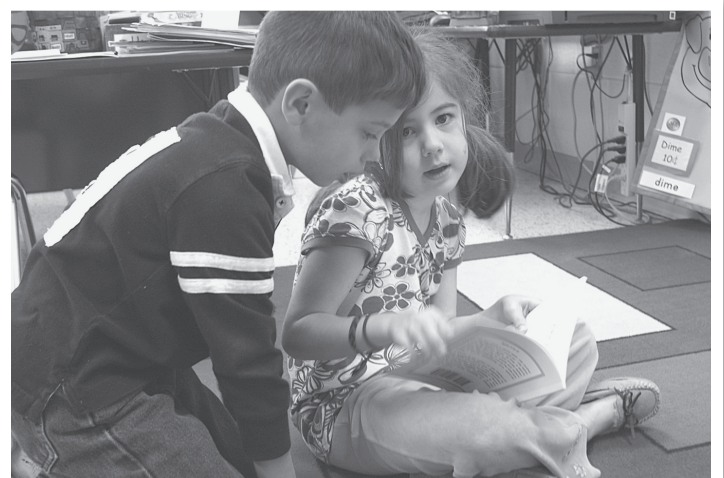
In addition to the guided reading in the classroom, students supplement the practice of their literary craft via the Accelerated

Reader (AR) program, which assesses a student's independent reading practice as an integral component of an overall literacy program. Millbrook Middle School has adopted this highly successful program this year. The software program, already in use at Alden Place and Elm Drive elementary schools, is designed to monitor and assess students' reading comprehension skills. Students choose literary materials based on their reading level and topics that interest them. They enjoy that material independently and at their own pace, logging their progress into the program via a school computer terminal. Once complete, the student takes a multiple choice reading comprehension exam, providing instant feedback for both student and teacher. Based on that exam, future book selections are discussed with the teacher, accounting for the student's interest and reading level.

The overall goal of AR is to make essential reading practice more effective by personalizing it to each student's current reading level. Because the program is customized to each student's individual level, they enjoy the practice of reading more because they experience success throughout the program. This helps build a life-long love of reading and learning.

Cathie Morton, the school's Library Media Specialist, spoke about the program. "Students have been shown how to locate books that are on their reading levels within the school library using the automated library catalog," she said. "They also have access to the AR Book Finder feature through the school library website. AR Book Finder allows students to search for AR quizzes for books they have at home or in their classroom libraries. Information regarding the AR Home Connect feature will be sent home to parents and guardians in the near future and will allow them to log in and view their child's progress from home. We are excited to offer this valuable program to our middle school students this year."

The District has extended their middle school reading program into the seventh grade with a new course required this year. "Reading 7" is given for one quarter in addition to traditional English classes. It is designed to provide students with the opportunity to practice oral and silent reading as well as listening skills through a mixture of hands-on activities, group work and the practical application of Thinking Maps® skills. Literacy specialist Susan Gagnon teaches both the sixth and seventh grade reading classes.



Arts Across Millbrook Central School District

Multi-day arts residency programs will abound at every school during 2009-10 thanks to the over \$20,000 in grants the District received from the Millbrook Educational Foundation, the Millbrook Arts Group, the Berkshire Taconic Foundation in conjunction with the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, and the Tribute Garden. Students will work directly with world-class performers and repertory groups, experiencing theater, dance, playwrighting, poetry, vocal performance, and multi-cultural music integrated into their normal classroom studies.

Shakespeare is a prime example. Millbrook High School students are lucky enough to be studying Shakespeare's classic, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the classroom as well as being able to see the production put on by the prestigious *Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival* in April. Not only will the students be treated to this fantastical play, but immediately following the performance they will also be able to participate with the actors in a question and answer session about the play. The production focuses on the use of language within the play, the individual characters and the relationship between the actor and the audience, bringing the overall story to life and making it memorable and accessible for all. Millbrook Arts Group is sponsoring a public evening performance on April 30.

Advanced Placement English students will be treated to a coffeehouse style open reading and workshop by Pulitzer Prize winning poet Jorie Graham on April 19. Graham has taught at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop and is currently the Boylston



Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University.

