

# FOCUS

Joel Barlow High School PTSA Newsletter

March/April 2011

## Principal's Points



Students are human beings, too. In our recent hand-wringing over the future of No Child Left Behind, the dire forecasts of the end of American ingenuity,

lamentation that we have been outscored by China or Singapore on math exams, or whatever else we worry about these days, we need to remember that students are not yet adults. They are on the journey, but have not reached the destination.

Yes, our students are our political and economic future, but they are just kids, too. Let's hesitate before we trade away their adolescence against the unrelenting drive for good-looking college applications. Think of it this way. Like all parents, I want to know that my two girls are healthy, so on the occasions when my wife and I think they might be running a fever, we take their temperature. We do not, on the other hand, coordinate a lifestyle for them that guarantees that every minute of every day they are "scoring" a 98.6 on the Fahrenheit scale. If we tried that, then there would be no running around, no dancing, no basketball in the driveway, no silliness.

In a similar way, there is great merit to checking how our students are performing. The school system can analyze how our students are doing on the Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMT) and

—continued on page 2



## Jottings From Jen

"A teacher's **effectiveness** has more impact on student learning than any other factor under the control of school systems."

—Bill Gates



Here, here, Mr. Gates! And there are some mighty **effective** ones here at Barlow. Sadly, some of those outstanding faculty members are retiring; new teachers will be hired to step into their gigantic shoes. Actually, a full one third of Barlow's teachers are relatively new - hired only within the past four years. Another third have been there since the nineties, and the remaining seasoned third have been teaching at Barlow for a couple of decades or more.

So how does our Head of School ensure that all of these professionals are **effectively** impacting our students' lives?

He does so by investing in them.

Investing in Professional Development. These programs are designed to challenge all of the teachers at Barlow to stay abreast of 21st century education.

To sharpen their **effectiveness**.

To expose them to techniques and tools which will inspire them and their students...whether they were hired yesterday or 25 years ago.

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## Principal's Points (continued from page 1)

the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). Students can know how they are progressing in the acquisition of essential skills for their adult lives. But if we become too obsessed with how they "look" we might fall into the trap of doing nothing but "skill drill and kill" teaching. There are good kinds of teaching-to-the-test. For instance, I sincerely hope that the pilot who has to land the plane in which I am a passenger has been "taught-to-the-test" of getting it safely back on the ground. There are also bad kinds of teaching-to-the-test; if we stop the real work of thinking and growing in our classrooms in order to be too oriented on standardized assessments, then we might be in real danger of killing off our students' natural curiosity. Too often, "Gee, that's really interesting" has been toned down to "Will this be on the test?" Adolescence is an amazing and wonderful time of life. Let's remember that our students need to be kids, too.

Okay, I can hear you --

"Hey, Mr. Principal, you are giving us a mixed message. First you tell us that these numbers are important, then you tell us they aren't. Which is it?" Well, it's both. Our country comprises only 5% of the world's population, so our students must have a global, world-class education. Each of them will, in all likelihood, have to compete against technology and outsourcing. If a job can be done for less money in India than in Fairfield county, it will be. If a computer program can replace a person, it will. Calling centers in Bombay, TurboTax. What our students need is the capacity to be life-long learners and creative team-players. We don't test for that, but it is still important for them to field our athletic teams, and debate, chess, and math teams. We need them skating, and painting, and singing, and performing, and trying their hand at student government, and bringing their science experiments to the state competitions, and building robots, and conducting community service, and giving blood,

and going to dances and just being friendly. I also think they should be doing chores and learning about finances. Let's try to steer away from the old Puritan notion that if it is fun it cannot be genuine learning.

Back to international comparisons: yes, Chinese students in certain hand-picked elite schools are outscoring Americans. Students from communities such as ours are outperforming their counterparts in the European community, although we usually don't read about that. Here's a statistic that I like: between 1998 and 2003, 99% of Chinese companies did not apply for a single patent. In 2005, only 21,519 patents were granted in China. In that same year, the US had more than 134,000 patents granted. American ingenuity, Yankee know-how, and sweat-equity will continue to thrive if we let our students be kids, playful and creative kids.

— Tom McMorran,  
Head of School

### Stop & Shop

Do you shop at Stop & Stop? You can earn cash for JBHS. Due to the generosity of Stop & Shop, a portion of the cost of your groceries can be awarded to Joel Barlow High School for educational needs. For more information, see the flyer on the home page of the Barlow website. You do need to register for this program each year.

