

CONNECTIONS

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Using an iPad, this occupational therapy session increases a student's ability to isolate finger and visual perceptual skills.

Highly Personalized Autism Program Can Help Students Return to Hometown Peers

EASTCONN's Autism Program provides its students with a wealth of expertise and care, while its small, deeply personalized and supportive learning environment is aimed at enabling some students to return to their hometown classrooms.

"The EASTCONN Autism Program is committed to both the provision of excellent outplacement services to the students who need them, and building internal capacity within each school district when we transition students back to their home school," said Heather Cymbala, EASTCONN's Director of Special Services. Cymbala oversees the Columbia-based Autism Program.

Open since 2009 and designed on a smaller scale for students in grades K-8, the Autism Program uses an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) approach and teaches students in a 1-to-1 configuration, with team support from special education teachers, BCBA's, psychologists, related services providers and assistive technology specialists.

"We provide a supportive learning environment that is data-based, intervention-rich, nurturing and education-driven," said Jessica Miglio, the Autism Program's lead teacher. "Our program is a place both for kids whose learning and/or developmental needs are long-term, as well as for kids who will be able to transition back to their hometown schools."

See **AUTISM**, page 2

QMC Magnet Students Enjoy Unique Advantages

Students at EASTCONN's Quinebaug Middle College (QMC) enjoy lots of unique, small-school advantages, including a democratic learning community and free college classes — all of which are helping prepare them for the future.

Housed on the campus of Quinebaug Valley Community College (QVCC) in Danielson, QMC offers its northeastern Connecticut students big benefits, including small classes; a high teacher-student ratio; a rigorous, humanities-rich and STEM-integrated curriculum; access to free college-credit courses; an embedded focus on public service projects; and a Town Meeting governance model that gives all students, grades 9-12, a voice in how their school is run.



Complex math functions often require one-on-one instruction, which QMC's smaller classes enable teachers to provide.

On top of that, students' school days are spent learning in an airy, \$24-million, state-of-the-art facility that just opened its doors last year.

"My daughter wakes us up to go to school each morning," said Bob Young, incredulously, when he visited QMC recently. Young's daughter is a freshman at QMC. "She wants to be here. She loves it here. This school was tailor-made for her and for us. I have a bright kid who will be able to manage college earlier, and here, she can earn college credits for free." Young, who is a lawyer, said that the small, supportive high school community, combined with the free college experience

See **QMC MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL**, back page

AUTISM, from page 1

“Our daughter started attending the EASTCONN Autism Program several years ago ... and we have seen steady, increasingly positive changes in her communication skills,” said Carrie and Stephen Gallant, of Pomfret. “We have happily seen our daughter grow and become much more involved with our family since she started the program. [EASTCONN Autism staff] have been excellent to work with and truly care about the development of the students ... they have a solid plan to bring out the best in each individual student.”

Prior to their being enrolled, student assessments include a comprehensive evaluation of each child’s academic, behavioral, adaptive and functional skills across all areas, said Dr. Ravit Stein, head of EASTCONN’s Psychological and Behavioral Consultative Services. “Data from this needs assessment will drive building a child’s individual program to match his or her diverse needs.”

Andover Elementary School Assistant Principal and Special Education Director Dawn Davis recently spoke about the successful transition of one of her students out of the EASTCONN Autism Program and back into a regular Andover classroom.

“The transition to bring this youngster back to our school was phenomenal,” said Davis.

“EASTCONN staff came to our school to help us transition this child back. Initially, there was an ‘I teach, you watch’ situation, which over time became ‘Now you teach and I watch,’ which is exactly what we were aiming for,” she said. “My staff has really grown during this process. We’ve improved our collaboration skills, no question.”

Davis continued, “When our student had to be outplaced, it had to be done. But to have him be in his home school and to be as successful as he is, it’s just so important ... I know that the mother of this child is ecstatic. She beams when she talks about his movement toward independence and that he’s happy. That’s the big thing. It’s been a really good experience all around.” The student’s Andover team continues to be supported through consultation with an EASTCONN BCBA.

“By using the model-lead-test framework for gradual fading of supports for this student, we ensured Andover’s fluency and consistency in the implementation of evidence-based practices,” said Stein.

“Andover went above and beyond to provide an inclusionary program for their student with special needs,” said Stein.

“They really serve as a model for supporting students with a variety of strengths and challenges within the public school setting.”

To learn more about EASTCONN’s Autism Program, contact Special Services Director Heather Cymbala at 860-634-7429, or reach her at hcymbala@eastconn.org.

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A screen shot from “Real Heroes Don’t Wear Capes,” the ACT video that earned 5th Place in the DMV Teen Safe Driving Video Contest.

