

CONNECTIONS

Education News From Northeastern Connecticut

volume 34, number 1

www.eastconn.org

October 2013



ECHIP Board members include, l. to r., seated: Alternate Suzanne Waterhouse, Tolland BOE; Robert Carroll, Coventry BOE; and Paula M. Colen, EASTCONN. Standing: Alternate Michael Wilkinson, Town of Tolland; ECHIP Treasurer/Secretary Kelly Vachon, Town of Plainfield; ECHIP Chairman Steve Werbner, Town of Tolland; Ron Lussier, Plainfield BOE and ECHIP Vice-Chairman William Hull, Putnam BOE. Missing from photo: William Guzman, Tolland BOE; Beth Bauer, Town of Coventry; Doug Cutler, Town of Putnam.

One Year Later, ECHIP Earns High Marks From Members

Now in its second year, the Eastern Connecticut Health Insurance Program (ECHIP), Connecticut's first health insurance collaborative for municipalities and school districts, continues to earn high marks from its current members as they benefit from cost-control savings.

"As chairperson of ECHIP this past year, I am proud of our initial accomplishments," said Steve Werbner, ECHIP's Chairman, who is also Tolland's Town Manager. "ECHIP members saw rate stabilization and, in many cases, decreases in health insurance costs, establishment of adequate future reserves and a stronger voice in the market place due to the size of the organization.

"In my own community of Tolland," he continued, "this past year has seen the lowest rate of increase in health care costs in years, much of which I attribute to our inclusion in ECHIP."

In 2010, Connecticut legislators passed Public Act 10-174, allowing municipalities and boards of education to join together

See **ECHIP**, back page

200+ Administrators Gain Expertise During EASTCONN Educator-Evaluator Trainings



EASTCONN's Coordinator of Teaching and Learning, Amy Drowne, leans in to field questions during a summer educator-evaluator session. Brooklyn Superintendent Louise Berry, seated left, shared ideas with Drowne and Brooklyn elementary and middle school Assistant Principal Marybeth Sweet, right.

The sound of facilitators' confident voices alternated with the hum of animated group discussions this summer during a series of EASTCONN workshops aimed at preparing administrators to conduct staff evaluations under Connecticut's new educator evaluation program.

A total of more than 200 school administrators participated in six, week-long trainings to build their observational, evidence-gathering and online reporting skills, even as they were also learning the language of a new state Common Core of Teaching rubric for the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED).

"All of these administrators are sharpening their understanding of how to conduct staff evaluations under the new CSDE guidelines, which are being implemented this year," said EASTCONN's Jim Huggins, a Teaching and Learning consultant, as he paused for a moment while facilitating a summer session. He was joined by Amy Drowne, EASTCONN's Coordinator of Professional Learning, who was among EASTCONN's team of staff developers presenting the workshops.

"One of the most important outcomes is that administrators

See **EVALUATOR TRAININGS**, page 2

View the EASTCONN Events Calendar
at www.eastconn.org

EVALUATOR TRAININGS, from page 1

explored the importance of evidence-based conversations and the need to bring student and teacher voices into the evaluation process," said Drowne.

Drowne said that the workshops' attendees included principals, superintendents, curriculum directors, special education directors, district coaches and others who hold 092 administrator certifications.

"I think it was an intense learning experience for everyone involved," she said.

A number of administrators who attended the evaluator workshops observed that the trainings helped them feel ready to implement their new evaluation plan.

"I would say that the training was helpful and informative, in terms of getting us ready to move forward with the state's [educator evaluator] initiative, and that EASTCONN did a nice job of tailoring it to the special needs of our district," said Dr. Ann Anderberg, Principal at North Windham School in Windham.

"I left with a thorough understand of the process and feel like I'm ready to engage with our teachers around this new evaluation tool," she said.

Mansfield's Southeast Elementary School Principal Lauren Rodriguez said she felt that the EASTCONN trainings were very effective.

"I feel like I'm ready for the [educator evaluator] proficiency exam tomorrow," said the animated Rodriguez, as she emerged from training in August. "EASTCONN instructors provided me with the one-one-one time I needed. I feel ready to turn it around and pass it along to my staff in a clear manner."

"EASTCONN pulled together an incredibly valuable week of learning for all those who attended," said Megan E. Baker, who is Curriculum Director for Thompson Public Schools and Assistant Principal at Mary R. Fisher Elementary School.

"Spending five days investigating, discussing and practicing within administrative teams provided the learning necessary to confidently implement the new system within our own districts," Baker said. "Moreover, this collaborative effort afforded us the opportunity to emerge prepared to promote growth in the field of education, as we follow the Common Core of Teaching Rubric for Effective Teaching."

EASTCONN staff developers are continuing to provide several school districts with embedded coaching to assist them with their educator evaluation and professional learning plans, said EASTCONN's Huggins.

