

CONNECTIONS

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CT Schools Gear Up to Meet Federal NCLB Expectations Data-based Technology May Help



EASTCONN'S Helen Weingart joins national consultant Nancy Love to train educators in "Using Data, Getting Results," one strategy schools can use

School districts across Connecticut are exploring strategies to help them meet and demonstrate new federal expectations for students as part of recently enacted federal legislation.

"The Federal Government is asking public education to raise the bar for all students," said Paula Colen, EASTCONN's Deputy Executive Director.

This legislation, known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), is built on four principles: (1) increasing achievement and performance of all students; (2) increased accountability; (3) increased flexibility and choice; (4) and application of scientifically based educational research.

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Groundbreaking Planned for Arts Magnet High School



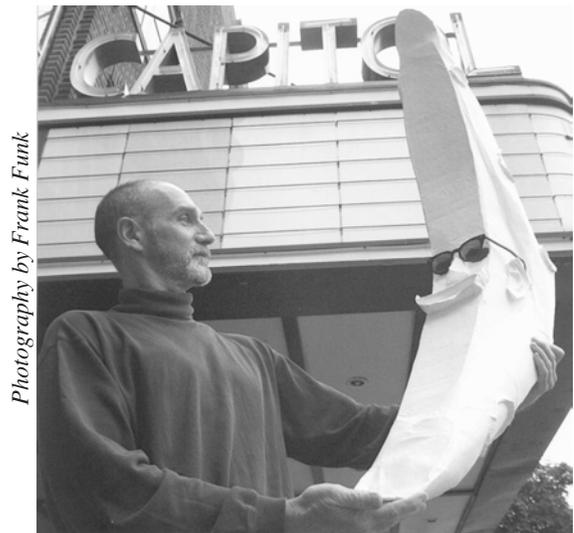
EASTCONN is on schedule for the fall 2003 opening of its new arts magnet program, EASTCONN officials announced. A groundbreaking ceremony for the program's permanent home, Willimantic's downtown Capitol Theater, will take place in mid-

November, said EASTCONN Executive Director David Calchera.

Named ACT (Arts at the Capitol Theater), EASTCONN's magnet program is almost a year away from opening and yet "already the excitement is building," said Calchera.

"We are getting a lot of inquiries from students and parents, as well as artists who would like to work with us," Calchera said. Student application packets have been sent to area schools.

The magnet program will offer a half-day curriculum to 60-80 students, grades 9-12, from high schools in EASTCONN's 36-town eastern Connecticut region. The



Photography by Frank Funk

Arts Principal Mayer poses in front of the Capitol Theater with his man-in-the-moon mask

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Calendar of Regional Activities



NOVEMBER 2002

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- 19 Ever Want to Use LEGOs in Your Classroom?
- 19 Microsoft Word: Tips & Templates
- 20 Understanding & Promoting Functional & Culturally Appropriate Communication Skills for Individuals with Pervasive Developmental Disorders
- 20 Action Research
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- 21 Math Council
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- 26 Teaching to the CMT Objectives of Initial Understanding

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- 2 Microsoft Word: Tips & Templates
- 2 Creating Student Online Activities
- 3 Introduction to Microsoft Excel
- 4 Introduction to FileMaker
- 4 Coaching for the BEST Special Ed Portfolio
- 4 Coaching for the BEST Elem. Portfolio
- 5 Coaching for the BEST Portfolio Process, Science
- 5 Coaching for BEST Portfolio Process, Mathematics
- 5 Connecticut Career Choices: Info Session
- 11 Developing Your School Leader Evaluation and Professional Development Plan
- 12 Motivating Reluctant Writers
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- 7, 22, 3/6, 5/9. . . Designing Web-Based Learning
- 8 Developing Your School Leader Evaluation and Professional Development Plan
- 10 URSA Meeting
- 10 Office Tools for the Curriculum
- 14 Tech Council
- 15 Regional Staff Development Council Meeting
- 15 The CMT Challenge! (Day 2) Using Student Work to Foster Growth and Achievement in Math Applications
- 16 Multisensory Comprehension Strategies
- 27 Writing Inside Out: A Developmental Look at the Adolescent Writer
- 27 Empowering Writers: Basic Narrative Writing
- 28 Empowering Writers: Basic Expository Writing

Note: Workshops fill up quickly. Please reserve seats early. EASTCONN workshops are subject to change without notice. E-mail the EASTCONN Conference Office at conferenceoffice@eastconn.org for more information about any of the meetings and workshops listed here. Workshop information is also available on our Web site at www.eastconn.org.



Community Cultural Committee

This school year, the Three C's offers a variety of high-quality performing arts experiences for students during the school day:

The Mystery of King Tut, Dec. 10, 2002, for grades 5-8
The Color of Justice, March 27, 2003, for grades 5-8
The Little Mermaid, May 9, 2003, for grades K-4

For more information, call 860-928-2946 or 860-928-7051.



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The Capitol Theater on Willimantic's Main Street as it appeared early in the 20th century

school will grow to 180 students over time. ACT will serve high school students with an interest in or a talent for the performing arts. Magnet school students will continue to attend their town high school where they will fulfill their graduation requirements.

