

# CONNECTIONS

*Education News From Northeastern Connecticut*

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## EASTCONN Head Start Programs Get High Marks in Triennial Federal Review



*A snapshot caught big smiles from staff and some candid expressions from Early Head Start toddlers in Killingly.*

EASTCONN's Head Start/Early Head Start programs in northeastern Connecticut have received high marks in an important, triennial federal review, according to a report released by the Department of Health and Human Services, the reviewing agency that oversees the national Head Start program.

"The grantee [EASTCONN] collaborated effectively in a unique partnership with multiple community agencies and local public school systems to provide high-quality, thorough services to pregnant women, children and families," stated the report by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Head Start.

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*Northeastern Connecticut leaders discussed health insurance collaboratives during a recent information session. Left to right, RHAM Superintendent Robert Siminski; Tolland Superintendent William D. Guzman, Esq.; EASTCONN Executive Director Paula M. Colen; and Woodstock Superintendent Frank Baran.*

## 40 Area Leaders Meet To Explore Health Insurance Collaborative

Forty representatives from northeastern Connecticut's municipalities, boards of education and school districts gathered at EASTCONN Hampton on February 28th to learn more about creating a regional health-care insurance collaborative.

EASTCONN hosted the information session, which featured experts from Milliman, Inc., an actuarial consulting firm, and a presentation by Plainfield Superintendent of Schools Kenneth Di Pietro, who has experience with health-care collaboratives in Rhode Island.

Connecticut recently passed legislation that allows regional "pooling" for school and municipal health-care costs.

"Not only would creating a collaborative in this region allow opportunities for collective-bargaining-power and savings...it would also allow us to maintain our local identities and local control," said Di Pietro, who gave a dynamic presentation on the advantages of health-care collaboratives.

"Just by coming to the table to explore the options, you become more knowledgeable about what's out there," Di Pietro said. "Collaboratives empower you to negotiate the best deal," he told the group. "That way, each of us is protected by the All."

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View the EASTCONN Calendar  
at [www.eastconn.org](http://www.eastconn.org) and  
Click on "Workshops, Events & Classes"

## EASTCONN HEAD START, continued from page 1

EASTCONN and its delegates and partners have also exceeded educational requirements for staff at all levels, the report said.

EASTCONN administers Head Start and Early Head Start in Killingly, Plainfield and Putnam, and works in partnership with Vernon Public Schools. Delegate programs are in Stafford and Windham, administered by local boards of education. About 500 area children and pregnant women are served by center-based and home-based Head Start/Early Head Start programs.

"We are very pleased that this intensive review validates the many ways in which EASTCONN and its Head Start partners meet and exceed federal performance standards to offer high-quality programming for children and families," said EASTCONN Assistant Director of Early Childhood Initiatives Kimberly Lewendon.

"We are delighted to have received such a positive review," said Elizabeth Aschenbrenner, Director of EASTCONN Early Childhood Initiatives.

"It's clear that these comprehensive child-development programs provide critically needed services to northeastern



Early Head Start toddlers

Connecticut's young children and their families, including an array of health, dental, nutrition, mental health, education and family involvement services," she said.

The federal review cited other EASTCONN Head Start/Early Head Start program strengths: management staff that effectively represent the ethnicities of participating families; staff's extensive experience in content areas; and successful programs for children, staff and parents, including the Jump Start program at Vernon Public Schools.

The report hailed the success of the EASTCONN Head Start Community of Practice professional development program; partnerships with the Department of Children and Families and Generations Health Care; and EASTCONN's ongoing consultation with the University of Connecticut. Also noted was EASTCONN Head Start's research-based programming; its emphasis on children's school success; its alignment of curricular expectations with the Connecticut State Department of Education's preK-to-grade-12 standards; the use of data to assess children's progress; its ongoing self-assessments in relation to all standards; and its attainment of a grant from Delta Dental Foundation of New Jersey, which has expanded dental treatment services from 60 to 71 percent among Head Start/Early Head Start children.

The federal review concluded, "The grantee [EASTCONN] had a true partnership with the community and public schools in providing services to families and children prior to entry into public school and preparing Head Start children for future success."



## Learn About Cooperative Purchasing Alternatives at "Sandwiches & Savings" Free Info Session, March 22

School administrators, finance/business managers and community leaders are invited to "Sandwiches and Savings," an information session about EASTCONN Cooperative Purchasing opportunities, on Tues., March 22, 2011, from 12 noon to 3 p.m., at EASTCONN, 376 Hartford Turnpike (Route 6), in Hampton.