"EASTCONN can help train district staff to use the state's new online platform and assist them with their evaluation process, as well as offering other resources like sample goals or forms," Huggins said.

To learn how EASTCONN can help districts with the implementation of their educator evaluator programs, contact EASTCONN's Director of Teaching and Learning Scott Nierendorf at snierendorf@eastconn.org, or at 860-455-1621.

Nierendorf Joins EASTCONN as Director of Teaching & Learning



Scott Nierendorf is EASTCONN's new Director of Teaching and Learning. Nierendorf joined EASTCONN in September.

EASTCONN has named longtime Connecticut educator Scott Nierendorf as the agency's new Director of Teaching and Learning.

"We are delighted to welcome Scott to EASTCONN," said EASTCONN Executive Director Paula M. Colen. "His recent work as teacher, staff developer and administrator, combined with his keen interest in technology, will not only inform his work here, but help us to continue offering relevant, innovative, professional learning opportunities to our member districts."

Nierendorf replaces Jim Huggins, who has retired to become a Teaching and Learning consultant for EASTCONN.

"I have been extremely fortunate to land at EASTCONN, and as I've learned more about the staff, the programs and the high standards of the work EASTCONN does, I have to say that I'm thrilled to be part of the team," said Nierendorf.

A Connecticut educator for the last 25 years, Nierendorf was a sixth-grade teacher in Haddam, an IT resource teacher in Wallingford, an educational technology specialist at ACES and director of Educational Technology at CREC in Hartford. He was assistant principal in West Hartford and, most recently, was principal at Marlborough Elementary School.

"Common Core Standards, educator evaluation implementation and the new Smarter Balanced Assessments — these are very big deals for our districts," Nierendorf said. "My clear goals at EASTCONN are around helping school and district leaders get the work done."

Nierendorf said he is eager to join EASTCONN's pursuit of a variety of distance-learning applications, video conferencing and other 21st-century technologies. Contact him at snierendorf@eastconn.org, or at 860-455-1621.

EASTCONN Connections

Writer/Editor: Teddie Sleight ~ tsleight@eastconn.org

Assistant: Cindy Laurendeau ~ claurendeau@eastconn.org

Communications Department

Dotty Budnick, Director ~ dbudnick@eastconn.org

EASTCONN Administration

Paula M. Colen, Executive Director

EASTCONN, 376 Hartford Turnpike, Hampton, CT 06247
860-455-0707 Fax: 860-455-0691

Professional Notes



Cronin



LoRicco

EASTCONN Education Services Director **Thomas F. Cronin** joined EASTCONN's Quinebaug Middle College Principal **Gino LoRicco** as co-presenters along with a Glasser senior faculty member at the William Glasser Institute National Conference in Buffalo. Their presentation was titled "The School Climate Solution: Moving from Power OVER to Power WITH."



Stein



Jaffery



Collier-Meek

Ravit Stein, Ph.D., EASTCONN's Director of Psychological Behavioral Consultation Services and two of EASTCONN's Educational and Behavioral consultants, **Rose Jaffery**, Ph.D., and **Melissa A. Collier-Meek**, Ph.D., are presenters at the 34th Annual Berkshire Association for Behavior Analysis and Therapy this month. Stein, who co-chairs a BABAT Symposium, presents "Supporting school-based teams in systemic data-driven problem solving: A unique opportunity for BCBA's." Jaffery presents "Building knowledge of behavioral principles among school-based staff through coaching and consultation." Collier-Meek presents "Fostering treatment integrity and acceptability of behavioral interventions in public school settings: Opportunities and challenges."



Turner



Dinda



Bedard

EASTCONN Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) **Sarah Turner**, M.S., and CCC-SLPs/Assistive Technology Specialists **Alicia Dinda**, M.A., and **Ann Bedard**, M.S., are the first Certified TouchChat Trainers in Connecticut. TouchChat is a full-featured communication application for individuals who have difficulty using their natural voices. Dinda, Bedard and Turner are now among a group of only 12 Certified TouchChat Trainers in the U.S. and Canada, and are listed as such in an online directory for those seeking support with the iPad app.



Aschenbrenner

Elizabeth Aschenbrenner, EASTCONN's Director of Early Childhood Initiatives, has been invited to co-present "Fidelity of Implementation to Support Mature Play and Overall Instructional Quality" at the 27th Annual Conference of the American Evaluation Association in Washington, D.C.

EASTCONN and Partner Districts Awarded 25 Interdistrict Grants



Using their own research, new friends collaborate on a biography project for the Interdistrict Grant, Heroes and Heroines.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has awarded EASTCONN and its partner school districts a total of 25 Interdistrict Grants for 2013-2015, providing both academic enrichment and a greater understanding of diversity for thousands of students across a three-county area.

"Once again, we're fortunate to be able to work collaboratively with our district partners to provide educational opportunities that genuinely enrich classroom curricula and give participating students a chance to connect with peers from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds," said EASTCONN Executive Director Paula M. Colen. Teachers also benefit from the Interdistrict connections they make with their peers, Colen said.