## Jen's Jottings (continued from page 1)

The proposed Region 9 budget includes a number of Professional Development initiatives (though some have already been cut in the school board's unenviable job of balancing what's best for two towns of taxpayers with what's best for the kids).

But what's left needs to be supported. By a "yes" vote at the Budget referendums in May.

Please remember Mr. Gate's observation. We can't expect the faculty to stay on top of their craft if we aren't willing to invest in that ever-changing, highly competitive,

and increasingly technical profession. An investment in the teachers' **effectiveness** here is an investment in the kids and their **effectiveness** out there.

Please vote "yes" for Barlow.

— Jen Wastrom,  
PTSA President

## Recap of February 8 PTSA Meeting

### *Bestselling Author Roni Cohen-Sandler - Special Guest at Feb 8 PTSA Meeting*

At our February 8 PTSA meeting, Dr. Roni Cohen-Sandler gave a very informative and candid talk about stressed out teens.

Roni Cohen-Sandler, Ph.D., (<http://www.ronicozensandler.com>) is a clinical psychologist, author, consultant, and lecturer who specializes in the issues of parenting adolescents, mother-daughter relationships, and learning disorders. Dr. Cohen-Sandler has been a parenting expert on national media such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *CBS News*, and National Public Radio. She is frequently

interviewed for publications including *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and *Marie Claire*. Dr. Cohen-Sandler's most recent book, **Stressed-out Girls: Helping Them Thrive in the Age of Pressure**, which is based on interviews and surveys of 3,000 middle school and high school students, has been striking a chord with teenage girls as well as their parents and teachers across the country. Her first book, **I'm Not Mad, I Just Hate You! A New Understanding of Mother-Daughter Conflict**, was a national bestseller. Dr. Cohen-Sandler's second book, **Trust Me, Mom--Everyone Else is Going! The New Rules for Mothering Teenage Daughters**, won a National Parenting Publication 2002 Gold Medal.

"We are so fortunate to have had someone of Roni's experience speak at our meeting," said PTSA President Jen Wastrom. "She shared some very relevant and useful information on keeping the stress level for our high school kids at a minimum."



*PTSA VP Anne Andrews welcomed noted author and clinical psychologist Roni Cohen Sandler, Ph.D to the February PTSA meeting*

## Spanish Mural Project PTSA Grant



One of the faculty grants the PTSA funded this winter was a mural project requested by Spanish Teach Chris Poulos.

Here is a description of the project in Mr. Poulos' words:

“The recent installation of a Diego Rivera mural in a Joel Barlow HS classroom has helped to involve students of all disciplines in learning experiences that expose them to authentic artwork. Through the integration of the arts, instruction is enhanced yielding countless opportunities for teachers to ignite the fire that facilitates the process of meaningful teaching and learning that we strive for each day. In this classroom, students are engaged, their curiosity peaked, and their minds delving deep as Rivera's ‘Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central’ provides the stage for authentic learning experiences.”



## Recap of March 8 PTSA Meeting

### *The College Process Unplugged: Some Moms' Perspectives on That Daunting Journey*

At the March 8 PTSA meeting, the featured program was a very candid panel discussion on the college application process.

Six moms - each bringing a different perspective to the table - answered a series of questions ranging from SAT vs. ACT? to college touring (when, how many?) to hunting for "Merit Money."

The panelists and their areas of expertise were: Anne Andrews (who used a college consultant), Pam Robey (who did not use a consultant), Janet Harrold (Early Decision/Early Action), Mary Bottero (applying to theater/arts programs), Laurie Harder (applying as an athlete to a D1 school), and Donna Marie Macchio (applying as an athlete to D2/D3 schools).

The ladies have volunteered to answer further questions on this almighty topic, their email addresses are listed below. Also, as part of the program, Pam Robey compiled the list of recommended books and resources.

- Anne Andrews  
[andrews1@optonline.net](mailto:andrews1@optonline.net)

- Pam Robey  
[robey@optonline.net](mailto:robey@optonline.net)
- Janet Harrold  
[jharrold@optonline.net](mailto:jharrold@optonline.net)
- Donna-Marie Macchio  
[dmacchio@optonline.net](mailto:dmacchio@optonline.net)
- Laurie Harder  
[harders@optonline.net](mailto:harders@optonline.net)
- Mary Bottero  
[mbottero@aol.com](mailto:mbottero@aol.com)

### *Resource Suggestions*

During the March PTSA meeting, tips, cautions, triumphs and plenty of wisdom were shared...we hope to offer a similar panel next year.

