

# CONNECTIONS

*Education News From Northeastern Connecticut*

volume 30, number 1

[www.eastconn.org](http://www.eastconn.org)

October 2009

## Vernon Head Start Collaboration Grows

The Vernon Head Start/EASTCONN program has expanded to include classrooms in all five Vernon elementary schools, thanks to a growing partnership between EASTCONN and Vernon Public Schools.

“EASTCONN is delighted to expand its collaboration with Vernon Public Schools in serving preschool children,” said Elizabeth Aschenbrenner, EASTCONN’s Director of Early Childhood Initiatives.

“This long-standing, successful partnership offers a win-win situation for both EASTCONN Head Start and Vernon that effectively shares resources, and benefits both children and families,” Aschenbrenner said.

Since becoming the federal grantee for Head Start in Vernon nearly nine years ago, EASTCONN has partnered with Vernon Public Schools to offer the highly regarded Head Start preschool program at Skinner Road School in Vernon.

As of September, preschool services in the Vernon Public Schools have expanded to include 133 students, according to Patricia Buell, Vernon’s Pupil Personnel Director. Preschoolers are now being taught in Vernon’s Center Road School, Lake Street School, Maple Street School, and Northeast School, as well as the Skinner Road facility.

“Vernon Public Schools is very pleased to expand its collaboration with EASTCONN Head Start,” said Buell. “We have had a very successful collaboration together for many years and are extremely pleased to offer this high-quality preschool program to a larger percentage of Vernon preschool students.”

“The most important outcome is that children will be happy, healthy and begin their journey of becoming lifelong learners and that the Vernon Public Schools will begin this journey with them,” Buell said.

For more information, contact EASTCONN’s Elizabeth Aschenbrenner at 860-455-1501, or at [easchenbrenner@eastconn.org](mailto: easchenbrenner@eastconn.org).



*EASTCONN’s Helen Weingart facilitates the AP program, Project Opening Doors, whose participants, including students in Coventry and Putnam, excelled on AP exams and beat statewide scores.*

## Initiative To Boost AP Scores Yields Impressive Results

Project Opening Doors, the privately funded, statewide initiative that encourages minority and low-income students to take more AP classes, has successfully completed its first year with impressive results.

The nine Connecticut high schools that participated in the initiative increased their passing rate for math, science, and English AP exams by 12 percent overall, which is twice the national average and three times better than the overall state average, according to Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA) officials.

CBIA was the recipient of the \$13.2 million POD program in Connecticut on behalf of the privately funded National Math and Science Initiative. EASTCONN Staff Developer Helen Weingart facilitates the program for CBIA and NMSI.

Among the nine pilot POD high schools were Coventry and Putnam, both of which are in EASTCONN’s region.

“While representing close to 6 percent of the state’s total enrollment, the nine (Project Opening Doors) schools accounted for 13% of the increase of the state’s math, science and English (MSE) exams passed, and more than half (51%) of the state’s increase in MSE AP exams taken,” CBIA reported.

Project Opening Doors began last year in nine Connecticut high schools, including Coventry and Putnam, with the goal of

### In this issue

- AP Scores Jump, Thanks to Project Opening Doors..... 1
- Events Calendar ..... 2
- Summer Youth Program Employs 700.....3
- Five NE CT Schools Get \$57K in Technology Grants ..... 3
- \$1.38 Million Awarded for Interdistrict Grants.....4
- Sprague 7th-Graders Excel on CMTs.....back page

# Calendar of EASTCONN Workshops & Events

## OCTOBER 2009

- 22.... Grant Development Council
- 26.... PreK-8 Principals' Consortium
- 28.... Science Council

## NOVEMBER 2009

- 5.... Building Bridges Using Science and Teamwork
- 5.... SRBI Council
- 5.... InspireData: Data Analysis for Grades 4-8
- 5.... Math Council
- 7.... PreK-8 Principals' Consortium
- 9.... Data Teams
- 10.... Differentiating Instruction: Middle School and High School Science
- 12.... Learning Through Internships
- 13.... Assistive Technologies Council
- 13.... Principals' Network
- 13.... Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum in Middle/High School
- 16.... CMT Reading: Teaching Main Idea and Summary of the A Strand
- 16.... Intel Teach Leadership Forum
- 16.... It's More Than Just the Activity
- 16.... Making Sense of Social Studies Text
- 17.... English Language Learner Leadership Academy Series
- 17.... Regional Staff Development Council
- 18.... Create Modified Materials with Cricksoft Products
- 18.... Using Adventure Education in Professional Development Trainings

