

- New Board Goals
- Janet Haley Is Teacher of the Year
- Preschool Kindergarten Census

# The Communicator

*Simsbury Public Schools—Continuously Improving Teaching & Learning*

To the Simsbury Community:

Like you, over the last year the Simsbury Public Schools have faced some harsh economic realities, and we have made tough choices. Economic pressures will certainly have an impact on the Board of Education budget development process for the 2010-2011 school year. Each year, we identify specific improvement priorities, always guided by our Board Goals (*see article at right*). Our priorities for the 2010-2011 budget are:

- Pursue year four objectives of five-year technology plan
- Maintain class size consistent with board policy
- Invest in teacher quality through professional development and professional learning communities
- Invest in the development of curriculum focused on 21st century skills

Last year, we communicated about opportunities for you to comment on the budget. This year, the BOE budget development process is even more open, with a new area of our district website devoted entirely to the budget. Beginning in mid-December, you can go to [www.simsbury.k12.ct.us](http://www.simsbury.k12.ct.us) and click on Board of Education/Budget Update. There you will find information from the inception of the budget through the May 18 referendum. A budget calendar, benchmark data, a link to offer your feedback on the budget, videos of meetings taped by Simsbury Community Television (SCTV), and more will be posted.

The budget will be presented to the Board of Finance on March 9th, with a public hearing on April 6th. Board of Education meetings are open to the public with opportunities for public comment at the beginning and end of each meeting. We hope that we have given you every avenue to be able to take an active role in the process.

We wish you and your family a wonderful holiday season!

Respectfully,

*Dr. Diane Ullman, Superintendent  
Jack Sennott, Board of Education Chair*

## Board of Education Identifies 2009-2014 Board Goals

Over the last year, the Board of Education (BOE) has been working with Superintendent Dr. Diane Ullman to develop new five-year goals. These goals were adopted on June 9, 2009 and will be used as a guide to help prioritize all decisions related to the education budget, including curriculum and instruction, structural supports for students, staffing, and system infrastructure.

The improvement focus that has been identified will be in the areas of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), 21st Century Skills, Curriculum Development, Student Achievement, and Technology Integration. For each of the four Board goals, the district has outlined potential indicators of success in order to clearly define what it means to reach the desired goal in each area. An accompanying theory of action for improving teaching and learning was also developed.

### 2009-2014 Board of Education Goals

1. Integrate and align content area curriculum with the higher-order, 21st Century critical thinking skills needed for success in learning, work, and life.
2. Ensure that every student is engaged in a rigorous and engaging learning experience that recognizes and challenges him/her to balance their academic progress with expressive, personal, physical, civic, and social development.
3. Attract and retain the highest quality staff by providing a vital, challenging, and consistently focused professional environment.
4. Continuously improve the systems that promote effective communication among and between the administration, staff, and community and ensure that the deployment of resources efficiently supports the district's Mission and priorities.

## 2009 CAPT/CMT Highlights

Simsbury continues to show strong performance on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and on the 10th grade Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), the most important "report card" measure in the state. The CMT assesses essential reading, writing, and math skills for grades 3-8, as well as science skills in grades 5 and 8.

### CAPT

- Math, Reading and Writing scores are all in the top 3 districts in DRG B and top 10 districts in state.
- Strong results in Writing with 85.3% at goal or above, with 54.2% scoring in advanced band.
- Students scoring proficient or above on all 4 subject tests was 95.3% or better. Students scoring at proficient or above include: 95.3% in Math, 95.4% in Science, 96.6% in Reading, and 97% in Writing.
- 20% of students tested scored at the advanced level on all 4 subject tests.

Grades 5-8 CMT Percentage of Students At/Above Goal in Math				
Grade Level in 08-09	Students	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Grade 5	338	83%	86%	93%
Grade 6	337	86%	88%	91%
Grade 7	364	91%	93%	96%
Grade 8	370	94%	97%	92%

### CMT

- As Simsbury students progress through the grades, performance in all subject areas increases significantly. This underscores the importance of our commitment to provide strong curriculum, professional development, and support for struggling students in the early grades.

- More than 50% of students scored in the advanced band in Math in grades 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8. Grade 4 has nearly 50% of the students scoring in the advanced band in math. Student performance in math in grade 5 is at #1 in DRG B.
- Cohort data in all grades shows improvement. Example: Reading cohort data improved in grades 4-7; grade 4 12% growth, grade 5 7% growth, grade 6 2% growth, and grade 7 4%. Grade 8 declined by 4%. Simsbury ranks #1 in DRG B for grade 5, #2 for grade 7.

For complete results of the tests, contact Assistant Superintendent Erin Murray at the BOE office at (860) 651-3361 or visit the district website.