Here is a collective list of some suggested resources the ladies recommended.

#### **Books**

- The Princeton Review's Guide to 373 Best Colleges: 2011 Edition
- The Gatekeeper: Inside the Admissions Process of a Premier College - Jacques Steinberg
- Looking Beyond the Ivy League: Finding the College That's Right For You (2008) - Lauren Pope
- Admission Matters: What Parents and Students Need to Know About Getting Into College (second edition) - Sally Springer
- Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools That Will Change the Way You Think About Colleges (2006) - Loren Pope
- What You Don't Know Can Keep You Out of College (2007) - Don Dunbar
- The College Finder: Choose the School That's Right for You (2008) - S. Antonoff
- The Insider's Guide to the Colleges, 2011 (2010) - Yale Daily News Staff
- Fiske Guide to Colleges, 2011 (2010) - Edward. B. Fiske
- Essays that Worked for College Applications: 50 Essays that Helped Students Get Into the Nation's Top Colleges (2003) - B. Curry
- Conquering the College Admission Essay in 10 Steps (2008) - Alan Gelb
- Crazy U: One Dad's Crash Course in Getting His Kid Into College (pub. Date: 3/2011) - Andrew Ferguson

#### **Websites**

- [www.joelbarlowps.org](http://www.joelbarlowps.org) : Naviance/Family Connection (found under counseling)
- [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)
- [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org)

## Upcoming April 12 PTSA Meeting

### *The Gap Year: What and Why?*

What is a Gap Year? The term describes a period of time after high school when young adults step away from the academic treadmill. Gap Years can be work, volunteer service, study and travel opportunities for graduating high school seniors as an alternative to college. Growing in popularity, the Gap Year is a year to re-charge, to follow a passion, to become immersed in another culture, or to find the love of learning again.

Though the concept may be new to many in the USA, it's an established tradition elsewhere. In the UK, about 11% of the 300,000 college-bound seniors take

a gap year before enrolling. Guidance counselors and college admissions officers say they're seeing a surge of interest in this path, according to *USA Today*. "Counselors are recognizing that there are many pathways to college," says David Hawkins, director of public policy and research at the National Association for College Admission Counseling. "They see that, if properly vetted, these opportunities could actually help students succeed in college."

"With the ever-increasing costs of a college education and the pressure on students to get into college, many parents might want to step back and reassess whether the goal is simply 'access

to college' or 'success in college,'" said former Barlow PTSA President and Gap Year consultant Colleen Joyce. "Studies show that students who take a year off to work, volunteer, or attend community college are very successful in their college careers. In fact, Harvard and Princeton require that some of their accepted applicants pursue a Gap Year experience before entering their college."

**Colleen Joyce will present a program on the Gap Year - as a knowledgeable consultant and as the mother of a successful Gap Year student - at the April 12 PTSA meeting at 9:30 AM in the Cafeteria Annex at Barlow.**

## Easton Learning Foundation

The Easton Learning Foundation's annual Trivia Bee is Thursday,

May 19, 7-9 PM.

For more information about ELF and these

events, go to [www.eastonlearningfoundation.org](http://www.eastonlearningfoundation.org).

## The Budget Referendum - Save The Date!

The following are days of note, days to mark on your calendar, days to remember to do something...file your taxes, send a card to your mother...GO TO THE POLLS.

Significant Springtime Dates:

April 15 - Income Tax Day

April 22 - Earth Day

April 18 - Passover

April 24 - Easter

May 3 - THE BUDGET REFERENDUM - PLEASE GO TO THE POLLS AND CAST YOUR VOTE FOR BARLOW!

May 8 - Mother's Day

## Post Prom Friday, May 13-14

### *Volunteers Sought*

The Joel Barlow PTSA has sponsored the Post Prom Party for nearly 25 years to provide a safe, chaperoned, alcohol-free alternative to other, less wholesome after prom activities. This year's event is to take place at Joel Barlow High School on Friday evening, May 13, from 11:30 PM into Saturday morning, May 14, ending at 3 AM. We expect up to 400 juniors and seniors to attend. Last year we had over 420 attendees.

