



The Putnam Examiner

FREE



twitter.com/examinerstone

Serving All of Putnam County

August 24- August 30, 2010

SMALL NEWS IS BIG NEWS

Volume 2, Issue 75

Student Participation Goes Beyond Classroom at New Brewster School

By Andrew Vitelli

At most schools, the concept of student democracy doesn't extend much past mundane, trivial decisions. Students may have the power to decide what the theme of a high school dance is, or who the yearbook dubs "Most Likely to Succeed," but the real decisions are left to the grown-ups. Longview School, which will open in Brewster this year after nine years in Cortlandt Manor, isn't like most schools.

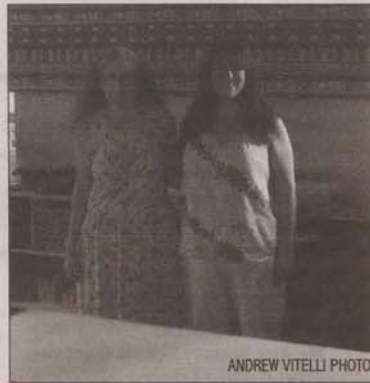
At Longview, a small, non-profit private K-12, the student body votes on everything except the curriculum (and issues involving safety or employment). This gives the students real power and real responsibility in how the school runs, Director Mark Jacobs said.

"I, as the director, get one vote," said Jacobs. "A five year old, as a kindergartener, gets one vote."

Students in pre-school, high school or anywhere in between, as well their parents, will have two chances to check out the school this week. Longview will be hosting two free Family Craft Days, one on Tuesday, Aug. 24 and another Sunday, Aug. 29 where parents will be able to tour the school while their kids enjoy the art room.

Although Longview will be doubling in size with its move, its student body of 30 to 40 kids will still not be much bigger than a large class at a public school. At Longview, a "big" class may have 10 students while some classes might be one-on-one instruction.

"Our motto is 'Less homework, fewer tests, deeper understanding,'" said Jacobs. "We offer a combination of a focus on helping kids achieve independence and responsibility mixed with traditional curricular education."



ANDREW VITELLI PHOTO

Assistant Director Barbara Jacobs and teacher Emily Sussman will be part of the staff at Longview School in Brewster.

While Longview is certainly not like a typical school, just how different a child's experience is varies. There are three tracks of education at Longview; the "Prep School" track is the most conventional, as students take rigorous classes, with exams, homework, etc.

The Sudbury/Unschooling track is the most alternative; it allows students to pursue their own interests while taking as many or as few classes as they see fit. If someone's got an interest such as music or art, this will let them concentrate on pursuing it without constantly being pulled away.

"When kids learn how to be expert in any particular area, they are then able to apply that skill of becoming an expert in different areas," Jacobs said. "It doesn't matter that much what they are becoming expert in."

The Exposure track is a kind of middle

ground. Students take a range of academic classes but limited homework and testing are required.

As students get older, starting at about age 12, they have the chance to participate in an internship program where they are placed in a local business in a field they may be interested in pursuing as a profession.

"We found that so often people will study and get a degree to prepare them for a job when they've never spent time in that workplace," Jacobs said. "People spend hundreds of thousands of dollars getting a degree in a job, then find it is not something they are interested in."

Loretta Jordan, a Bronx resident, decided Longview was the right fit for her son, Nekoda Bear, because she wanted more than the public school system offered.

"I didn't want my child to be involved with a method of education that was from the outside in," Jordan said. "I grew up with that and even though I fared well enough, it wasn't what I wanted for my children."

Jordan believes growing up in a small-school environment, interacting with children of all ages rather than just those in his grade, has benefitted Bear.

"He has matured in a way that more reflects real-life situations," Jordan said. "He's had to interact with a broader range of people than he would have, and out of that came what I feel is the ability to take personal responsibility for his actions."

Even conflicts between students and teachers, normally resolved by a school's administration, are resolved with help of the students at Longview. A Judiciary Committee consisting of one staff member and three students acts as a jury to hear

complaints and issue decisions regarding infractions of school laws.

"This way, kids are learning what is fair and what is just by being involved in all parts of the justice system," Jacobs said.

Students also share the burden of running and maintaining the school through a series of clerkships; one student may assist with paying the bills while another will help give tours.

The school's move from Westchester to Putnam came after Crossroads School, located on Route 6 in Brewster, reached out to Jacobs and let him know they'd be closing their doors, creating a void in the community. By expanding from about 15 students and moving to Main Street in the village, Jacobs felt he could serve both the families from the Cortlandt location and those looking for an alternate schooling option in the Brewster area.

"The philosophies were similar, and the specialized individual attention was the same," said Emily Sussman, a teacher at Crossroads who will begin working at Longview this semester. "What Longview brings into the picture from where I was is the democratic and the judicial systems. It just adds more to a child's life."

Barbara Jacobs, a teacher and the school's assistant director, believes students graduate Longview "being a self-motivated learner and knowing how to get along with all types of people and dealing with all types of problems."

Longview School is located at 83 Main Street in Brewster. Tuesday's Family Crafts Day will run from 6 to 9 p.m. while Sunday's will run from 1 to 4 p.m. For more information, visit www.longviewsschool.org or call (845) 259-8259.