## PRESCHOOL/ KINDERGARTEN CENSUS

Each year Simsbury Public Schools conducts a census of all children residing in Simsbury who are pre-school age. With this information, we can more accurately estimate the number of children who will enter kindergarten from each area of our community.

If you have a pre-school age child or children residing in your home, your assistance in completing this brief survey by **December 30, 2009** would be greatly appreciated. You will find the census at <http://www.simsbury.k12.ct.us/page.cfm?p=2563> or, if you have any problems with the link, please go to [www.simsbury.k12.ct.us](http://www.simsbury.k12.ct.us) and select "Preschool Census" from the Community Connection section on the home page. If you do not have access to a computer, you may phone your information in to Susan Caccamo, Enrollment Coordinator, at 860-651-3361.

## School-Community Connection

A new initiative called "**School Windows**" was launched this fall in order to give Simsbury citizens improved access to our schools. Themes were developed around topics of interest to parents and community members. Once the theme was chosen, an informational article was written and posted on the district website, and tours were organized. For example, on October 29, the high school conducted a tour around the theme of "What Really Happens During Thursday Morning PLCs?" Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were implemented at the high school at the start of the school year; SHS Principal Neil Sullivan and several faculty members had the opportunity to answer questions about this new practice, including why PLCs have such a positive impact on student learning. Other themes that are being explored are Readers & Writers Workshops, Classroom Technology in Action, and Artists in the Making. For more information on upcoming activities, visit our home page and click on "School Windows."

An **H1N1 flu clinic** was held on October 22nd for 2-4 year olds in the HJMS auxiliary gym. There were 250 children that had pre-registered for the clinic plus walk-ins. Rick Matheny, Director of the Farmington Valley Health District, indicated that they could handle about 60 inoculations per hour. As nasal or needle vaccines become available, information will be posted under the "Healthy Schools/Healthy Students" link on the district website.

## Achievements

### Simsbury's Teacher of the Year



District-wide autism consulting teacher **Janet Haley** is Simsbury's 2009-2010 Teacher of the Year.

Haley has been instrumental in the success of the Ready-Set-Go program and in the delivery of high-quality professional development for many staff in regard to autism spectrum disorders. She is active in

promoting autism awareness beyond the walls of the school. Haley is an expert in her field, working tirelessly as a collaborator, mentor and friend. Her story is that of a lifelong learner motivated to see all students achieve their maximum potential. She draws from her personal experiences as well as professional research to help prepare staff to better connect with and positively affect the lives of their students.

As Teacher of the Year, Janet will serve as the face for all the teachers of the Simsbury public schools. She was selected by a committee of her peers based upon conversations with her, recommendations from her coworkers, and classroom observations.

## Spotlight on Schools

### **SIMSBURY HIGH SCHOOL RECOGNIZED AS MODEL SCHOOL**

Simsbury High School was in the spotlight on October 14th, at the Model Schools Showcase hosted by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) on the campus of Bentley College in Waltham, MA. SHS Principal **Neil Sullivan** was invited to present at the conference from one of the associate directors at NEASC. Specifically, the commission asked SHS to discuss the process it used to create more heterogeneous grouping patterns for students by eliminating Level III classes in 9th grade for most core disciplines. That move was highlighted by the commission as significant progress on one of the most challenging elements in the NEASC standards for accreditation.

Nearly 350 high school educators from across New England were in attendance at the event, and Simsbury's session was noted as one of the best of the day by conference participants. In addition to Sullivan, the team of presenters included Assistant Superintendent Erin Murray, Assistant Principal Eileen Eustis, and English Teacher Dan Diana. The team discussed the year-long study about grouping patterns that was conducted by the SHS Leadership Team as well as Department Supervisors, and they outlined some of the support systems that have been put in place (class size caps, training on differentiated instruction, the addition of student support resources at the high school) to ensure the best possible implementation of this

transition. The team noted that there is much more work to do on this front, but it was certainly a day to celebrate the fact that Simsbury High was one of just 12 "model schools" invited to present at this year's showcase.

**SHS & HJMS GRADING PORTAL** The Grading Portal for our high school and middle school students opened this fall. This online feature allows students and parents 24/7 access to the current status of student grades in each of their subjects. The system provides view-only access to grade book entries for the individual student and is password protected for each family. Feedback from families has been very positive thus far.

### **TARIFFVILLE SCHOOL**

**CELEBRATES!** On November 3rd, Tariffville School opened its doors to the community to show off recent renovations. Students served as "tour guides" during the Open House. The extensive renovation project broke ground in June 2008, expanding the school by more than 8,500 square feet, updating existing classrooms, and making needed improvements to the heating and ventilation systems. A new main entrance, main office, kitchen, and cafeteria were features of the project. The traffic pattern around the school was completely overhauled as well. Construction and renovation was headed up by the Branford-based construction firm A. Secondino and Son along with OakPark Architects of West Hartford.