Millbrook Middle School sixth grade students are working with guest playwrights from the Bardavon every Tuesday in their *Young Playwrights Festival*, an artist residency program for area schools. The forty-minute weekly sessions cover such topics as basic playwriting including plots, character development and revision, as well as the basics of theatrical production including scene setting and direction. The students also learn to incorporate visual thinking strategies and writing with emotion. As part of the program, the students will write their own plays and perform them in a staged reading.

School Singers Perform Together

On March 26, choral teachers Heidi Tucci and Alexis Clements expanded their second annual Singapalooza District Songfest to include a workshop and performance by the nationally renowned a cappella group, The Yale Alley Cats. Student choral groups from Alden Place, the middle school, and the high school Madrigal Choir performed for each other, as well as learned how to develop their performance skills. The Yale Alley Cats diverse repertoire includes jazz, Motown, pop, classical, and many other genre. The residency day concluded with the Yale Alley Cats and MHS Madrigal Choir performing jointly in a wonderful evening community concert sponsored by Millbrook Arts Group.



PUTTING ART INTO PERSPECTIVE
An art student practices drawing perspective using the hallway in the high school.

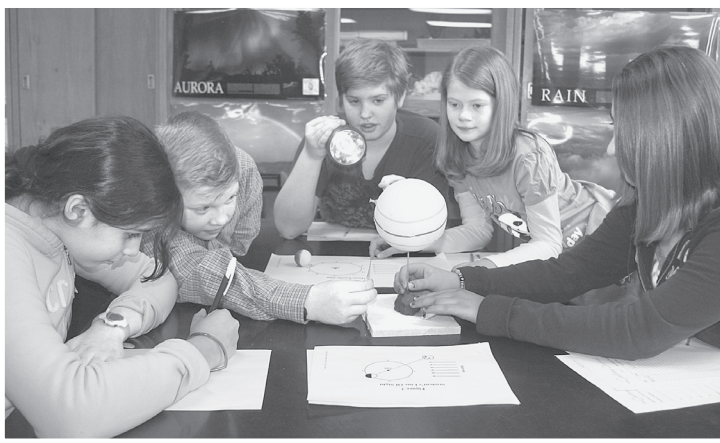
Vanaver Caravan comes to Millbrook

Last year, students from Alden Place and Elm Drive elementary schools had the privilege of watching the *Vanaver Caravan* perform their World Dance and Music Assembly, followed by a series of workshops on Mexican traditional dance. This year, second- and third-grade students will participate in a *Vanaver Caravan* school residency in May. Third-graders will focus on dances from China and Brazil while second-graders will focus on North America, Europe and Africa.

The *Vanaver Caravan* school residency program provides a hands-on learning experience that augments and enlivens the curriculum students are currently studying. A member of the *Vanaver Caravan* will work with the students for several weeks, immersing them in the social studies, language arts, physical education, art and music from a particular region or culture. This offers students a well-rounded opportunity to share the customs and traditions of different countries

around the world. This approach helps to provoke a deeper understanding of textbook information.

Vanaver dancers incorporate their own culture into their dances. Gustavo Caldas, a native of Brazil, has expertise in Afro-Brazilian martial arts and a dance called Capoeira. Caldas will teach Capoeira as well as a dance called Maculele. He will also teach the Samba to teachers. Caravan Director
(continued on page 8)



Science 21

Science 21 is an integrated science sequence developed at Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES that has been implemented at both Alden Place Elementary and Millbrook Middle School. The program incorporates the use of inquiry-based experiments and labs to build memorable experiences, known as discovery-based learning. This type of learning helps students to bridge text and lecture concepts. The program's relevant, grade-level appropriate experiences include physical, earth and life sciences and are presented in an integrated, deliberate sequence to provide a comprehensive science program in which students are interested.

Science 21 differs from previous programs in the use of discovery-based learning and in how each successive unit builds on the last. This teaches the students not only to learn the science, but also to think more like a scientist. Integrated within *Science 21* is the use of SMART Board™ technology as well as the use of Thinking Maps®.