Since 1999, EASTCONN has successfully partnered with area schools districts to submit Interdistrict Grant proposals to the CSDE. This year, EASTCONN is partnering with a total of 36 districts. EASTCONN grant coordinators manage the Interdistrict Grant programs.

EASTCONN's 25 Interdistrict Grants for 2013-2015 will provide rigorous interdisciplinary programs in the arts, sciences and social sciences to more than 5,000 students in grades 2 through 12, from dozens of partner schools across Windham, Tolland and Hartford counties, said Nancy Vitale, EASTCONN's Interdistrict Grant Coordinator.

Each EASTCONN Interdistrict Grants is aligned with Common Core State Standards.

"Some of our grants enable children from Windham, Manchester, Hartford, East Hartford and Bloomfield, for example, to connect one-on-one with students from EASTCONN's north-eastern Connecticut region, giving them a chance to engage in meaningful ways with students they might not otherwise ever meet," Vitale said.

"We really enjoyed working with everyone and seeing the students develop friendships while exploring STEM," said Melissa Vanek, who is the robotics coach at the O'Brien STEM School in East Hartford. Vanek's students have partnered with Stafford students in grades 5-8 on the EASTCONN Interdistrict Grant, The Fourth R: Robotics. "Programs like this allow students to explore subject knowledge along with other life skills, like learning the importance of diversity."

Contact EASTCONN's Nancy Vitale at 860-455-0707 or at nvitale@eastconn.org, to learn more about Interdistricts.



EASTCONN's Danielson-based magnet high school, Quinebaug Middle College (QMC), welcomed its first class of 9th-graders this fall. They are part of a pilot program to determine whether QMC should enroll freshmen in the future. Previously, QMC enrolled grades 10-12. Here, QMC's 9th-grade students posed at Quinebaug Valley Community College, which houses QMC.



Pictured above in Venice, Italy, students from EASTCONN's two magnet high schools, Quinebaug Middle College (QMC) and Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT), toured five major cities in nine days this summer, visiting ancient Roman ruins, among many other interesting sites. The trip was chaperoned by EASTCONN teachers.

ECHIP, from page 1

for the purpose of purchasing employee health insurance. Working with Cigna, ECHIP was officially launched on July 1, 2012. The collaborative was the first of its kind in the state.

ECHIP has nine members, including both the municipalities and school districts of Coventry, Putnam, Plainfield and Tolland, as well as EASTCONN. Altogether, ECHIP insures more than 3,500 people through self-funded Cigna health plans.

“ECHIP has allowed Putnam to begin to have control over its health care costs,” said Putnam Superintendent of Schools William Hull. “We have already seen savings. The power of this collaborative will only grow with time.”

Ron Lussier, who represents Plainfield’s Board of Education on the ECHIP board, also gave ECHIP high marks.

“ECHIP and the wellness programs sponsored by ECHIP have provided us with ways of helping our employees maintain healthier lifestyles,” Lussier said. “As a result, we can expect to see reduced claims, which translates into reduced costs to the district ... Every dollar we save in premiums is a dollar saved for our taxpayers.”

Among ECHIP’s first-year successes were a stabilization of administrative costs; the development of two new medical-benefits options that will reduce members’ costs; and the implementation of successful employee health and wellness initiatives for members, said ECHIP Administrator Larisa Carr.

“It’s also clear that ECHIP board members have developed a true spirit of collaboration, which promises to ensure that ECHIP will continue to grow in a positive direction,” said Carr.

“ECHIP has allowed Putnam to begin to have control over its health care costs. We have already seen savings. The power of this collaborative will only grow with time.”

– William Hull, Putnam Superintendent of Schools

A variety of employee wellness initiatives like walking programs, biometric health screenings, health fairs and informational sessions have provided ECHIP members and their dependents with a chance to improve their health, she said.

“With the help of Cigna, the ECHIP Health and Wellness Committee did a great job of increasing awareness of the many ways in which employees can manage their overall health,” said Carr. “Proactive activities like these demonstrate an overall commitment to maintaining healthy lifestyles among ECHIP members, which ultimately drives down claims costs.”

“Last year’s successful EASTCONN Walk-for-Health program, which is running again this fall, has ignited interest from three other ECHIP members and as a result, there will be a total of four ECHIP-member walking programs for our municipalities and school districts this year,” said Carr.

“That’s fantastic news, not only for all of our member employees and their families, but also for ECHIP’s bottom line,” Carr said.

Carr added that ECHIP’s goals this year are to expand its membership and promote the two, new medical-benefit options.

To learn more about ECHIP or to inquire about membership, contact ECHIP Administrator Larisa Carr at lcarr@eastconn.org, or reach her at 860-455-1546.

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

EASTCONN
Where Learning Comes to Life
376 Hartford Turnpike
Hampton, CT 06247