EASTCONN will offer a free, light lunch to participants, who can learn more from suppliers that offer cooperative purchasing products and services through EASTCONN.

Cooperative purchasing topics and displays will include commodities and services like: **broker electricity alternatives; heating fuel; automated absence-and-substitute management and payment-processing solutions; GPS tracking solutions; printer management; office supplies; "green" cleaning supplies; food products; and cafeteria products.**

Participants should R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, March 15, by contacting EASTCONN's Rich Tariff at 860-455-1562, or by e-mailing him at [rtariff@eastconn.org](mailto:rtariff@eastconn.org).



## Reading Assessment Consortium Offers New Tools for Grades 3-8

EASTCONN's Reading Assessment Consortium, which already offers reading and social studies assessment tools, has continued its partnership with language arts expert Dr. Kristina Elias-Staron to create a new science reading assessment tool for students in grades 3-8. The science assessment tool should be ready by fall.

The Consortium currently offers schools a formative reading assessment tool for grades 3-8, aligned to the CMT, with benchmark assessments at the appropriate reading level for each grade, designed to be given twice a year. They include both multiple-choice and open-ended questions and represent all CMT objectives. EASTCONN also offers a differentiated content assessment tool in social studies for grades 3-8. These assessments are published articles, related to specific GLEs, intended to be integrated into content units of study and to be used by classroom teachers as part of their ongoing formative

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## McREL Challenges CT Districts to Transform Student Outcomes

Teams of educators from 15 Connecticut school districts participated in a McREL workshop that challenged them to transform their education systems and improve student outcomes by re-evaluating and re-applying existing resources and know-how.

“How do you beat the odds for students? By fundamentally applying existing know-how in a superior way,” said McREL President and CEO Dr. Timothy Waters, who presented “Changing the Odds for Student Success: What Matters Most” at EASTCONN Hampton.

About 40 school representatives, many of whom came as part of a team, attended the workshop from districts that included Colchester, Coventry, Eastford, Hebron, Killingly, Mansfield, Plainfield, Sprague, Stafford, Sterling, Tolland, Vernon, West Hartford, Windham and EASTCONN.

Waters led intensive, small-group discussions throughout the day, enabling attendees to brainstorm ideas and solutions to specific regional challenges.

“This workshop raised fundamental questions, like how do we get the conversation on a broader level to more people in northeastern Connecticut, because we’re at a crisis point,” said Killingly Board of Education member Richard Murray, who attended with a four-person Killingly team.

“The presentation was wonderful and very informative,” said Michael Bednarz, Stafford’s Director of Curriculum Instruction, who attended as part of a four-person Stafford team.

“What I liked was it was just common sense,” he said. “It was also nice to have an opportunity to discuss some pretty important concepts with our team.”



*McREL President and CEO Dr. Timothy Waters, left, joined EASTCONN Executive Director Paula Colen and EASTCONN’s Director of Teaching, Learning and Technology Jim Huggins.*

McREL, Inc., is a private, non-profit, education research and development corporation that is devoted to helping educators improve the odds for success for all students. Learn more at [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org).

For more information, contact EASTCONN’s Director of Teaching, Learning and Technology Jim Huggins at 860-455-1525, or at [jhuggins@eastconn.org](mailto:jhuggins@eastconn.org).

## Griswold Posts “Budget 101” on Web to Reach, Inform Town Residents



*Griswold Superintendent of Schools Dr. Paul Freeman is shown in a screen shot taken from his district Web site, where visitors can see informational videos on the school budget process.*

Griswold’s “Budget 101” Webisodes haven’t become a YouTube sensation yet, but they’re gaining local attention as Griswold school officials use their district Web site to inform residents about the 2011-2012 budget process.

School officials say Web analytics show that hundreds of visitors have already clicked on the “Budget 101” videos on the Griswold Public Schools Web site at [www.griswold.k12.ct.us](http://www.griswold.k12.ct.us).

Two “Budget 101” Webisodes, lasting 6-8 minutes, focus generally on where school funding comes from and how it’s spent. A 3rd, executive-summary budget Webisode is planned.

Web site visitors can also view or download Griswold’s 2011-2012 proposed budget and related materials.

