

CONNECTIONS

Education News From Northeastern Connecticut

volume 37, number 4

www.eastconn.org

Summer 2017



A summit to share concerns about children's mental health in NE Connecticut attracted 75 of the region's leaders.

Community Conversation Focuses on Children's Mental Health Issues

In response to growing concerns around children's mental health and its effects on schools and communities in northeastern Connecticut, many of the region's leaders, educators and providers convened at EASTCONN to share information and grapple with questions about how deep the problem goes.

"Part of EASTCONN's mission is to bring people and communities together to discuss issues that connect us all," EASTCONN's Director of Early Childhood Diane Gozemba told nearly 80 people who assembled in Hampton for A Community Conversation: Mental Health Issues in Northeastern Connecticut: A Growing Concern.

"Children's mental health is one of those issues that is not going away," she said. "This is about our communities, and it's a call to action for all of us."

Representatives from several state departments, including Children and Families, Public Health and Labor joined town selectmen, school administrators, social workers, Family Resource Center directors, mental health providers and early childhood educators for a morning-long community conversation around mental health.

Dr. Marianne Barton, Clinical Professor and Director of the Psychological Services Clinic at UCONN, delivered the keynote. She outlined the scope of Connecticut's mental health problem with some troubling statistics: 1 in 5 children (156,000) have mental health

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Is This Local Stream Healthy? Tolland 6th-Graders Investigate



Tolland 6th-graders partnered to gather scientific data as they worked to determine whether a nearby stream was healthy.

EASTCONN's Mobile STEM Laboratory has been making the rounds among schools across northeastern Connecticut this spring, recently stopping at Tolland Middle School, where 6th-graders got a chance to investigate the health of a local stream.

"For students to be able to conduct real-world experiments right here in their own Tolland ecosystem is wonderful," said Tolland 6th-grade science teacher Stephanie Cassidy, as she watched students test water samples from a stream next to the school soccer field.

"We are asking one guiding question today: Is this local watershed healthy? What better way for students to figure that out than to extend their classroom and conduct experiments out here," she said, gesturing to the foot-deep but swiftly moving water, which was lined by trees and dense brush. A chorus of birds sang overhead, which Cassidy's wide-eyed and attentive students quietly observed from the banks of the stream, clip boards in hand. "Are these birds possible evidence of a healthy ecosystem?" she asked.

More than 180 Tolland 6th-graders conducted field experiments on the stream, using the EASTCONN Mobile STEM Lab and its on-board equipment in May. An EASTCONN grant through the SUEZ Foundation helped defray the cost.

"Observe everything. Use all your senses, except taste. Don't make assumptions. Don't draw conclusions yet," Cassidy told students, as

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they carefully dipped water from the stream into clear beakers.

“Our students are exploring their environment and connecting NGSS principles to their lives and to their own learning. That’s what NGSS is really all about,” Cassidy said. NGSS is an acronym for Next Generation Science Standards.

“I think this is really fun,” said Sydney, a 6th-grader, as she made her way down a roughly cleared path to the stream. “We get to test things on our own, and find out our own information. I like that.”

When asked what she’d discovered, Jada, another 6th-grader, rattled off the data that she’d collected from her water samples, including its turbidity, PH and temperature. She theorized that the hot sun had probably affected the accuracy of her temperature readings. She also reported enthusiastically that one of her fellow students had actually found a damsel fly larva swimming in his water sample. “Yeah,” she said, nodding her head. “This is fun!”

After collecting and testing their water, students headed up a long hill to the school, where the Lab was parked. They sat at workstations and continued their investigations, using probes and other on-board scientific instruments. The sounds of enthusiastic young voices filled the Lab, as they discussed and recorded their findings with lab partners. Each student also got to observe samples through the Lab’s electron microscope.

“The great thing about the Lab is that kids are using the technology — not just hearing about it or reading about it in a book,” said Cassidy. “To be able to incorporate all their learning from the last three months into a hands-on experience just goes above and beyond.”

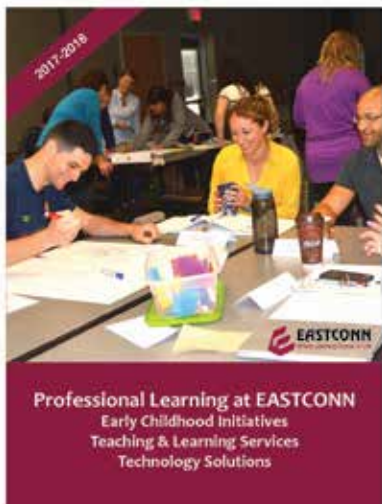
So, what were their conclusions? Was the watershed healthy?

EASTCONN Science Specialist and Mobile STEM Laboratory Coordinator Dr. Stacey Williams-Watson joined Tolland teachers to challenge students’ assumptions. Watson asked, “What is your definition of healthy? Is this watershed healthy for animals? What about human consumption?”