Each grade level is broken into a total of four units of study. Each grade answers what is known as “Big Questions,” which are overall topics and concepts. *Science 21* was initially implemented in Alden Place Elementary last year with great success. Much success is credited to the consistent, essential lessons and common assessment tools. “*Science 21* provides students with the essential content that we need to teach, so we don’t miss anything,” says Alden Place Principal Tom Libka. “The students like the hands-on nature, which is a big step up from book learning.”

Science 21 was expanded this year into the middle school. Students in Alfred Hammell’s sixth-grade class really seem to be enjoying the hands-on discovery-based learning experience. Classroom student Jordan Babbit said, “It’s awesome! Science was boring when I was younger. Now it’s one of my favorite subjects. I really like the activities we get to do in science now.” Branigan Murphy, another of Hammell’s students agreed. “From one to ten, it’s about a nine.”

The District hopes to expand the K-6 program into Elm Drive Elementary School within the near future. Currently, the students in the primary school are introduced to many science topics in conjunction with its literacy program.

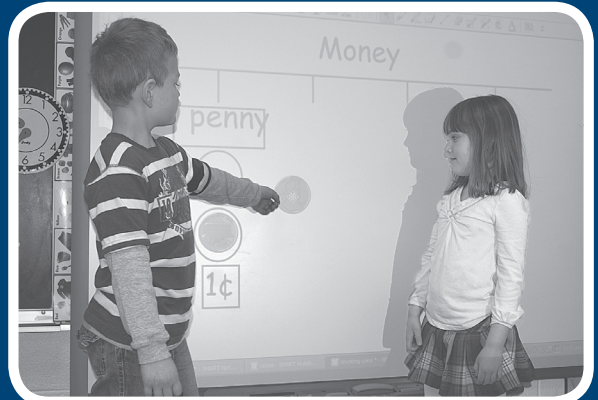
SMART Boards™ Used Throughout the District

Millbrook Central School District has continued to extend and deepen its implementation of SMART Board™ technology this year. SMART Boards™ are interactive whiteboards that provide touch technology to detect user input via a finger, pen or other solid object.

The interactive ability of this technology encourages students to actively participate in classroom lessons. The boards can be used in any subject, either to display pertinent information, be used as an interactive chalkboard or to

display educational tools like Thinking Maps® to be incorporated within the particular lesson. For students who have been surrounded by a multimedia environment, SMART Boards™ are a good balance between traditional and technological innovation, making the learning experience more fun and interesting. This increases students’ alertness and retention.

Having SMART Boards™ available in each class throughout the



District allows educators to provide a consistent, familiar learning device throughout a student’s educational career. The equipment is a very versatile instructional tool, and may be suitable for solving math equations, conducting class research or strategizing for a school football game.

Building-Level Teams Plan Enrichment Programs at Elm Drive and Alden Place Elementary

Throughout Millbrook Central School District, each individual building has a committee known as a Building Level Team (BLT). Each BLT, comprised of a combination of school staff and parents, meets on a monthly basis to work on their top three priorities, depending on the student needs within the school. The elementary schools and their team initiatives are featured on this page.

Eat Well, Play Hard

According to the Center for Disease Control, childhood obesity is a growing problem in America's schools, with rates more than doubling within the last twenty years. In an effort to help combat this problem, Elm Drive Elementary School, in conjunction with Cornell Cooperative Extension, has implemented a program called *Eat Well, Play Hard*.

The new program began as an eight-module process in which the school identified the areas they wanted to work on the most. As a result, the school now offers its students new options to get fit and healthy. Principal Karen Fitzgerald said, "Elm Drive is committed to teaching children to be healthy and active students. Research has shown that children who eat a healthy diet and remain physically active tend to enjoy learning more."

In order to keep students more physically active, the school has formed a walking club, which meets daily to walk outside on nice days or inside the building during inclement weather. This provides students with an organized physical activity five days a week. In addition, during recess students are offered several different choices of guided activities designed to help foster life-long fitness habits.

