

Summer 2009



*From the
Desk of the
Executive
Director*

*Mr.
Richard
Burke*

Dear BBL Family and Friends,

As this landmark year comes to a fast close, we have already started to plan the beginning of another year – one which will equally be filled with milestones and growth for the BBL community.

Some of this year's unforgettable highlights have left me speechless at the creativity and resilience of our students, and at the dedication and talents of our staff. On June 2, our students impressed guests with a 15-minute African dance performance at our annual fundraiser. Two weeks later, we celebrated the end of the year with the enjoyable chaos of "Fun Day." And on June 23, we watched our 5th Graders graduate with excitement as they looked forward to their middle school experience.

The progress we made this year towards expanding our space, developing our leadership team and training our staff speaks to the promise that BBL holds as an "oasis of hope" for our children. Once again our test scores in ELA and mathematics have exceeded the average for schools in District 11 and the Bronx.

Although we began the year in a fading economic climate, we have caught the attention of several foundations that recognize our potential. And previous supporters remain faithful to our cause. We sincerely thank everyone for all this support.

Our dreams are bright because of our successful year. Going forward, we're keen to strengthen further our staff's facility with our unique teaching approach, *the subordination of teaching to learning*. And because we are so successful as a primary school, we will move forward with plans to add a full-fledged after-school program and grow into a middle school.

Your support has permitted us to expand a model of education that works. We look forward to your continual cooperation as we better the lives of children and give them the tools to succeed.

Thank you.



*Congratulations to all our graduates!
We'll miss you!*

To make a donation: Visit our website (www.bronxbetterlearning.org) or call Ms. Sam Valerio at the school (718-655-6660). Your donations help pay for field trips, museum visits, an expanded arts program, and better computers. All contributions are tax-deductible.

Chess Scores Big

This year, our school started a formal program to teach students how to play chess and profit from the many benefits the game offers, including strategic thinking, patience, and sportsmanship.

The Chess in the Schools Program (www.chessintheschools.org) provided a trained chess instructor, Mr. Chris Welcome, who gave lessons to 5 different classes each Tuesday during the school year. He taught both 5th Grade classes and all three 3rd Grade classes in the fall, and all 4th Grade classes and two 2nd Grade classes in the spring. In addition, 3rd and 5th Graders could participate in the Chess Club, which met from 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. on alternating Tuesdays.

Teams from the Chess Club represented our school in two tournaments (one in the Bronx, one in Queens), where they competed against students from other parts of New York City. Due to the program's great success, we plan to continue chess instruction next year. We also hope to increase the amount of instruction students receive.

Reporting by Mr. Jason Sarsfield, teacher



It may have been cold last winter, but our Chess Team was hot!

Next Year's Calendar

Next year's school calendar is already up on our Website: www.bronxbetterlearning.org. See you in September!



The winning team cha-chas to victory.

Fun Day: Yellow Team Wins 2nd Year in a Row

Fun Day is an end-of-the-year activity where student teams compete against each other in different games. Some of the games are kickball, soccer, crab-walk, dodge ball, and relay races.

Congratulations go to the Yellow Team, who won the most points this year, just as they did last year. But Fun Day is not about winning or losing, it's about having fun!

I'm a 5th grader and when I go to middle school in September I'm going to miss Fun Day and all the terrific times we had. It's exciting to see all of your friends laughing and doing what we do best – having a great time.

This year was the Kindergarteners' and 1st Graders' first Fun Day and I hope they enjoyed it. I think all the teams are winners. I also enjoyed having parents there to compete and volunteer their time, and I was happy with the music being played and barbeque food being cooked!

I will really miss Fun Day, but hope to have similar exciting activities at my new school, M.S. 181 in Co-Op City.

Reporting by Alexis Pabon, 5th Grade

Second 5th Grade Class Graduates!

On June 23, 2009, Bronx Better Learning graduated its second fifth grade class.

“This is a tremendous accomplishment for the school, our teachers, our students and all of our families,” said Mr. Richard Burke, Executive Director. “These forty-eight children represent the future of the Bronx, New York City, and the nation. The tremendous success of the first graduating class confirmed that we were making enormous strides forward, and we are just as pleased with the results of our second graduating class.”

Currently, all but one student have been placed in middle school. This is a remarkable accomplishment, as last year at this time, only half of our graduates had been placed. We owe an enormous amount of gratitude to our new school counselor, Mrs. Maureen Griffiths.

Additionally, twenty-five of the graduating students received a \$500 scholarship through a fund established by Lowell Lifschultz, a member of the board at Bronx Better Learning. We look forward to hearing about the amazing progress our students are sure to make in middle school.



Watercolor by Chideraa, 1st Grade

Hanover Farm

My class trip to Hanover Farm was fantastic. It was my first time there. We saw chickens, hens, and roosters! We even got to feed them.

We also went inside of a greenhouse where I got really wet. Then our guide walked us to a field to learn how to harvest plants. I ate the bottom of one plant and it tasted like apples. It was very bizarre.

We also learned about bees and our guide let us eat honey cake. It tasted both sweet and delicious.

While I was at Hanover Farm, I learned something shocking – wasps know how to make paper! They bite off tree bark and make their nest. Another fun thing we ate was pollen, which tasted better than it smelled.

I was sad when the trip came to an end.

Reporting by Kelvin Forde, student



Walking across the green to the greenhouse.

Skyrocketing Test Scores

Our students did very well on the NY State exams.

English Language Arts: For 2008-2009, our performance improved yet again, with 76.5% of students in Grades 3-5 scoring as proficient. This was 8.3 percentage points above the local school district.

Math: Our school also demonstrated consistent and steady performance in Math, with 86.2% of students in Grades 3-5 receiving passing scores. Most notably, 96.6% of our 3rd Grade students scored as proficient in Math, with over 20% earning a perfect score.

Gala a Smash Hit!



Our African Village Dance wowed everyone.

This year's Gala was the best yet! On June 2, our school celebrated its 6th anniversary at the New York Botanical Garden. We'd like to thank all those who made this year's Gala a success, especially Event Chair, Ellen Waldman. Special appreciation also goes to the supporters who have been with us from the beginning, and to those of you we were lucky to find along the way. Your contributions tremendously benefit the children at Bronx Better Learning.

Nearly 200 supporters, staff, friends and family attended the Gala. Guests were welcomed by students and staff, who invited them to enjoy appetizers and beverages while viewing auction items. Items up for auction included amazing student art, Knicks tickets, hand-made jewelry, and a portrait design studio session.

Our guest speaker, Deputy Borough President Aurelia Greene, spoke about the characteristics she thinks are important in a school, and praised Bronx Better Learning for possessing those very qualities. We were also honored to have as special guest Jesse Mojica, Director of Education, from the Borough President's Office, who became very excited about our program.

Another featured speaker was 5th Grade student Savoy Drummond, who related his experiences at Bronx Better Learning. He gave a well-written,

well-rehearsed speech, and he had the audience eating out of his hands! Savoy looked relaxed and spoke extremely well...just like a professional!



Savoy Drummond speaks his mind.

As the night continued, guests enjoyed student performances that included musical instruments, poetry, and singing. When our 3rd - 5th Grade Choir sang Bob Marley's *Three Little Birds*, our supporters were amazed at their beautiful voices. Our grand finale was an African Village dance, choreographed by Yahaya Kamate and Yobo Euphrasie. Over the past three months, nearly 50 children rehearsed the phenomenal 15 minute dance. Everyone agreed: the children were outstanding!

Once again, thanks to everyone for giving our students a chance to shine!



A distinguished guest admires our students' art and poetry at this year's gala.