

# CONNECTIONS

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## Autism Program Goal: Return Students to Home Districts



*An Autism Program student receives direct instruction, aligned with his individualized education plan, aimed at helping prepare him for day-to-day challenges at home and in the community.*

While EASTCONN's Autism Program continues to offer a strong, one-on-one program with professional supports for both students and their families, its ultimate goal is to return well-prepared students to their hometown schools, where EASTCONN experts can help member districts build the necessary in-school capacity to meet students' special learning needs.

"I am thoroughly impressed with EASTCONN's commitment to serving Plainfield students with intensive needs," said Dr. Bryan Klimkiewicz, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services in Plainfield.

"Their school-based programs' intentional response to [support students in their] Least Restrictive Environment is refreshing. Our collaboration with EASTCONN has produced positive results in meeting our students' complex educational needs, while building our capacity to support students within our district programs," Klimkiewicz said.

"This strategy has served to create a bridge for our

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*Nearly 80 administrators from non-pilot school districts across northeastern Connecticut attended EASTCONN-led workshops to better understand the state's new educator evaluation program.*

## EASTCONN Helps Districts With New Educator Evaluation Program

EASTCONN is helping five northeastern Connecticut school districts pilot the state's new System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED), by providing professional development and supports that will help pilot districts implement new protocols this year.

EASTCONN staff is working on the first-year pilot of Connecticut's model SEED initiative with educators in Windham and in a small-rural-district consortium that includes Eastford, Franklin, Columbia and Sterling.

"We're very excited to be part of it," said Columbia Superintendent of Schools Francine Coss, adding, "There is a great deal of hard work being done, both at the state level and among [pilot] cohort members."

Coss said she was glad that EASTCONN was facilitating the five-town pilot.

"As always, EASTCONN is a fantastic resource," Coss said. "They anticipate our needs and they manage the complexities, so that they are not foreboding. Throughout the training process...they are not just simply delivering the information, they are providing it to us with meaning."

The SEED model was developed in response to Connecticut's new Core Requirements for Educator Evaluation, which provide

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Click on "Workshops, Events & Classes"

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students placed out of district resulting in an effective, timely and systematic return to district," he said.

Thomas F. Cronin, EASTCONN's Director of Education Services, confirmed EASTCONN's return-to-district objective.

"One of our main goals is to build a framework of supports that will help students transition back to their home schools," said Cronin. "We are committed to helping districts build a greater capacity to serve the special needs of their unique student populations, both now and in the future."

According to Ron Morin, a psychologist and EASTCONN's Director of Special Services, those supports for schools include comprehensive wrap-around services, specialized outplacement programs, school-based consultation, training, school-wide professional development and trainings for paraprofessionals, teaching staff, school psychologists and special education teachers. EASTCONN's multi-disciplinary team provides schools with assessment, evaluations and programming needs for individual students with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities.

While her 9-year-old son continues to be taught as a student at the EASTCONN Autism Program's Columbia-based site, one mother said that the experience has been life-changing for her son and her family.

"The [EASTCONN] program is an awesome program and it has changed his life, my life, my family's life," said Andover parent Delthia Ishmael, speaking about her son and his experience with EASTCONN's Autism Program. "It's been a very positive change. He's more independent now, more vocal...The intervention in this program, it's unbelievable. There is always open communication and support.

"His needs are being met academically, socially and behaviorally — I have seen the change and his ongoing progress. A lot of the skills he can generalize from school to home and in the community, so I know its really working," Ishmael said.

The Autism Program's fundamental approach to in-program care for students is instruction-based in applied behavior analysis (ABA) with an emphasis on data-based decision-making and a strength-based approach to assessment and intervention, said EASTCONN's Dr. Ravit Stein, BCBA-D, a licensed psychologist with the Autism Program.

"A central tenet of the program is a focus on family-school collaboration," Stein said. "In consultation with families in the home, we develop individualized programs to support families and their children."

Stein also said the program focuses on developing students' functional and adaptive skills. The program's multi-disciplinary, team-based approach includes on-staff expertise in assistive technology, instructional/behavioral supports, physical/occupational therapy and speech-language services.

To learn more, contact Special Services Director Ron Morin at 860-228-3240, or reach him at [rmorin@eastconn.org](mailto:rmorin@eastconn.org).