## DECEMBER 2009

- 1.... Differentiating Instruction
- 2.... Empowering Writers: Kindergarten-Grade 1 Writing
- 3.... Empowering Writers: Narrative Writing
- 3.... Literacy for Little Ones
- 3.... STC Human Body Systems meets EASTCONN Adventure
- 3.... Technology Council
- 4.... Implementing Your School Improvement Plan
- 4.... Literacy 2.0: The Potential of Podcasting
- 7.... Math Council
- 8.... Building Science Process Skills
- 9.... Empowering Writers: Expository Writing
- 9.... Improving School Climate Using Adventure Education
- 10.... Principals' Network
- 11.... EASTCONN Reading Comprehension Assessment Consortium
- 11.... Related Services Council: ASHA Revisited
- 11.... STC Presents Gems Space Systems Sequence
- 14.... CMT Reading: Teaching to the D Strand of the CMT
- 16.... Literacy 2.0: Digital Storytelling
- 17.... Strategies for Cultivating Respect for Diversity in Preschool and Kindergarten Classrooms

*Please reserve seats early. EASTCONN workshops are subject to change. Register online for any of the above workshops at [www.eastconn.org](http://www.eastconn.org). Click on "Registration."*

## ACT Scholarship 5K Run

To benefit ACT arts magnet high school students

**Saturday, Oct. 24, 10 a.m.**

Walk or Run

Register day of race 9 a.m.-10 a.m.

\$18 per person

USATF-Approved Course

Start: Capitol Theater, 896 Main St., Willimantic

Call 860-465-5636, ext. 2, for info.

Or, register online at [5krace@yahoo.com](mailto:5krace@yahoo.com)

## ACT Students Present

### *Guys & Dolls*

**Dec. 3,4,5 at 7:30 p.m. & Dec. 6 at 2 p.m.**

**\$10 adults, \$8 students/children**

**Call the Box Office, 860-465-5636**

**Capitol Theater, 896 Main St., Willimantic**



*During a recent rehearsal, ACT's Guys & Dolls cast were a blur!*

## Dec. 17 - 6:30 p.m. ACT Open House for Prospective Students 2010-2011

For Prospective Students and Their Parents/Guardians!

ACT is located in the Capitol Theater, 896 Main St.,  
downtown Willimantic (across from the Post Office)

Free Parking

**Call 860-465-5636, ext. 2, for more info.**



### **EASTCONN Connections**

Writer/Editor: Teddie Sleight ~ [tsleight@eastconn.org](mailto:tsleight@eastconn.org)

Assistant: Cindy Laurendeau ~ [claurendeau@eastconn.org](mailto:claurendeau@eastconn.org)

### **Communications Department**

Dotty Budnick, Director ~ [dbudnick@eastconn.org](mailto:dbudnick@eastconn.org)

### **EASTCONN Administration**

Paula M. Colen, Executive Director

**EASTCONN**, 376 Hartford Turnpike, Hampton, CT 06247

860-455-0707 FAX: 860-455-0691



*U.S. Congressman Joe Courtney (in white hat), visited with Summer Youth Program workers at Goodwin State Park, Hampton.*

## 700 Youths Employed By Summer Youth Program

From New London to Thompson, federal stimulus funds employed about 700 eastern Connecticut youths this summer, successfully introducing them to internships in libraries, schools, hospitals, Head Start sites, gardens, state parks, camps, town halls and area businesses.

“The stimulus-funded Summer Youth Program in eastern Connecticut was a huge success,” said EASTCONN’s Nancy Vitale, who managed the 41-town initiative for partners across the region. “No question about it.”

U. S. Congressman Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, visited Summer Youth Program workers, ages 18-24, to see what they’d accomplished at James L. Goodwin State Park in Hampton.

“It is important to make sure we demonstrate to the American public that we can successfully make public investments in programs like this one and have them work,” Courtney said.

“Now I know a lot more about building bridges [across streams on park pathways],” said one youth from Willimantic.

The Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB), which oversees public investments in employment and training strategies throughout a 41-town region, awarded EASTCONN more than \$1 million in federal stimulus money late last spring to coordinate the Summer Youth Program. EASTCONN partnered with the Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA), the New London Office of Youth Affairs, the Norwich Youth and Family Services, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEP) and the Windham Region Council of Governments (WINCOG), among other agencies.

From about 1,100 applicants, ages 14-24, nearly 700 young people were placed in internships according to their career interests, according to Vitale. Students had to meet rigorous age, income, employability and residency requirements.