After considering all the evidence, most students concluded that the watershed was healthy, based on their observations of the stream’s circulation, the abundance of nearby plant and animal life, and the stream’s physical and chemical properties.

“These terrific Tolland students engaged in real scientific study, and they did an excellent job,” said Williams-Watson. “Their teachers did a great job of preparing them. It was a very good week.”

To learn more, contact EASTCONN’s Williams-Watson at swatson@eastconn.org, or EASTCONN Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Dr. Toni Ryan at tryan@eastconn.org.



Professional Learning Opportunities for 2017-2018

EASTCONN’s new catalog of workshops and instructional opportunities is now available. Go to www.eastconn.org and click on the Media link in the top menu bar. Click on Publications and look for the catalog. Or, call 860-455-1569 and we’ll mail you a copy.

New Observation Tool Simplifies Teacher & Student Assessments

EASTCONN has designed a new online tool that promises to simplify the process of collecting, storing and reporting observation-based data associated with student and teacher assessments.

Called eObserve, EASTCONN’s new framework-independent tool supports the use of tablets and other devices, and allows supervisors and educators to directly input teacher observations, as well as child-centric and/or task-centric scoring data, eliminating the need for intermediate scoring sheets and transcriptions.

“eObserve simplifies the process of collecting and comparing developmental and scoring data, with tools that can track evidence of progress, retain specific observational artifacts like photos, video and documents, and quickly generate both longitudinal and latitudinal reports,” said Andy DePalma, EASTCONN’s Director of Technology Solutions.

Designed by EASTCONN staff, the new platform also provides a foundation for planning additional supports and communication around common goals. eObserve is backed by a powerful, independent, online platform that doesn’t require users either to invest in or install new infrastructure, DePalma said.

“It also perfectly complements EASTCONN’s Measure Success tool,” DePalma said. “Measure Success allows for consensus-building on rubric-based assessments, increasing reliability and validity prior to the execution of any assessments using the eObserve tool.” Measure Success is an online professional forum for developing and sharing standards-based learning tasks with embedded performance assessments. Contact Andy DePalma at adepalma@eastconn.org.



Playing with Jump Ropes in Class?



A recent joint meeting of EASTCONN’s Regional Staff Development and Technology councils focused on computer science and classroom integration. Volunteers demonstrated that technology concepts can be translated into creative classroom activities. Above, the group used jump ropes to simulate electronic components in a live digital circuit.

EASTCONN Connections

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QMC Students Win Regional Video Contest

EASTCONN's Quinebaug Middle College (QMC) students took 1st place for Outstanding Videography and 3rd place in the Viewer's Choice category at the Third Annual Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance (EAMA) Video Challenge and Film Festival.

"Our students worked long and hard producing this video," said QMC Principal Gino LoRizzo. "I couldn't be prouder of their accomplishment and the quality of the work that they collectively produced."

Annually, high schools across eastern Connecticut partner with local manufacturers to produce a video that will educate students and communities about how manufacturing companies are changing through the use of technology, new skills and systems. Nearly 100 students across 14 high school teams participated in the 2017 challenge.



QMC students took 1st place in the Third Annual Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance Video Challenge and Film Festival.

"The entire opportunity was invaluable," said QMC math teacher Robyn Incera. "For some students, it validated their interest in a manufacturing career."

Ten QMC students collaborated with local manufacturer Unicorr, located in Putnam, to produce the winning films. Students toured Unicorr and learned about their manufacturing process. In addition, students were able to connect with key personnel, including the company president.

QMC offers different academic pathways to the manufacturing field. Academically qualified QMC seniors can enroll in Quinebaug Valley Community College (QVCC) Advanced Manufacturing classes.

Visit www.eamainc.com/results.html to see the 2017 EAMA Video Challenge films.

QMC is currently enrolling academically motivated students who will enter grades 9-12 in 2017-2018.

Visit www.eastconn.org/qmc to download an application or call QMC Principal Gino LoRizzo at 860-932-4040 for more information.



13 ACT students were recognized by UCONN's prestigious Connecticut Writing Project for the quality and creativity of their written works.

ACT Student Work is Honored by Connecticut Writing Project

UCONN's Connecticut Writing Project (CWP) contest has again honored Creative Writing students at EASTCONN's Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT) magnet high school for their original works of writing and poetry. Of the 13 students recognized, 5 have been selected for publication in the CWP-sponsored 2017 Connecticut Student Writers magazine.

"The support we receive for our art at all levels at ACT is key to the success of the writers," said ACT Creative Writing teacher John Wetmore.

Wetmore was one of three teachers statewide who received a Gold Award in the Secondary category from CWP for having multiple students published.