Healthy food tasting has been incorporated into the students' classroom activities. This initiative began this fall when a small group of second-graders were given the opportunity to attend a full-day healthy cooking class at Cornell Cooperative Extension. Activities included being "student chefs" and making yogurt dip with fresh fruit, whole-wheat pizza and baked apples, all of which they ate for lunch. These students now serve their peers as "ambassadors" of healthy eating, sharing their experience, knowledge and recipes in the classroom and reinforcing the "healthy choices" lessons from the teachers. To reinforce these nutritional lessons, Elm Drive has implemented "Healthy Wednesdays," a school-wide initiative that takes place on every Wednesday when all fattening snacks are excluded. Instead, the program offers students choices between sherbets, pretzels and dried fruits.

Upcoming events include a *Healthy Awareness Day*, which is scheduled for May 19. On that date, parents may join their children in participating in the walking club and enjoying healthy snacks. Plans are currently in the works for a future school trip to the Walkway Over the Hudson.

Eat Well, Play Hard has been met with great success. As a result, Alden Place Elementary is looking to incorporate select modules into their program next year.

Alden Place focuses on History, Enrichment and Civics

On May 12, Alden Place Elementary students will participate in their annual *Colonial Day* event. *Colonial Day* is based on the fourth-grade social studies curriculum and the fourth-grade students teach the third-graders about the games and crafts from that era. The fifth-grade class handles much of the camp preparations that include preparations for a traditional colonial dinner menu, butter churning and tent set-up. In addition, they will also conduct a New York Regiment presentation. Students will also be involved in storytelling, sewing, quilting, apple press, tinsmith, rug making, and much more!

The Alden Place Elementary School continues its *Enrichment Program* for the second year. Last year, the *Enrichment Program* offered six different opportunities and boasted the participation of ninety students. To date this year, the program has doubled in size, offering twelve different programs with 130 participants. Enrichment is a volunteer after-school learning activity for students and is available from March through May or June. Selections this year include science, art, writing, drama, book club, cooking, robotics, and many others. Students may sign up for up to two classes and sections are still available.

In addition, Alden Place Elementary School has formed a new student government this year. Two students from each class are chosen every week to participate in the club. The group works on their public speaking skills by taking turns telling stories or riddles to each other during the meetings. They also tackle school issues. So far this year, the student government has implemented a recycling program and began working on revising some of the school rules.



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("Vanaver Caravan" continued)

Livia Vanaver will share teaching duties with Caldos, including a Chinese ribbon dance and enacting several native folk tales.

While students learn the dances and traditions from Caravan members, teachers tie in classroom activities including literary selections, art and music instruction of the cultures being studied. Once students have mastered the dances, they will don the traditional garb for the dance and present it to family and friends in a cumulating performance on May 26.

This performance will not only be an opportunity for students to show off what they have learned, but it also offers the second-graders an opportunity to experience time at Alden Place Elementary, where they will attend school next year. This is designed to help bridge the gap between the two buildings and introduce students to their future educators.

Vanaver is very excited to be working in the Millbrook Central School District this year. "Over the past twenty-five years, we have worked closely with Dr. Jaeger when he was an administrator in other school districts, so he knew our work very well from his own experience," she said. "Through learning the dance and music and the reasons why people dance, Millbrook students and teachers personally experience how people from other cultures express themselves, while discovering self-awareness and their own abilities to relate to others."



A reading class in the middle school wrote and produced their own play for students and faculty as a way to solve a conflict they were having in the classroom. They became friends in the process! Congratulations to all involved!

("Superintendent's Message" continued)

assessment tools and accelerated reading opportunities. Science 21 has followed students from Alden Place into the sixth-grade program, extending this approach to student investigations and inquiry into the middle school. Our Building-Level Teams continue to evolve school-wide experiences at Elm and Alden with their respective focus on healthier

and physically fit lifestyles, colonial history and citizenship through student government. SMART™ technology is being used in every school, with teacher training to support its use. And finally, the article on the arts describes the many new ways students are being introduced to the likes of Shakespeare, a cappella music, playwrighting, global cultures and

dance traditions to deepen their insights as they study literature, social studies, language arts and music. Millbrook is fortunate for this community's support and the philanthropic generosity of so many local organizations. It enables us to provide an increasingly meaningful educational experience for all our students. Thank you!

Lloyd Jaeger



COMING SOON

**2010-11
School Budget
VOTE
May 18, 2010**