## CCSS Consortium Helps School Districts Adapt to Shifts in Classroom Instruction in Time for Fall 2014

During its first year, EASTCONN's regional Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Consortium provided a valuable professional learning community for 21 northeastern Connecticut school districts, which collaborated to meet new state curriculum standards by 2014.

Begun last fall, EASTCONN's CCSS Consortium worked with nearly 300 preK-12 teachers and administrators from the EASTCONN region. EASTCONN organized the CCSS Consortium to assist the region's small school districts as they write new English language arts (ELA) and math curricula that align with Common Core Standards. New ELA and math curricula must be implemented by fall 2014.

"During its first year, the CCSS Consortium provided professional learning that teachers and administrators needed to implement the new, state-mandated shifts in their classroom instruction and assessment," said Jim Huggins, EASTCONN's director of Teaching, Learning and Technology.

In its second year, the CCSS Consortium's Cohort 1 participants will concentrate on unit-writing that is aligned with the Common Core Standards.

"In the context of each district's curriculum, Consortium participants will adapt their current curriculum frameworks to align with the new standards, either by updating their grade-level units or developing new ones," said EASTCONN's Curriculum Specialist Helen Weingart, who co-facilitates the ELA group.

Consortium members have worked with EASTCONN curriculum specialists and national experts like Dr. Juanita Copley, Dr. Karin Hess and Dr. Kristina Elias-Staron. The Consortium is organized around different grade levels. New members may join the CCSS Cohort 2 this year.

To learn more about the CCSS Consortium, contact EASTCONN's Amy Drowne at [adrowne@eastconn.org](mailto:adrowne@eastconn.org), or reach her at 860-455-1591.

### EASTCONN Shout-Out!

**Kate Bars**, a first-grade teacher at Pomfret Community School, has been named Connecticut State Agricultural Science Teacher of the Year. Kudos!

### Send Us Your School's Good News!

Contact **Connections** Editor **Teddie Sleight**  
[tsleight@eastconn.org](mailto:tsleight@eastconn.org) or 860-455-1553

#### 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

Doty 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

## EASTCONN Professional Notes



*Debra Stipe*

As the East Region Accreditation Facilitation Project Coordinators, EASTCONN's **Debra Stipe** and LEARN's Michele Pearson will present a workshop on "Using the Classroom Portfolio for Professional Development and Reflection" at the Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children Conference this month.



*Nancy Magnani*

**Nancy Magnani** and **Karen Neville** have co-authored papers that will be published in the proceedings from the August SPIE Optics + Photonics Optics Education and Outreach II Conference. Magnani and Neville co-authored "Looking at light through a pinhole;" Magnani authored "Lessons learned from student outreach: introducing optics to 5th graders." Magnani also presented a paper and poster session at the conference, which took place in San Diego; the SPIE conference is the largest international, multidisciplinary optical sciences and technology meeting in North America. Magnani and Judy Donnelly, professor at Three Rivers Community College, also co-instructed a course on Optics Magic.



*Karen Neville*



## Vernon Preschool Collaborative Program Earns NAEYC Accreditation

Congratulations to the Vernon Preschool Collaborative program, which has received accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a highly prized, national hallmark of excellence for early childhood programs.



The newly accredited Vernon program, which serves 160 children, ages 3 to 4, is located in all five Vernon elementary schools. The Vernon Preschool Collaborative is a joint effort of Vernon Public Schools and the EASTCONN Head Start program. NAEYC's final report gave Vernon top scores all-around.

To obtain NAEYC accreditation, preschool programs must participate in an uncompromising, voluntary process that includes an extensive self-study. Qualifying programs must then meet NAEYC's criteria for standards-based excellence.

To learn more about NAEYC accreditation, contact EASTCONN Early Childhood Initiatives Director Elizabeth Aschenbrenner at 860-455-1518, or at [easchenbrenner@eastconn.org](mailto: easchenbrenner@eastconn.org).



*Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) Deputy Commissioner Susan Whalen, third from left, helped Trail Blazers crews celebrate their summer work, improving the infrastructure of northeastern Connecticut state parks.*

## Trail Blazers Improve State Parks

For 36 young people, the Eastern Connecticut Conservation Corps's summer-long Trail Blazers program offered the promise of fresh air, work in the state's beautiful parks, a regular paycheck, and an opportunity to learn job skills that will improve their chances of finding full-time employment.