Griswold Superintendent of Schools Dr. Paul Freeman made the “Budget 101” Webisodes with the help of Griswold High School video-journalism students.

“As our budget process goes out to the community, I’ll encourage people to visit the Web site and view the videos,” Freeman said. “I’m hoping that between now and May that we get more and more hits.” Community feedback has been positive.

“The 90-page budget is really dense and for a lot of people it’s either boring or intimidating,” he continued. “But if you can look at a couple of 5-minute videos and look at an executive summary, it gives you what you need to be an informed participant in the process without being a CPA,” he said.

Freeman, who became Griswold’s superintendent in 2009, said he brought the Webisodes idea from East Lyme schools, where he was previously assistant superintendent.

“Here in Griswold, I wanted to make sure there was an accessible, painless way for people to get some basic information about the process,” Freeman said.

Like many superintendents of schools across the state, Freeman said his biggest challenge is effective communication.

“Particularly today, the challenge is conveying the value of our schools and education to the community,” he said.

As part of a regional initiative to build awareness of and support for preK-12 and adult education, Freeman will join an on-air discussion about school budget basics on Charter Cable television’s “Education Matters” show, airing in mid-March. Go to [www.ctv14.com](http://www.ctv14.com).

## INSURANCE COLLABORATIVE,

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*Forty community and school leaders discussed the pros and cons of creating a health-insurance collaborative in northeastern Connecticut during a meeting at EASTCONN's Hampton offices.*

Before moving to Plainfield last fall, Di Pietro was superintendent of schools in Rhode Island's Coventry Public Schools, where health insurance collaboratives have been in use for years.

Milliman representatives and Di Pietro touched on topics like the potential administrative structure of a collaborative, as well as collaborative strategies and the benefits of joining a collaborative. Those present asked a variety of questions.

"I thought this was great," said RHAM Superintendent Robert Siminski after the information session ended. "We've been advocating for this for a while. It's very exciting to see this getting off the ground, but there's a lot of work to be done. Now we just have to sit down and do it."

Thirty [30] representatives from 28 towns and/or school districts have volunteered to help EASTCONN explore next steps for creating a regional health-care collaborative. Among the 30 volunteers are superintendents, boards of education members, fiscal managers, finance directors, business administrators, boards of finance representatives and town managers.

According to EASTCONN Executive Director Paula M. Colen, volunteers will meet in the next few weeks to explore the specifics that would be involved in creating a health-care collaborative. Participants will be notified once the date is set.

For more information or to participate in next steps, contact EASTCONN's Paula M. Colen at 860-455-1505, or e-mail her at [pcolen@eastconn.org](mailto:pcolen@eastconn.org).

## ACT Student-Video Among 10 Finalists in DMV Contest

A creative video filmed by EASTCONN's ACT arts magnet high school students has been selected by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy and a panel of judges as one of 10 finalists in the 2011 Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles' teen safe-driving video contest.

The annual DMV contest, "From the Driver's Seat to the Director's Chair," invites Connecticut high school students to create a public service video on the theme "Make the Right Choice," depicting the consequences of students' making both good and bad choices while driving.

Three winners will be announced at an April 4, 2011, DMV awards ceremony. This year, ACT's DMV entry was created by ACT juniors Caleb Newell, Chris Richard and Josh Winarski; and seniors Ben Newell and Jeff Garland. The video depicts a student jumping into a digital car, and driving erratically while texting. Its slogan is "Just drive."



*Above, a screen shot from the ACT student-made video, submitted to the state DMV's safe teen driving contest; the video is among 10 finalists chosen from among 164 entries statewide.*

Since 2008, other ACT student videographers have twice won honorable mention in the DMV contest.

This year, the DMV video contest attracted 164 entries from high schools statewide. Schools ranking in the DMV Top 10 are (alphabetically): Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT); Cheney Technical High School; Coginchaug High School; Danbury High School; Daniel Hand High School; East Lyme High School; East Lyme High School; Nonnewaug High School; The Williams School; and West Haven High School.

To view the 10 finalists' videos, visit [www.ct.gov/dmv](http://www.ct.gov/dmv).

## EASTCONN Wins CIRMA Award

EASTCONN has won a statewide 2011 Risk Management Achievement Award from the Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency (CIRMA) for "outstanding efforts" to improve safety and risk management through staff training and awareness.