With the Post Prom theme selected, "Friday the 13th (of May), A Magical Night at the Movies," we are ready to work. Volunteers in all capacities are needed to make the evening a success: check-in/chaperoning, food contributions/servers, prizes, decorating and helping with set-up, and clean-up crew. Since the Post Prom is on a Friday

night this year we are in particular need of volunteers to help set up both Thursday afternoon and Friday, all day. If you would like to volunteer please contact Joey Davey at [Joeydavey@sbcglobal.net](mailto:Joeydavey@sbcglobal.net). For any information regarding the Post Prom please contact Wanda Augustyn by phone at (203) 938-3859 or email Wanda at [acesaces@msn.com](mailto:acesaces@msn.com).

Our next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 17, at 4 PM in the Cafeteria Annex. Come and join us help prepare for an evening of fun, in a safe, chaperoned and alcohol-free environment.

### *Prizes Sought*

Every year merchants and businesses in our area generously donate goods in order to ensure the success of the event. Once again we are seeking your support

through the donation of monetary funds, a gift certificate, or gift item.

Your donation is tax deductible and a confirmation will be provided. Your support will be announced and published throughout the Easton/Redding communities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

To donate, contact one of the Post Prom Prize Committee Co-Chairs:

- Michelle Falcone  
(203) 650-3959  
[michfalcone@optonline.net](mailto:michfalcone@optonline.net)
- Cathy Grimes  
(203) 570-1842  
[ccvagrimes@comcast.net](mailto:ccvagrimes@comcast.net)

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

## Reflections

A big THANK YOU to all the students who participated in the PTSA Reflections Program this year.

The work that was submitted by participating students this year was highly praised by the judges in each category. Competition was stiff. All entries were commendable, and everyone who participated should be very proud of their work.

Participants were Cormac Cummiskey, Carol DeSalva, Adrienne Dooley (in two categories), Tara Dooley, Walter Frank, Michael Giamportone, Olivia Hermantin, Aaron Hurwitz, Kyle Kloiber, Rachel Losacco, Erin Meskers, Blake Pritchard, and Tomas Zlock.

CONGRATULATIONS to this years winners!

The following participants have been awarded FIRST PLACE in their arts category. Their work was forwarded on to the State Level of this competition.

Michael Giamportone  
FIRST PLACE  
Musical Composition

Walter Frank  
FIRST PLACE  
Photography

Cormac Cummiskey  
FIRST PLACE  
Literature

Tomas Zlock  
Second Place  
Musical Composition

Aaron Hurwitz  
Third Place  
Musical Composition

Rachel Losacco  
Honorable Mention  
Musical Composition

Olivia Hermantin  
Second Place  
Photography

Erin Meskers  
Second Place  
Literature

Adrienne Dooley  
Third Place  
Literature

CONGRATULATIONS to junior, Michael Giamportone, who took SECOND PLACE for the entire STATE of Connecticut, for the beautiful piece of music he composed and performed for the Reflections Program.

After placing FIRST at the local level, for which his work received very high praises from our local judges, Michael's work was entered into the State level of this competition.

The musical composition category is a competitive category, and Michael's talents as a composer captured the attention of the state level judges. We are very proud to have Michael, and his music, as part of our JBHS community.

Thank you to all students who participated in this year's competition. I hope you will consider participating again next year. The theme for the 2011-2012 Reflections Program will be "DIVERSITY IS ..."

Reflections is a program in which students may enter a theme-based piece of work in one of six arts categories. The categories are Literature, Photography, Musical Composition, Dance, Film and Visual Arts.

Entries are judged at the local level by professionals in the field associated with the work entered. First place winners move on to the State Level and potentially the National Level of the competition.

To learn more about the National PTA's Reflections Program, please visit [www.PTAreflections.org](http://www.PTAreflections.org), or contact Claire-Anne Meskers at [meskers@optonline.net](mailto:meskers@optonline.net).

## Wanted: Parents Interested in Getting Involved in Barlow!

We are already on the hunt to fill some soon-to-be-vacancies on the PTSA Board. If you are interested in getting to know Barlow better or want to be part of a terrific group of parents, please contact President

Jen Wastrom ([jwastrom@optonline.net](mailto:jwastrom@optonline.net)) or VP Nominating Chair Pam Robey ([robey@optonline.net](mailto:robey@optonline.net)) for more information. It's truly a valuable and rewarding way to stay in touch with the place your child spends

the bulk of his/her teenage years. Some of the vacancies we are currently looking to fill are listed below, but many of the board positions can have co-chairs – so if anything strikes your fancy, PLEASE DON'T BE SHY!