Calchera and John Mayer, the magnet school's principal, have been making presentations to area boards of education.

"The response has been so enthusiastic," said Mayer. "There is always someone in the audience who will come up and shake my hand and say, 'This is such a wonderful idea for eastern Connecticut.'" Presentations to student groups have also begun.



Artist's rendering of proposed performance space at the Arts Magnet High School in the old Capitol Theater

Renovations at the Capitol Theater are already under way and the estimated completion date is January 2004. The Capitol Theater is located in downtown Willimantic. Built in 1925, the theater has been closed for almost 30 years. The Connecticut State Department of Education has approved a grant to EASTCONN which will provide 100% reimbursement to renovate and equip the magnet high school.

"We will have four separate performance spaces, from small and intimate to our main stage with seating for 200," Mayer said.

"In addition, the facility will have a full scene shop, a costume shop, lighting and sound lab with synthesizing capacity enabling us to make our own sound tracks."



Capitol Theater's proposed main stage with seating for 200

Construction drawings for the arts magnet high school and updates are on the EASTCONN Web site, including a virtual 3-D tour of the renovated facility at www.eastconn.org.

There will be six areas of focus: performance, theater production, dance, creative writing, video production, and theater history.

"The curriculum will be project-based and determined by student interest," said Mayer. We will offer an interdisciplinary approach as theater production is a collaborative process," he said.

Although the Capitol Theater renovation will not be completed when the program opens in September 2003, Mayer sees this as a real benefit for the incoming students. A decision will be made at a later date about where students will be housed until the Capitol Theater site opens.

"I like the idea that we are going to begin offsite and move onsite together. This gives our students an opportunity to be an integral part of the opening, both for planning and showcasing. The students are the school and this group will be the first students. They will be a part of the legacy."

Application packets have been distributed to all schools in the area for students in grades 8-11. Completed applications will be due at EASTCONN on February 28, 2003 and decisions will be made by April, 2003.

"It's critical that we have time to work together with guidance personnel to ensure a smooth transition," said Mayer. Specific programs and staffing will be determined once students have been selected.

For more information about ACT contact John Mayer at 860-455-0707 or jmayer@eastconn.org.

Clues Lead the Curious on Letterbox Adventure

by Donna Drasch



Last year, sixth-graders from Windham and Voluntown developed a new history-based Letterboxing Adventure for visitors to Fort Griswold State Park in Groton. The park holds a monument, a restored colonial house and a Revolutionary War Museum, which are open during the summer.

The students' Letterboxing Adventure includes historical information as well as compass directions, which must be used to locate the hiding place of the letterbox.

Started in Scotland more than 100 years ago and increasingly popular in the U.S., letterboxing combines orienteering and treasure hunting skills. Individuals or groups progress through a Letterboxing Adventure by gathering clues, which lead them (with the help of compass points) from one site to the next. At the end is a waterproof letterbox containing a stamp and a log book. Participants can stamp the log and/or write a personal message, then use the letterbox stamp to mark their personal journals.

Working with Donna Drasch, EASTCONN's Service-Learning Coordinator, the sixth-graders produced a video explaining letterboxing and how to use a compass. The video also gives a brief history of the battle of Fort Trumbull and Fort Griswold, talks about the Revolutionary War traitor, Benedict Arnold, (under whose command British forces captured Fort Griswold and destroyed the Colonial forces defending it), and tells a little bit about the two schools involved in the project.

The students said they enjoyed becoming familiar with U.S. History through a hands-on learning project. They agreed that other students would like to learn about local history by going to the Fort and completing the Letterboxing Adventure.

Backpacks were prepared for Letterboxing Adventurers so that students could visit the site even when the museum is closed and still learn about what happened there. Students also wanted to encourage families to use the backpacks, or simply the compass and the adventure clues and have fun while they were at the fort.

There are pre-assembled backpacks containing copies of the Letterboxing Adventure directions/clues, a compass, the video, a laminated background information packet (about the Revolutionary War, the reason for the attack on the two forts, the Battle of Fort Griswold, and the aftermath), and a young adult historical fiction book, *Traitor: The Case of Benedict Arnold*, by Jean Fritz.

To find out about borrowing backpacks, contact DEP Museum Assistant Laura Macaluso, 860-444-7591. For letterboxing info, call Kim Kelley or Amy Walker at Windham Middle School, 860-465-2350. For Service-Learning, call EASTCONN's Donna Drasch, 860-455-0707.

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"Although Connecticut was among the first states to raise standards and expectations for student learning, there is still much we can do," EASTCONN's Colen said.

Schools must be able to monitor student progress and evaluate the impact programs have on student learning, she said, adding that the big challenge lies in building the capacity to do so effectively.

"This is especially difficult in a region like ours with so many small districts. The smaller the school, the harder it is since they have the same requirements with fewer available resources."

Districts in EASTCONN's 36-school region are approaching the challenge of school improvement in different ways and EASTCONN has been working to build a range of responses.

"Some districts are beginning with a comprehensive audit of district data to determine next steps, some are developing customized databases, while others are preparing for data-warehousing," said Colen. "We know that one size doesn't fit all."