Gina Lopez, 16, of Plainfield High School, worked in Putnam’s Day Kimball Hospital for the Summer Youth Program.

“It was very, very good experience,” said Lopez. “It was one of the best summers I’ve ever spent. Now I know that I’m going to go to college for nursing.”

To learn more, contact Nancy Vitale at 860-455-1568, or at [nvitale@eastconn.org](mailto:nvitale@eastconn.org).

## Five Northeastern CT Schools Win \$57K Technology Grants

The Connecticut State Department of Education has awarded four \$57,000 technology writing-improvement grants to five northeastern Connecticut schools, including Brooklyn, Eastford, Sterling, Union and Windham. Because they applied jointly, Eastford and Union will share their grant.

Only eight Computer-Assisted Writing Program Grants were awarded statewide. Eastford and Union will share their technology grant; they applied jointly.

The technology grants are intended to help middle schools improve student writing results, obtain laptops and carts for classrooms, promote the use of online writing tools and enhance teacher professional development.

“We’re elated!” said Glenn Lessig, the Technology Coordinator for The Brooklyn School.

“With budgets the way they are, there would be no way we could ever get 27 laptops, the wireless connection, carts, MyAccess! software and the professional development that this grant will provide,” he said, adding that Brooklyn will use its grant to improve writing skills in the sixth-grade.

“One of the things that’s kind of exciting is that getting these [27] laptops for the sixth-grade loosens up the availability of our computer equipment for the rest of the school. Everyone will feel some benefit,” Lessig said.

---

***“Our teachers are really excited. I think this will help put the power and control in kids’ hands, to help move them toward being better writers.”***

*– Principal Vincent Agostine, Sterling School*

---

Lessig described his grant-writing experience with EASTCONN as “excellent.”

“It was great. We’ve worked closely with EASTCONN for a number of years, very closely in fact,” said Lessig. “They’re fantastic.”

“I’m so delighted,” said Sterling School Principal Vince Agostine about winning the grant. Sterling will use the money to improve writing skills among 7th- and 8th-graders. They will purchase about 25 laptops, a cart, wireless connection, MyAccess! software, and professional development, Agostine said.

“I couldn’t wait to tell everyone the news,” Agostine said, enthusiastically. “I even put it in this week’s newsletter [to the community and parents]. Our teachers are really excited. I think this will help put the power and control in kids’ hands to help move them toward being better writers.”

“Maureen Crowley played a big role in our getting this grant,” he continued. “She was great. And Jim Huggins played a big part in this process, too. The three of us got together and it was just one of the most productive days. They just provided a wealth of ideas.”

[Editor’s Note: Maureen Crowley is EASTCONN’s Director of Planning and Development, while Jim Huggins is EASTCONN’s Director of Teaching, Learning and Technology.]

Reach Crowley at 860-455-1513 or at [mcrowley@eastconn.org](mailto:mcrowley@eastconn.org); or Huggins at 860-455-1525, or [jhuggins@eastconn.org](mailto:jhuggins@eastconn.org).

# EASTCONN Districts Win \$1.38 Million in Interdistrict Grants

In collaboration with its local school districts, EASTCONN has won \$1.38 million in Interdistrict Grant funding in Connecticut's 2009-2011 grant cycle.

Nineteen Interdistrict Grants were funded, serving grades 2 to 12. Over the last two years, EASTCONN Interdistricts have served more than 5,500 students from 32 partner towns in northeastern Connecticut.

Every Interdistrict Grant program is designed to boost academic achievement and increase students' understanding and appreciation of diversity. EASTCONN's 2009-2011 Interdistrict Grant programs for northeastern Connecticut districts include:

● **Academy of International Arts & Sciences**, grades 3-10: Social studies, math and science are the focus for students during February and April school vacations and throughout the summer.

● **Arts in the Afternoon**, grades 2-6: Through the visual and performing arts, academic skills are reinforced during February and April school vacations and throughout the summer.

● **Creating Community Builders**, grades 5-6: Teams of students integrate art, science and technology in the service of others through community projects that they create and execute.

● **Faces of Culture**, grades 8-12: Viewed through the lenses of several different historical periods, this study of culture culminates in student art projects and performances.

● **Farming the Land and Sea**, grades 2-4: What external factors influence cultural food choices and human interactions with their environment? Students learn to appreciate similarities between different cultures as they explore the food cycle, from growth and production practices, to the meals on their tables.