"Your award is testament to your dedication to improving safety, lowering losses, and ultimately saving taxpayer dollars," said EASTCONN's award letter from CIRMA CEO and President Bruce A. Wollschlager and CIRMA Vice President for Risk Management Services David Demchak. CIRMA is honoring EASTCONN in the category, "Outstanding Commitment and Results from Safety and Health Committees." EASTCONN is among 16 CIRMA award recipients from across Connecticut.

EASTCONN will be honored during CIRMA's annual awards celebration on May 26, 2011, in Rocky Hill.

CIRMA is Connecticut's leading provider of municipal risk financing and risk management services, providing coverage to 344 municipal, school, and local public agency members. CIRMA was established as a service program of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) in 1980. To learn more about CIRMA, visit [www.cirma.org](http://www.cirma.org).

## Regional Initiatives Gather Momentum in NE Connecticut



Working with its member districts and other stakeholders across northeastern Connecticut, EASTCONN continues to explore an expanding number of cost-effective, regional solutions to local education and community challenges.

In the last two years, for example, EASTCONN has hosted regional forums to help educators and communities identify common fiscal and organizational problems. Based on consensus from stakeholders at the forums, EASTCONN is moving a regional agenda that addresses a broad constituency.

“With these regional efforts, our goal is not simply to save money, but to help schools and communities redirect their resources for student instruction in more cost-effective ways,” said EASTCONN’s Executive Director Paula M. Colen.

“Taking a regional approach to addressing a broad range of local issues is very, very exciting,” Colen continued. “EASTCONN will continue to collaborate with its regional partners to find solutions that meet as many local needs as possible.”

Some highlights from regional initiatives:

### ■ **Regional Health Benefits Collaborative:**

[See Story, Page 1]

■ **Transportation Study:** EASTCONN is gathering information from area school districts and reviewing current contract end-dates in an effort to offer options for regional transportation contracts. Recent state legislation removes legal barriers to transportation partnerships among public schools. For more information, contact EASTCONN CFO John Baskowski at 860-455-0707, or [jbaskowski@eastconn.org](mailto:jbaskowski@eastconn.org).

■ **Regional School Calendar:** EASTCONN is working with superintendents to create a potential regional school calendar in northeastern Connecticut. Some possible benefits: student bus routes could be coordinated and streamlined, making them less expensive; districts would save money by coordinating common professional development days.

■ **Expanded Cooperative Purchasing:** EASTCONN is expanding its cooperative purchasing options. The first-ever “Sandwiches & Savings,” a free, cost-savings cooperative purchasing alternatives exhibit, where 10 new vendors will offer discounted items, is scheduled for March 22, from 12 noon to 3 p.m., at EASTCONN, 376 Hartford Turnpike, Hampton. [See Details in Story on Page 2] To learn more, or to attend “Sandwiches & Savings,” contact Rich Tariff at 860-455-1562, or at [rtariff@eastconn.org](mailto:rtariff@eastconn.org).



## EASTCONN’s Regional Groups and Councils: Places to Connect

For years, EASTCONN has hosted free regional councils and groups, which offer administrators, teachers and staff the opportunity to connect with peers, share regional strategies and information, keep abreast of the latest professional developments, and share opportunities for advocacy. These free, collegial groups are growing in size and meet regularly, including:

■ **Early Childhood SRBI Consortium** — Contact Elizabeth Aschenbrenner at 860-455-1518, or e-mail her at [ldziurgot@eastconn.org](mailto:ldziurgot@eastconn.org)

■ **Facilities Council** — Contact Mike Akana, 860-455-1543, or [makana@eastconn.org](mailto:makana@eastconn.org)

■ **Grant Development Council** — Contact Maureen Crowley, 860-455-0707, or [mcrowley@eastconn.org](mailto:mcrowley@eastconn.org)

■ **Language Arts Council** — Contact Hayley Zinn-Rowthorn at 860-455-1574, or [www.registereastconn.org](http://www.registereastconn.org)

■ **Math Council** — Contact Kelly Doubleday Bush at 860-455-1514; register [www.registereastconn.org](http://www.registereastconn.org)

■ **Reading Assessment Consortium** — Contact Donna Drasch at 860-455-1516, or at [ddrasch@eastconn.org](mailto:ddrasch@eastconn.org)

■ **Regional Staff Development Council** — Contact Jim Hugins at 860-455-1525; register with [cklemyk@eastconn.org](mailto:cklemyk@eastconn.org)