A dedication ceremony took place on November 17th.



*The big smiles on the faces of these Tariffville School "student tour guides"—Jack Farrell, Nick Tefft, Katelyn Paddock, Sarah Poirot, Emily Candels, Luke Gorkofsky, Sara Gorkofsky, Rhyon Jadovich, Hayley Selvage, Savannah Caroon, Katherine Berry, Katie Deveaux, Jake Ruzsbatzky, and Carl Doncette—show why they were selected to show off the brand new renovations at the school's Open House on November 3rd.*

# Stellar Students

## CAPSS STUDENT RECOGNITION

SHS student **Tom Benneche** and HJMS student **Noah Goldblatt** have received the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) Student Recognition Program award, based on community service and service to others, academic prowess related to ability, and leadership service to the school community. A luncheon was held November 13, 2009. SHS Principal Neil Sullivan recommended Tom for this award. Said Sullivan, “[Tom] has distinguished himself as a scholar, an athlete, and a leader. Academically, Tom has challenged himself in senior year with a full schedule of AP classes, having already been recognized as an AP Scholar and a National Merit Commended Scholar. He is also one of the school’s best runners on both the track and cross country teams, where he was selected by his peers to be team captain. For the past three years, he has served as Class President, leading successful fundraisers, school events, and charitable drives. Most importantly, he is just a generous, witty, and thoughtful young man who is respected immensely by his classmates and teachers.”

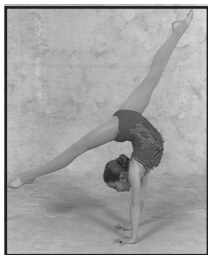
HJMS Principal Sue Homrok-Lemke said of Noah Goldblatt: “Noah is a personable, articulate and friendly student who is well liked by students and adults. [He is] a team player, who is able to take a leadership role in a kind and gentle manner. As a participant in the Leadership Academy, he has helped with orientation programs and Open Houses while maintaining a respectable, responsible nature.”

Noah earned all A's in grade 7 and during the first quarter of grade 8. In grade 7, he made a DVD of Israel to share with his classmates, which was appreciated by his Social Studies class. Noah is a well-respected violinist and a community volunteer.

**ALPINE SKI RACER Erik Sparkows-**ki will be training in Lake Placid for potential Olympic opportunities. The HJMS eighth grader attends the National Sports Academy (NSA) in Keene, NY and has been on skis since he was 1½ years old. This fall he has the opportunity to train alongside U.S. Olympians in hopes of reaching his personal goal of being an Olympic skier. Erik has invested dedication, time, and effort to achieve high levels of proficiency in the sport of Alpine Ski Racing.



*Eighth grade figure skater Ainsley McGill*



*Sixth grade dancer Megan Laakso. ©Donner Photographic Inc.*

## COMPETITIVE FIGURE

**SKATER** and HJMS eighth grader **Ainsley McGill** was selected to the 2009 U.S. Figure Skating Team as a result of finishing 2nd in the country at the 2009 U.S. Junior National Championships at the Juvenile level in 2008.

McGill belongs to the Charter Oak Figure Skating Club in Simsbury, is coached by Vladimir and Elena Petrenko, and skates out of the International Skating Center of Connecticut. She has plans to move up through the Junior and Senior levels in the future, with her sights ultimately focused on the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia.

## A REAL SHOWSTOPPER

During the summer of 2009, **Megan Laakso**, a sixth grader at Tariffville School, competed in a national dance competition in Myrtle Beach, SC., against hundreds of dancers. “Showstop-

pers,” a dance competition now in its 32nd year, gives students not only the performance opportunity but also a top-notch venue in which to display their talents. Megan earned the gold trophy and a plaque officially naming her the number one dancer in the United States in her age division. The routine that won Megan these high marks was her acrobatic solo, “Exodus.” (Acrobatic routines involve a series of back flips and handstands). Megan has also danced in Madison Square Garden in New York City, Disney World, Universal Studios and has performed at half time for the Women’s New York Liberty basketball team.