● **Forensics 101**, grades 9-12: Students explore crime scene forensics and intriguingly complex, real-life problems that can only be solved using forensic science.



*Students examine an animal skull and take notes during a workshop for Forensics 101, a very popular Interdistrict Grant program.*

● **Imagination Connection**, grade 2: Using literacy as a foundation, students read multicultural stories and poems as they work with professional writers to create a collaborative story, books of poetry or a poetry podcast.

● **Learning Lands: Stewardship and Conservation in NE Connecticut**, grades 5-8: Through a partnership with Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust, this exploration of open spaces, forests and wetlands teaches students about the critical protection of historic lands and biodiversity in NE Connecticut.

● **Legacy Explorations**, grades 3-12: Students study human rights heroes/heroines and work with both original documents and artwork to better understand humanity's ongoing struggle for social justice, human rights and freedom.

● **MAPPS**, grade 3: Using map-making and orienteering, students explore the concepts of place, belonging, and community in both a local and global sense. Students collaborate on the Web with students from area schools and around the world.

● **Minds in Motion**, grades 6-8: Students boost their problem-solving skills, content knowledge, creativity and teamwork as they learn how scientists investigate and explain physical phenomena.

● **Mosaic**, grades 7-12: This leadership training program focuses on student team-building and community engagement as students grapple with real-world, service-learning projects.

● **New Images: Connecticut Youth Learn Together**, grades 9-12: Students explore digital photography and creative writing, sharing their own views of the world in a final exhibition.

● **Skills for Success**, grades 9-12: Students develop project-planning and management skills, in addition to technical writing and reading competence, as they work to master the expertise necessary to succeed in the workplace and post-secondary settings.

● **Successful Journeys**, grade 9: To navigate that difficult transition from middle school to high school, students work together in integrated teams on effective social, study and planning skills

● **The 4th R: Robotics**, grades 5-8: Students tackle complex engineering problems, using LEGO construction challenges, while building their problem-solving, critical-thinking, math and technology skills. Final products are displayed at the annual EASTCONN Robotics Challenge.



*Young engineers-in-the-making concentrate on their Lego robot during activities for The 4th R: Robotics.*

● **UConn Mentor Connection**, grades 11 & 12: Obtained in partnership with the University of Connecticut, this summer grant program immerses talented juniors and seniors in a three-week residential experience that offers them hands-on learning opportunities and real-world research projects under the direction of university mentors.

● **Water, Wildlife, People**, grades 4-6: Students focus on ecosystems and man's impact on water resources and wildlife habitats as they explore the concept of diversity through the study of natural environments - from local aquatic, fresh-water streams to the estuaries of eastern Long Island Sound.

● **Waves of History**, grades 9-12: Working with local writers and historians to select literature and primary-source materials, students explore cultural change, revealing the different voices, backgrounds and experiences of Connecticut's immigrants.

For more information about EASTCONN's 2009-2011 Interdistrict Grant programs, contact Nancy Vitale, at 860-455-1568 or [nvitale@eastconn.org](mailto:nvitale@eastconn.org).

## AP SCORES, continued from page 1

increasing not only the number of AP courses in each school, but also the number of low-income and minority students successfully passing AP exams.



### PROJECT OPENING DOORS

Connecticut National Math & Science Initiative

“This project truly opened doors for students who in the past did not have access to this level of rigor and preparation for college,” said EASTCONN’s Weingart.

Weingart worked closely with the POD grant content-specialists in math, science and English to assist each participating school in reaching their individual grant goals, such as organizing professional development opportunities for teachers, creating a summer AP prep program for students, providing students with AP materials, and assisting in the organization of parent outreach programs at individual schools.

“Expectations for this privately funded grant are particularly demanding,” said Weingart. “The bar was set high for all stakeholders, including administration, teachers and students, making implementation uniquely challenging for all participating schools.”

Coventry was one of two schools in the original nine POD group that met its goal for the number of students scoring 3,4, or 5 on the math, science, and English AP courses, Weingart said.

“Coventry went from offering two AP English courses to offering six courses, including calculus, statistics, biology and chemistry,” she said. The district’s AP enrollment increased to 148 from 90 the previous year.

“The number of Coventry students earning qualifying scores increased from 35 to 60, a testament to the hard work of students and teachers alike,” Weingart said. “Coventry was successful in meeting the target goal set by the grant’s funder.”

“Putnam also showed dramatic increases in their AP program,” she continued, “offering three additional courses and increasing their overall enrollment from 38 to 76 students. Students and teachers demonstrated their willingness to embrace the challenges of AP.”