■ **Related Services Council** — Contact Ron Morin at [rmorin@eastconn.org](mailto:rmorin@eastconn.org)

■ **Science Council** — Contact Nancy Magnani at 860-455-1536; register at [www.registereastconn.org](http://www.registereastconn.org)

■ **SRBI Council** — Contact Kelly Doubleday Bush, 860-455-1514; register at [www.registereastconn.org](http://www.registereastconn.org)

■ **Technology Council** — Contact Jane Cook at 860-455-1510; register at [www.registereastconn.org](http://www.registereastconn.org)

■ **PreK-8 Principals’ Council** — Contact Debbie Siegel, 860-455-1551, at [dsiegel@eastconn.org](mailto:dsiegel@eastconn.org)

**All Educators Invited To Teaching American History’s Free Public History Program**  
**May 11, 2011, 4-6:30 p.m., EASTCONN Hampton**

UConn History Prof. Christopher Clark, guest speaker; Topic: Brooklyn’s 19th c. Stetson family & a MA utopian society. Contact: Dan Coughlin: [dcoughlin@eastconn.org](mailto:dcoughlin@eastconn.org); 860-455-1511.

## READING ASSESSMENT, continued from page 2

classroom assessment of reading. Each assessment is offered at three readability levels.

“All questions are open-ended, related to CMT reading strands and are accompanied by a scoring guide, encouraging the collaborative analysis of student work,” said Donna Drasch, a lead Consortium member and EASTCONN staff developer.

“We believe that the open-ended responses will provide more detailed clues about what the students actually know and are thinking,” Drasch said.

“This type of assessment serves as a guide for the types of readings teachers should be providing and the types of questions students should be answering in all subject-matter academic classrooms,” said Elias-Staron.

Elias-Staron, who is working with the Consortium to develop the assessments, is a highly regarded consultant in the field of English language arts education. She oversaw the creation of the CMT, grades 4, 6 and 8, and later 3-8 (Generations 3 and 4) and aided with the production of the third-generation CAPT.

Learn more about the reading assessment tools from Donna Drasch, 860-455-1516, [ddrasch@eastconn.org](mailto:ddrasch@eastconn.org), or Hayley Zinn-Rowthorn, 860-455-1574, [hrowthorn@eastconn.org](mailto:hrowthorn@eastconn.org).



## TECHNOLOGY PD

The RESC Alliance is offering a variety of technology-focused professional development through spring. Learn more at [www.rescalliance.org/techpd/](http://www.rescalliance.org/techpd/).

## New Transition Resource Program To Assist LEAs, Special Education Students With School-to-Work



*The region welcomes Patricia Atkinson, northeastern Connecticut's new Transition Resource Counselor*

EASTCONN is pleased to announce its participation in the new Transition Resource Counselor program in northeastern Connecticut for special education students who need Bureau of Rehabilitative Services (BRS) assistance with school-to-work planning.

“For some students with disabilities, their physical, cognitive, or mental health challenges affect their employment prospects,” said

Ron Morin, EASTCONN’s Director of Special Services. “Continued supports are needed in the region to assist these young adults so they can achieve successful transition from high school to competitive employment and vocational opportunities.”

The EASTCONN region’s new Transition Resource Counselor is Patricia Atkinson, M.A., CAGS, CAS, who brings a strong background in special education, school psychology and special education administration to her new position.

“Patricia’s breadth of experience provides the expertise needed for facilitating the student, school, family and community connections needed for this unique new program,” said Morin.

Atkinson, who will be based at EASTCONN’s Commerce Drive site in Columbia, will assist schools and parents as they seek post-secondary jobs for students with learning disabilities or other special educational challenges.

“I’m delighted to be part of this new initiative,” said Atkinson, “and I’m looking forward to forging new relationships with schools, parents, families, the BRS and other adult service agencies across the region.”

Morin said that the intent of the Transition Resource Counselor initiative is also to develop effective working partnerships between the BRS and local school districts (LEAs). The program will coordinate efficient transition-to-employment student services and increase the capacity of the state’s Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) and the State Education Resource Center (SERC) to work collaboratively with BRS and other state and local adult service agencies.

The Transition Resource Counselor initiative is funded by BRS in collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education, SERC, the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC) and Connecticut’s RESCs. EASTCONN is one of Connecticut’s six RESCs.

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