## SHS FALL SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

**Girls Cross-Country** won the Central CT Conference West Championship with an undefeated 14-0 season. The **Field Hockey** team won the Central CT Conference West Championship with a 15-1 record, was the #1 seed in the State Class L Tournament, and lost in overtime 2-1 in the State Quarter-Finals to the eventual State Champion Greenwich. The **Badminton** team won the CT Interscholastic Badminton League Championship with an undefeated 10-0 record and finished first in the state tournament. The **Varsity Football** team was Co-Champion of the Central Connecticut Conference Division 1. The team beat rival Glastonbury in the last regular season game 34-33 in OT; the team was seeded 4th but lost 41-26 to Pomperaug in the State Semi-Finals. **Simsbury High School** was selected as the Central CT Conference Sportsmanship Award winner in the West Division for the Fall ‘09 season. At the CIAC Sportsmanship Seminar in September, Simsbury was awarded first place in the “Michaels Achievement Cup” in Class LL. This award was presented for overall athletic excellence during the 2008-09 school year.

## CTI Update

Last year, volunteers launched *The Classroom Technology Initiative: Preparing 21st Century Learners (CTI)*, a five-year campaign to address a potential technology gap that could impede students from acquiring the 21st century skills they need to succeed in this digital information age. Approximately \$60,000 in technology equipment has been donated by Simsbury’s generous parent-teacher organizations, and local businesses have contributed. Hence, more classrooms are approaching “model classroom” status, which we define as having a digital projector, interactive whiteboard, and “ready access” to laptops. But additional support is needed to fulfill CTI’s goal of providing ready access to technology for seamless instructional support and learning. Access to laptops opens up the world to students through the Internet and other online resources. This ready access will further improve education in Simsbury.

CTI is managed by the Simsbury Education Enhancement Foundation (SEEF) and co-chaired by Simsbury parent volunteers Kris Barnett and Sheila Gschwind. Donations can be made directly to SEEF or via the United Way. SEEF also accepts matching gifts. For more information, including a list of donors, go to the district homepage and click on the CTI logo on the lefthand side. You also can email [21stCenturyLearners@simsbury.k12.ct.us](mailto:21stCenturyLearners@simsbury.k12.ct.us) or call 860-986-1499.

## Enrollment

As of October 1, 2009, there were 4,840 students enrolled in the Simsbury Public Schools’ five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

CENTRAL	LATIMER LANE	SQUADRON LINE	TARIFFVILLE	TOOTIN’ HILLS	HJMS	SHS
376	490	781	285	505	827	1,576
<b>TOTAL ENROLLMENT = 4,840</b>						



Simsbury Public Schools  
933 Hopmeadow Street  
Simsbury, CT 06070  
(860) 651-3361

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## Taking Initiative

**DEFINING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS** High-quality, interactive communications with parents and the community has always been a primary goal of the Simsbury Public Schools. Surveys have been an excellent tool for us to determine what parents and community members are thinking about education here in Simsbury. In the next few weeks, you can expect to see an online survey that will give you the opportunity to help us define 21st Century Skills, skills that will engage students more in learning and prepare them for success in a global economy and digital world. Once we define what constitutes 21st Century Skills, we can do the work of integrating these skills (such as critical thinking, problem solving, and communication) more purposefully into our core academic subjects. We welcome your input every step of the way.

## Keeping in Touch

[www.simsbury.k12.ct.us](http://www.simsbury.k12.ct.us)

**BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETINGS** It is vital to keep lines of communication open between public schools and the community. One way to stay in touch is by attending a Board meeting. The Board of Education meets on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month, at 7PM. Visit our website for upcoming dates and locations.

**SIMSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOL ONLINE** The district website ([www.simsbury.k12.ct.us](http://www.simsbury.k12.ct.us)), now more than ever, is the place to go for information on what's happening in the Simsbury Public Schools. Find out what your child is having for lunch that day, check on her sports schedule, or look ahead to when the next band concert is scheduled. When a hot topic comes to the forefront, such as school security concerns, the budget, or a health crisis, you can go to the home page to find links to the latest information, take a survey, or participate in a discussion forum. Put our website in your "favorites" and stay connected!

## *In Our Next Issue...*

Watch for a special "Budget Snapshot" issue of *The Communicator* coming in early Spring...all the news & highlights about the budget development process.

## By the Numbers

- Total participation for SHS's Fall 2009 sports program was 652 student athletes: 334 Girls and 328 Boys.
- Simsbury Public Schools educates 98 students from Hartford through the Project Choice Program. One hundred thirty-five Simsbury regular education students attend magnet schools outside of Simsbury.
- There are 177 students currently enrolled in the Simsbury Enrichment and Extended Day program (SEED): 103 at Squadron Line, 32 at Tootin' Hills and 27 at Latimer Lane. This first-year program offering before and after school care and enrichment is off to a fantastic start!
- One hundred twenty-two elementary children and 30 middle schoolers participated in the first annual Town-wide Cross Country Fun Run on October 29th, a 1.977 mile race.