This year, Project Opening Doors has added 12 more Connecticut schools to the program.

“It’s been rewarding on multiple levels to have the opportunity to work with teachers who are so dedicated and committed to their students’ success,” Weingart said.

“Ultimately, Project Opening Doors is about helping schools strengthen their college-readiness initiatives and ensuring that students are prepared for college, whether or not they choose to attend,” Weingart concluded.

To learn more, contact EASTCONN’s Helen Weingart at [hweingart@eastconn.org](mailto:hweingart@eastconn.org) or at 860-455-1571.

## Send Us Your Good News!

We’d love to publish good news about staff awards, honors or new administrators in your schools or districts. Just send the information to *Connections* Editor Teddie Sleight at [tsleight@eastconn.org](mailto:tsleight@eastconn.org). Or, call her at 860-455-1553.

## Prominent Early Childhood Math Professor Teaches Staff



*Nationally prominent author and early childhood math professor Juanita Copley, Ph.D., engaged EASTCONN Head Start staff members in lively training and discussion during four days of intensive professional development in late August. Dr. Copley explored in depth the topic, “The Young Thinker: Mathematics in the Preschool and Kindergarten Classroom Institute” at EASTCONN’s Windham Mills in Willimantic.*



*Irish Poet Geraldine Mills, left, and ACT poet and creative writing Teacher Lisa C. Taylor, in Carna, Ireland, this summer.*

## ACT Creative Writing Teacher Invites Irish Poet to Teach Her CT Students

ACT creative writing teacher Lisa C. Taylor, recipient of a prestigious Surdna Arts Teaching Fellowship for 2009, traveled to Ireland over the summer to work on a new collection of poetry with award-winning Irish poet and writer Geraldine Mills.

Taylor, also an award-winning poet, called her Surdna-funded trip to Ireland “an amazing and life-transforming experience.” ACT is EASTCONN’s arts magnet high school in Willimantic.

In late October, Mills will guest-teach at ACT; do a Q&A for a UConn Irish poetry class; present her work at ECSU; and read from her works at a book-signing at the UConn Co-op; she will also read from her works at Taylor’s home. Mills’ ECSU and UConn appearances are open to the public. Contact Taylor for Mills’ schedule at 860-455-1563, or via e-mail at [ltaylor@eastconn.org](mailto:ltaylor@eastconn.org).

# Sprague's 7th-Graders Earn Great CMT Reading Scores



*Sprague's current 8th-grade class scored at-goal or above-goal on their 7th-grade reading Connecticut Mastery Tests last spring.*

Congratulations to Sprague's Sayles Elementary School, all of whose current 8th-graders scored at-goal or above on the 7th-grade reading section of the Connecticut Mastery Tests last spring.

"We're very proud of our students' achievement," said Sayles Principal Jean Wierzbinski, who has been at Sayles' helm for seven years. Sayles serves 350 preK-8 students.

"Our challenge now is to maintain that high level of achievement," Wierzbinski said.

All 31 of Sayles's 7th-graders (now in 8th-grade) scored a 4 or 5 on the CMT reading section, according to Wierzbinski.

"It's nice to have the whole class do well because it shows that the school is doing a good job and we can probably do it again next year," said 8th-grader Annie Woronecki.

Principal Wierzbinski attributed the 7th-graders' CMT

reading success to a number of factors, including the students' devotion to reading and their willingness to work hard.

But it wasn't just the students who excelled. Wierzbinski said Sayles's teachers, from the early grades on up, also really came through. Sayles's four-teacher, 7th- and 8th-grade team had developed a "wonderful reading program for writing, across all disciplines," Wierzbinski said.

Students voluntarily participated in after-school CMT classes in both reading and math twice a week from January until the CMTs began. Wierzbinski added that she also felt that the school's use of SRBI/RtI interventions was really working.

"Thanks to RtI, kids who needed help with reading got it, while the kids who were reading at grade-level got enrichment," Wierzbinski said.



376 Hartford Turnpike ~ Hampton, Connecticut 06247  
860-455-0707 ~ [www.eastconn.org](http://www.eastconn.org)

*EASTCONN, one of six Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) in Connecticut, has been serving the educational and training needs of schools, organizations, and individuals of all ages in northeastern Connecticut since 1980.*

EASTCONN  
376 Hartford Turnpike  
Hampton, CT 06247

U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Non-Profit  
Permit No. 86  
Willimantic, CT 06226