Putnam Takes a Hard Look at Data-Warehousing Solutions

As eastern Connecticut schools prepare to meet broad NCLB expectations, regional data-warehousing may help Superintendent Mike Graner and his staff evaluate programs and their impact on student learning.

"We started looking at the whole question of data-warehousing last spring," Graner said. He participated in a June EASTCONN workshop exploring the potential of data-warehousing technology.

Graner proposed forming a regional data-warehousing collaborative for which EASTCONN would provide data-management support.

Putnam, Plainfield and Sprague have joined EASTCONN to develop a proposal under The Enhancing Education Through Technology Grants, which if awarded, would provide funding for just such a regional data-warehousing pilot.

"A data-warehouse will allow us to input any sort of data that we have," Graner



Putnam's Michael Graner proposes data-warehousing to help meet new NCLB standards

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said, “whether it is attendance information, student management information, developmental reading assessments, preschool tests — whatever it is, we can feed all that into the system and then start to ask questions that we hope will lead us to make better data-based decisions.

“We wanted a way of staying on top of the data as opposed to waiting for annual or semiannual results and not being able to act on it as quickly,” Graner said.

“Mike Graner’s inquiry was very timely,” said EASTCONN’S Colen, since EASTCONN had already begun investigating regional data-warehousing, designed to offer smaller, eastern Connecticut schools the same services that only large districts can presently afford.

In the meantime, Putnam has also been working with EASTCONN Technology Specialist Jim Huggins to prepare for transition to data-warehousing by converting essential data to digital formats. “NCLB is going to require districts to ask hard questions and the answers to those questions are going to be found in the data,” said Huggins. “In Putnam, they’ve identified the data that they need.”

“We want to have some way of looking at all the children,” said Graner, “to look at what sorts of instructional programs are working . . . and then to identify those that are not working so well . . . and provide them with some intervention. This is really going to give us an opportunity to provide ongoing data analysis and really share that with teachers.”



Plainfield is taking advantage of a seed grant from the Connecticut Center for School Change (CCSC) helping to implement a data-based school improvement initiative in two schools. The goal of the CCSC project in Plainfield is “to begin the implementation of a systemic process for continuous school improvement, planning and evaluation that emphasizes collaborative data collection and analysis.”

Plainfield Superintendent Mary Conway and some of her staff participated last spring in an EASTCONN workshop with Victoria Bernhardt, a national consultant and the creator of the School Portfolio model for comprehensive school-wide improvement. Conway liked the comprehensiveness of the portfolio and baseline data it will provide.

“This will be a living document,” said Conway, “against which to ask, ‘Who are we now?’ and then reflect, ‘Is this who we want to be as a school?’ ‘Where do we need to improve?’ ‘What do we need to look at?’”

EASTCONN’S Helen Weingart, a trained School Portfolio facilitator, brought Bernhardt to Connecticut and is providing follow-up assistance to the Plainfield staff.

According to Weingart, “It’s exciting because Plainfield wants to engage teachers and administrators in data-driven decision-making across the system. The School Portfolio

not only deals with data analysis, it is a way to monitor and evaluate progress over time. It provides a history of school improvement efforts and successes.”

Plainfield is preparing for a strategic planning process later this year.

“We’ve involved people through a Community Conversation, talking about academic standards and what we expect of our kids,” said Conway.



Plainfield’s Mary Conway looks to school portfolios

One School Portfolio initiative benefit Conway hopes to realize is the comprehensive data that will inform the long-term strategic planning process.

“When you look at school goals, like our literacy goals, and you have a significant way to measure progress,” said Rena Cadro, Plainfield District Coordinator, “It’s very exciting. When you see progress, it’s so clear and obvious. You may have a gut feeling but until you can collect the data and look, you’re not sure.”



EASTCONN Forges Discount Deal with National Computer Retailer

John Kalinowski, Director of Technology Development, has announced a new cooperative agreement with MicroWarehouse, a multi-billion dollar specialty catalog and online retailer which markets brand name personal computers, computer software, accessories, and networking products.

“This agreement will enable our districts to purchase hardware and software at discounts ranging from 5% to 30%,” explained Kalinowski.

To access the discount, go to the EASTCONN Web site, www.eastconn.org, click on Technology in the lower right corner of the page. There you will find a link to the MicroWarehouse Web site, along with instructions on how to enter the password-protected site.

Also, in the Technology Development site is information about EASTCONN’S partnership agreement with Gateway Computer which has resulted in substantial savings to our districts.

For more information contact John Kalinowski at 860-455-0707 or jkalinowski@eastconn.org.

Summer Fun 2002 in Eastern CT

Depicted at right are students and teachers participating in various EASTCONN summer programs, including Camp Exploration in Windham Center; Camp Paesano Goes to China in Columbia; the Summer Youth Program, part of which took place at the Windham High School and the CT Audubon Society's Pomfret site; and Special Needs Summer School, held at EASTCONN Columbia. For more information about how students can participate in these and other EASTCONN summer programs next year, please contact Paul Rennick, at 860-455-0707, or prennick@eastconn.org.



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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.

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