ACT DMV Video Wins 5th Place

A video by three students at EASTCONN’s Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT) arts magnet high school has won 5th Place in Connecticut’s annual DMV Teen Safe Driving Video Contest. ACT seniors Rachel Martin, Graham Frassinelli and Philip Chovick won \$1,000 for ACT with their 5th Place prize. Four ACT videos were among 15 finalists in this year’s contest, which drew 114 entries from 350 high school students statewide. ACT is the only high school in the state to make the Top 10 each year since the contest began in 2007. Search YouTube for [teendriving12](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCteendriving12) to see all entries.



Colchester & Coventry Schools Win Connecticut Arts in Education Grants

Congratulations! Colchester and Coventry are among eight Connecticut districts whose special arts enrichment projects will be funded by the state’s Arts in Education Grant, a new program designed to strengthen arts instruction through partnerships among schools, artists and arts organizations.

Children in third, fourth and fifth grades in Colchester’s Jack Jackter Intermediate School will benefit from a \$20,500 award that will make their “Jazz and Poetry” program possible through a collaboration with the Bushnell in Hartford.

Coventry Public Schools’ “Who is Coventry?” program will use their \$2,759 award to connect 30 students and families with Hartford’s Wadsworth Atheneum.

A total of 82 schools and districts applied for Arts in Education funding.



Dr. Catherine Wade’s Memory Honored by District 11

This winter, Regional School District 11 honored the memory of former music teacher and supporter of the arts, Dr. Catherine Wade, by dedicating its Parish Hill Middle/High School music wing in her memory. Dr. Wade, who was a resident of Hampton, died last fall.

A well-known music educator, Dr. Wade was for many years an active member of the EASTCONN Board of Directors as its Hampton representative, and was also secretary/treasurer of the EASTCONN Executive Board.

Professional Notes



Stein



Jaffery



Starling



Cymbala

EASTCONN's Psychological and Behavioral Consultation Services (PBCS) Coordinator **Ravit R. Stein**, Ph.D., MCSP, BCBA, joined PBCS colleagues **Rose Jaffery**, Ph.D., NCSP, BCBA-D, and **Natalie R. Starling**, NCSP, M.Ed., to present "Reframing the Top of the Triangle: PBIS in Clinical Day Treatment" at the 12th International Association for Positive Behavioral Support Conference in Boston; the presentation was co-authored by EASTCONN Special Services Director **Heather Cymbala**, LCSW, M.Ed. In February, Stein, Jaffery and Nick Gelbar, a former doctoral intern who is now at UConn, presented a poster on the same topic at the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Conference in Orlando. Stein, Jaffery, Gelbar and Cymbala also authored "A Case Study on the Implementation of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in an Alternative Educational Setting," which appeared in December's issue of the *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*; that study was based on work done in EASTCONN's Clinical Day Treatment programs.

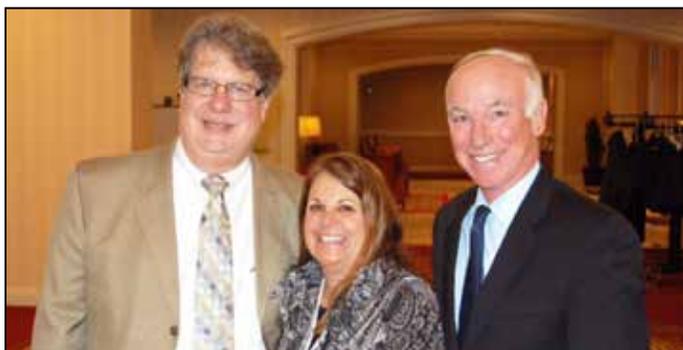


Nierendorf



Hempel

The Connecticut Association for Adult and Continuing Education (CAACE) invited EASTCONN's Director of Teaching and Learning **Scott Nierendorf** and EASTCONN Community Learning Center Coordinator **Kristin Hempel** to present "Teacher Evaluation for Adult Educators" at a February workshop in Bristol.



U.S. Congressman **Joe Courtney** spoke about the importance of the federal *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014* as it relates to Adult Education during the CAACE Conference in Mystic. Above, l. to r., are EASTCONN's **Rich Tariff**, President of CAACE; CAACE Conference Facilitator **Risa Filkoff**; and Rep. Courtney.

ACT Students Win a Variety of Creative Writing Accolades

Works by EASTCONN's ACT Creative Writing students have recently won recognition from several prestigious contests and forums, including the 2015 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, the New England Young Writers Conference ("Bread Loaf") and the Connecticut Writing Project's student magazine.

ACT (Arts at the Capitol Theater) is EASTCONN's arts magnet high school in Willimantic.

Altogether, 15 ACT creative writing students' works were among regional finalists in the 2015 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. One of those students, senior Karlyle Palmer, of Willington, earned a national-level Gold Key, Scholastic's highest honor, for his poem, "There was a Paradise in her Footsteps." ACT junior Heaven Stone, of Danielson, won a national Silver Key from Scholastic for her flash fiction work, "Marbles."



Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT) senior Karlyle Palmer, above, was thrilled after learning his poem had won a Scholastic Gold Key.

"I'm so incredibly proud of our students for both entering and then being recognized in the Scholastic Awards competition," said ACT Creative Writing teacher Barbara Greenbaum. "Our ACT students have worked so hard on these amazing pieces."

"I can only hope that I will ever again experience the wave of sheer euphoria I felt when I found out I was a national winner in the Scholastic Art & Writing contest," said Palmer, when asked about his Gold Key honor.

Only 2,200 of 300,000 student works submitted to the 2015 Scholastic contest garnered a national Gold or Silver Key.

ACT students Nadia Jalal, Victoria Sun and Evan Saunders have been selected to attend the highly regarded New England Young Writers Conference this May at the "Bread Loaf" campus of Middlebury College in Vermont. Each year, the highly competitive national conference invites 200 talented young writers who can hone their writing skills, network with fellow writers and attend workshops with published authors.

Creative writing works by ACT students Victoria Sun, Heaven Stone, Evan Saunders and Danielle Wilson will appear in *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine, part of UConn's Connecticut Writing Project, which honors exceptional writing talent in K-12 students from across Connecticut.

EASTCONN's ACT arts magnet high school enrolls 143 public-school students in grades 9-12 from 26 northeastern Connecticut towns.

To learn more about ACT's Creative Writing program, contact ACT Principal Tracy Goodell-Pelletier at tpelletier@eastconn.org.

and caring teachers held an irresistible appeal for his daughter.

Designed for non-traditional students who are seeking a different kind of high school experience, QMC will enroll at its maximum capacity of 180 students next year. QMC class sizes average 15 students, enabling teachers to spend quality time working with students, said QMC Principal Gino LoRicco.

"We encourage QMC students to start planning their paths to the future as soon as they walk through our doors," said LoRicco, "and that means taking ownership of their personal education plans as they prepare themselves for college and/or post-secondary careers. We are here to help them figure it out every step of the way."

Each QMC student can choose from among several college pathways that are aligned with QVCC's majors in Allied Health, Advanced Manufacturing, and STEM subjects. (STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.) But QMC's broad-based curriculum also offers a strong liberal arts pathway for students who are interested in the humanities.

New this year for QMC freshmen is a QVCC-aligned "First Year Experience" class, which builds students' study and time management skills, increases their college-level writing expertise and allows them to explore potential college and career pathways, said Toni Ryan, Ed.D., EASTCONN's Director of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment & Accreditation.

"That class also earns them their first free QVCC college credit," Ryan said, "and helps prepare them for the academic

continued next column

rigors of both high school and college. Since QMC graduated its first class in 2011, we've had kids who've worked very hard to earn both their high school diploma and transferrable college credits to use toward an associate's degree. That gives them a big financial and academic head start."

This year, 24 QMC students are directly enrolled in a total of 32 QVCC courses, while 34 are taking QVCC-aligned courses, and 66 are enrolled in the QVCC-aligned "First Year Experience," all for QVCC credit.



A STEM-integrated curriculum enhances science classes for students who conduct hands-on experiments in state-of-the-art labs.

Ryan Bassett, a QMC sophomore, chatted about QMC with fellow student Sera Matthews, a junior, who agreed that QMC's small size, cohesive student body, free college access, weekly Town Meetings and supportive staff make it the right school for them.

"I couldn't be happier than I am here," said Bassett, while Matthews added, "This school has changed my life. It's a school where we can express ourselves, and our voices are heard. Our teachers really help us succeed."

During weekly Town Meetings, all students and faculty discuss and resolve important school issues. The group votes on binding resolutions around rules, discipline, attire, etc. "Students establish the agenda, run the meeting, bring forward their concerns and invite guests to make presentations," said Ryan. "It's inspiring and unusual."

Both current students and alumni benefit from their QMC education, said 2011 graduate Shayna Doyle, who said she was unhappy and unmotivated at her hometown high school before choosing QMC. Her QMC experience set her on a positive, life-changing path that inspired her to pursue a college education in speech pathology, she said.

A \$1.4-million federal grant has enabled QMC to broaden its high school curriculum by integrating STEM subjects across many of its content areas. The grant has funded a new, 40-foot-long mobile STEM lab that will be outfitted with sophisticated lab equipment, including an electron microscope and 3-D printers. It will travel to area K-12 schools for off-site lab experiments starting this fall.

QMC's focus on service learning projects is also an integral part of the QMC experience. Students devote a full block each week to service learning programs that benefit many area organizations and individuals.

Learn more about QMC from Principal Gino LoRicco at 860-932-4040, or at gloricco@eastconn.org.