For 15 weeks this summer, the ECCC Trail Blazers, ages 18 to 25, improved the infrastructure of eastern Connecticut state parks by refurbishing picnic areas, improving old park buildings, and clearing miles of walking trails.

"It's awesome working outside," said Willimantic resident and ECCC Trail Blazers employee Juan Ortiz, 21, as he built new picnic tables at Natchaug State Forest in Eastford. "I'm learning a lot. It gives us great experience and a better resume."

Funded by the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB) and administered by EASTCONN in collaboration with the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (which runs the state parks system), the ECCC Trail Blazers hired young adults and war veterans from the Willimantic, Danielson and Norwich areas.

One day a week, crews sat in an EASTCONN classroom, where they learned resume-writing, interpersonal, online-job-search and workplace-etiquette skills, among other things. They earned industry-recognized certificates in areas like First-Aid, CPR and OSHA 10 and received career and post-secondary-education counseling. Following their Trail Blazers experience, 10 youths have found full-time, unsubsidized jobs.

In September, representatives from EASTCONN, EWIB and the state DEEP celebrated the Trail Blazers' success. DEEP Deputy Commissioner Susan Whalen conferred certificates of completion and praised the work of the Trail Blazers crews, as well as their success in job-skills training classes.

"I am so proud of them. These programs are invaluable. You can see it in their faces," Whalen said afterward. "The State of Connecticut has gotten a huge benefit out of this."

To learn more about the Trail Blazers, contact EASTCONN's Suzanne Cimochofski at 860-779-3770, or at [scimochofski@eastconn.org](mailto: scimochofski@eastconn.org).

# Great Point!



*Delighted teachers react to Rob Buyea, author of “Because of Mr. Terupt,” during a September workshop called “How to Teach Your Students to Read Like a Writer.” The workshop was for teachers whose grades 4-to-6 students participate in EASTCONN Interdistrict Grants, “Creating Community Builders” and “Legacy Explorations.” During the workshop at EASTCONN’s Hampton facility, teachers from Coventry, Hebron, Mansfield, Voluntown, Willington and Windham discussed the art of writing. “Because of Mr. Terupt” is a 2013 Intermediate Nutmeg Book Award nominee. EASTCONN’s 24 Interdistrict Grants engage 5,000-plus students from different communities in activities that promote academic rigor and a greater understanding of diversity.*

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requirements/guidelines for a teacher and administrator evaluation and support program.

EASTCONN has also begun presenting a series of regional, informational workshops to help non-pilot districts from the northeastern Connecticut region understand the core requirements and the SEED model. Districts must either select the SEED model or develop their own evaluation plan by March 30, 2013, for implementation in the 2013-2014 school year.

“The sessions are very helpful in clarifying what the objectives, issues and opportunities are,” said Fred Baruzzi, Superintendent of the Mansfield Public Schools, who was among 80 administrators attending an EASTCONN workshop in October for non-pilot towns.

Under Connecticut’s new educator evaluation system, teacher evaluations will be linked to students’ academic growth and development, as well as classroom observations, among other things.

EASTCONN is also facilitating a new data management system with My Learning Plan® that will be employed in the five northeastern Connecticut pilot towns, as well as in nine other school districts participating in the state’s pilot, to gather data and support the process of teacher and administrator evaluation. My Learning Plan® is a provider of Web-based educator evaluation and professional learning data management solutions.

“We are working closely with the Connecticut State Department of Education and My Learning Plan to launch and implement this on-line evaluation system in the pilot districts,” said EASTCONN’s Director of Teaching, Learning and Technology Jim Huggins.

“We’re looking forward to being part of this major reform initiative in Connecticut,” he said.

SEED is being implemented statewide in collaboration with the CSDE, the state’s Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs), the Connecticut Association of Principals and School Superintendents (CAPSS), the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), and the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS).

To learn more about SEED, the five-town pilot program or to obtain information about workshops for non-pilot towns in the EASTCONN region, contact EASTCONN’s Jim Huggins at 860-455-1569, or at [jhuggins@eastconn.org](mailto:jhuggins@eastconn.org).



## Ground-Breaking at QVCC for Middle College Expansion



*Quinebaug Middle College (QMC) students joined leaders from EASTCONN and Quinebaug Valley Community College (QVCC) in Danielson to break ground for an addition, scheduled for completion in mid-2014, serving both QMC and QVCC students.*

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