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

- President (Jen Wastrom)
- Vice President, Nominating (Pam Robey)
- **Vice President, Listserve (OPEN)**
- Vice President, Member at Large (Jean Tompkins)
- Treasurer (Mary Ellen O'Leary)
- **Secretary (OPEN)**

### GENERAL BOARD CHAIRS:

- **Arts Foundation (OPEN)**
- Beautification Committee (Cheryl Frier)
- Caring Committee (Jean Tompkins, Margot Abrams)
- **Board of Education Rep (OPEN)**
- **Corresponding Secretary (OPEN)**
- Focus Newsletter (Lisa DeVoto)
- Hospitality, Open House (Peggy Palmer, Laura Gibney)
- Membership/Buzz Book (Joey Davey, Sharon Gianicchi, Laurie Stone)
- Mini Grants (Reghan Diaz)
- **Post Prom (Candy Wood McAdam, also needs co-chair)**
- PTA Council (Kim Breda)
- Publicity (Jen Wastrom)
- Reflections (Claire-Ann Meskers)
- Senior Luncheon (Peggy Palmer, Kim Ryan)
- Staff Appreciation Luncheons (Steph Belleveau, Candy Wood McAdam)
- Transition Advisory (Margot Abrams)
- Volunteer Coordinator (Arlene Darrow, Joan Winter)

## *About This Newsletter*

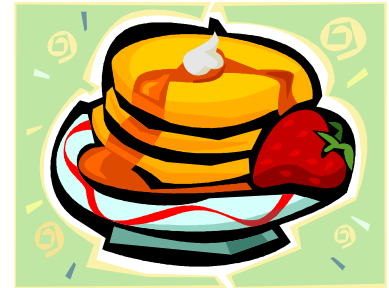
The FOCUS newsletter is a bimonthly publication of the JBHS PTSA. Email notification is sent to those who have registered to receive information from the PTSA. We welcome submissions from the JBHS community. To submit articles for consideration, please email submission to Lisa DeVoto at [lisadevoto@optonline.net](mailto:lisadevoto@optonline.net). Previous issues of the FOCUS can be found on the JBHS website at [www.joelbarlowps.org/Communications/PTSA/Focus.html](http://www.joelbarlowps.org/Communications/PTSA/Focus.html).

# PANCAKE BREAKFAST

## BARLOW LAX FUNDRAISER



Bring the whole family  
for a morning of fun  
**Sat. March 19<sup>th</sup>**



**9:00 A.M. - 11:00 A.M**

pancakes, eggs & sausage, fruit cup, muffins

OJ, milk, tea, & coffee

**\$5.00/person JBHS CAFETERIA**

TO ALL **RELAX** players SIGN UP FOR

**BARLOW LAX INDOOR CLINIC**

**\$10.00 10:00 - 11:00 Girls clinic**

**11:30 - 12:30 Boys clinic**

Run by Barlow lax Varsity coaching staff & players

Girls: mouth guard, eyewear & stick Boys: full gear & stick

Clinic Questions and Sign up by 3/15:

[jbhslaxbooster@gmail.com](mailto:jbhslaxbooster@gmail.com)

**Cash or Checks payable to: "JBHS"**

**50/50 RAFFLE & BARLOW LAX APPAREL**





**Is your child going to the Prom?**  
**Have you noticed that the tickets are expensive?**  
**(not to mention the tux/dress, flowers, transportation)**

*The Easton Redding Community Coalition is pleased to extend an invitation for parents to a one man show*

## **“Dirt”**

*and earn a \$20 voucher for a discount on your child's prom ticket.*

Try as we might to prevent it, our children are growing up. With that growth comes the potential for making life-altering choices- good and bad. Because of the vigilance of the JBHS staff and our supportive community, our prom seasons have avoided tragedies that have plagued other communities.

**Parents please join us with your children for this phenomenal performance**

- **Dirt is a one-man show by John Morello. John, a survivor of a high-risk childhood has been on stage of 20 years acting and is a nationally headlining comedian.**
- **“Dirt” is not a lecture.. but a one-man play of characters dealing with issues of substance abuse and choices.**

**April 5, 2010**

**JBHS**

**7:00-9:00pm**

*RSVP is appreciated -*

*danaj@eastonreddingcc.org or 938-2508 x1524*

**SPONSORED BY THE EASTON REDDING COMMUNITY COALITION**

**\*Door Prize of 2 free prom tickets\***



*If you would like more information about this performance you can go to:  
 johnmorello.com or iamdirt.com*