Students whose work will appear in the magazine include sophomore Jordan Pelletier, poetry; junior Alex Castro, poetry; junior DJ Hettinger, fiction; junior Mae Santillo, poetry; and senior Juliet Duchesne, poetry.

Annually, more than 1,000 Connecticut students submit their works of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, two-dimensional art or photography to the CWP. Just 81 students statewide, from kindergarten through grade 12, will be published in the 2017 Connecticut Student Writers edition.

"This is the first time my work has been published and I feel very accomplished," said ACT Creative Writing student DJ Hettinger.

The mission of UCONN's CWP is to improve student achievement by improving the teaching of writing and improving learning in the nation's schools.

ACT is currently accepting new enrollments, grades 9-12, for 2017-2018. To learn more about ACT or its Creative Writing program, contact ACT Principal Sarah Mallory at 860-465-5636 or visit www.eastconn.org/act.



Eastern Connecticut Youth, 14-21, Can Sign Up for Summer Job & Training Program

The 2017 Summer Youth Employment and Training Program for eligible eastern Connecticut youth, ages 14 to 21, is accepting applications. Administered by EASTCONN in partnership with the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB), Norwich Youth and Family Services, and New London's Office of Youth Affairs, the program runs from July 3-Aug. 11, 2017, based on funding projections. About 400 youth will work a total of 75 hours in July and August for minimum wage. The program is designed to train participants in the skills that employers seek. Supports like transportation, required clothing, tools and case management will be provided. More than 120 public and private employers will participate. Funded by EWIB, DCF and the state Department of Labor. Contact Cyndi Wells at cwells@eastconn.org or 860-455-1572. EASTCONN is an equal opportunity employer. For applications and eligibility info, <http://www.eastconn.org/index.php/youth-employment>.

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needs; only 20% of those can access care; 44% of children, ages 2-5, are exposed to at least 1 trauma; 49% of child abuse and neglect victims are under the age of 6 and more than 95,000 children under the age of 6 have experienced trauma, which can have long-term, negative effects on their physical and mental health.

“All of this is complicated by poverty, isolation, long distances, access and stigma.” Barton raised concerns about Connecticut’s high rates of student expulsions and suspensions, and underscored that teachers need better training and support, so they can effectively identify and respond to students’ mental health needs in the classroom. She also identified a region-wide lack of funding and access to services as key problems.

Following Barton’s keynote, a facilitated, interactive panel of



Panelists and facilitators who participated in the Community Conversation included, left to right: Dr. Marianne Barton, Jan Shanks, Francis J. Carino, Paula M. Colen, Kenneth DiPietro and Diane Gozemba.

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experts fielded questions from the audience. Panelists included Barton; Francis J. Carino, Supervisory Assistant State’s Attorney in the Office of the Chief State’s Attorney, who spoke about mental health issues and the juvenile justice system; Kenneth DiPietro, Superintendent of Schools in Plainfield, who spoke about mental health issues in schools; and Jan Shanks, M.Ed., Behavioral Account Manager for CIGNA, who spoke about the intersection of mental health issues, access to providers and insurance.

Afterward, groups rotated through facilitated break-out sessions to discuss four areas of concern: challenging behaviors in schools, beginning with our youngest learners; access to mental health services in the region; the effects of mental health issues on families and communities; and mental health issues in the juvenile justice system.

“The key word here is silos,” said Allan Cahill, First Selectman in Hampton, as he leaned in to hear what was being said in one break-out session. “We need more collaboration.”

Once the large group had reconvened, each break-out facilitator summarized everyone’s thoughts and ideas. They will be included in a summary report and sent to all those who attended. During the closing minutes, many attendees shared their thoughts.

“We need to make our legislators aware ... we need to advocate as a region,” said John Goodman, of United Services.

“This was an awakening for me as a town official,” said Rick Ives, Brooklyn’s First Selectman.

“How can we work with school systems to address mental health issues through policy that stays, even when administrations change?” asked Linda Colangelo, with the NE District Department of Health.

“I think shared services and collaboration are key,” said Ann Gruenberg, president of CABE.

“The big question is, how do we change the narrative around mental health issues in our communities and schools?” said EASTCONN Executive Director Paula M. Colen.

EASTCONN will send a survey to all those who attended the June 1st meeting, and analyze the results. Based on responses, EASTCONN will invite participants to continue the conversation by identifying manageable options that can be pursued regionally by stakeholders.

For more information, contact EASTCONN’s Diane Gozemba at dgozemba@eastconn.org.



EASTCONN Board members posed for a photo during the agency’s Annual Meeting in May, attended by more than 60 staff and guests. Everyone viewed program and video displays depicting scenes from EASTCONN divisions, and several 30-year employees were honored. UCONN’s Dr. Marianne Barton was the keynote speaker. She discussed growing concerns around mental health issues in children and their effects on schools and communities in NE Connecticut.