

CONNECTIONS

Education News From Northeastern Connecticut

volume 35, number 2

www.eastconn.org

Winter 2015



Yong Zhao, Ph.D., whose research focuses on the effects of globalization and technology on education, will present two workshops at EASTCONN's Conference Center this spring.

April 2nd Workshop Will Feature Author/Innovator Dr. Yong Zhao

Educators are invited to attend an April 2nd workshop with Dr. Yong Zhao, a leading international scholar, author and innovator, whose work focuses on the implications of globalization and technology, and their impact on education in the 21st century.

"Dr. Zhao understands today's students, and wants to empower their creativity, their individuality and their determination to 'own' their future," said Amy Drowne, Director of EASTCONN's Center for Educational Leadership. "I hope that educators from across the region will take time to read Dr. Zhao's books, or watch his presentations on YouTube, so they have a clearer understanding of the enormous impact his ideas can have on our classrooms and the workforce in general."

Currently the Presidential Chair and Director of the Institute for Global and Online Education in the College of Education at the University of Oregon, Zhao is also Associate Dean for Global Education and a Professor in the university's Department of Educational Measurement, Policy and Leadership.

See **Yong Zhao**, page 2

Arts-Infused Magnet High School Earns High Marks From Students



ACT teacher Barbara Greenbaum, far left, confers with members of her "Inspired Creative Writing" class, while they "workshop" the pros and cons of a flash-fiction piece by a fellow ACT student.

Now in its 11th year, EASTCONN's Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT) arts magnet high school continues to provide its students with a unique, arts-infused alternative to a traditional high school education.

"ACT is unique," said ACT Principal Tracy Goodell-Pelletier. "It's a way of life. Our school is housed in a real theater. That just doesn't exist anywhere else. It's a wonderful learning environment that was created by artists and educators for young artists. The kids here really appreciate the opportunity to attend a school that is unlike any other."

Set in the refurbished Art Deco-era Capitol Theater in downtown Willimantic, ACT was originally a part-time, after-school, regional magnet arts program for about 35 high school students. In 2007-2008, ACT became a full-day magnet high school, offering an arts-infused, rigorous core curriculum. Today, ACT enrolls 140 students, grades 9-12, from 26 towns across northeastern Connecticut and beyond.

"ACT has also been able to integrate arts and academics, and personalize every student's education, using their interest in the arts as a springboard for learning," Goodell-Pelletier said.

"For example, Dance Anatomy is a class co-taught by a certified science teacher and a professional dance artist,"

See **ACT Magnet High School**, back page

During both sessions at EASTCONN, Zhao will share teaching strategies that encourage student autonomy and leadership; that champion and cultivate independent, innovative thinkers; and that promote an entrepreneurial spirit in young people.

Open to all educators, Zhao's workshops are highly interactive, as he welcomes discussion and offers break-out sessions.

Zhao's research centers on the premise that schools and parents need to cultivate independent young thinkers who are willing to use their learning differently to create jobs and contribute positively to a globalized society. Students must be encouraged and able to think like entrepreneurs, Zhao says, and be resourceful, flexible, creative and global.

"I think our children are much more capable and much more motivated to learn than many adults have assumed," said Zhao during a recent phone interview.

Zhao said there are a number of ways that schools and district leadership teams can support students' entrepreneurial spirit.

"I think schools can rethink themselves as innovation incubators," Zhao said. "They can treat each student as a passionate, creative responsible entrepreneur – and they can provide them with opportunities to experiment with their interests, their strengths and weaknesses, and engage them in authentic work ... Students need to connect with the global community."

Zhao believes that with the liberty to make meaningful decisions and explore non-traditional learning opportunities, today's students will develop into tomorrow's global entrepreneurs.

Among the books written by Zhao is his latest, *World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students*, which is the basis for his workshops at EASTCONN. The first 50 registrants will receive a free copy of his book. He has published more than 100 articles and 20 books, including *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Dragon: Why China has the Best (and Worst) Education System in the World*; and *Catching Up or Leading the Way: American Education in the Age of Globalization*.

Zhao has earned numerous professional accolades, including the 2013 AEP Distinguished Achievement Award and the 2013 Society of Professors of Education Book Award. Learn more about Zhao at www.zhaolearning.com.

Zhao will offer the same workshop at two different times at EASTCONN's Conference Center in Hampton, Conn.: the first, from 8:30-11:30 a.m., with breakfast, 8-8:30 a.m.; and the second, from 1-4 p.m., with refreshments. To register for a session, go to www.eastconn.org/yongzhao. To learn more, contact Amy Drowne, at adrowne@eastconn.org,

Professional Notes



Maureen Crowley, Ph.D.

EASTCONN Director of Planning and Development **Maureen Crowley** has earned a Ph.D. in Adult Learning and Workplace Education from the University of Connecticut's Neag School, Department of Educational Leadership. Crowley's research focused on the intentional, self-directed learning that Adult Basic Education and Literacy educators undertake to develop proficiency in the workplace.



Richard Tarriff

Richard Tariff, EASTCONN's Director of Adult Programs, presented "Managing Growth and Change in Adult Education" during a statewide Connecticut Association for Adult and Continuing Education (CAACE) workshop in November. Earlier in the fall, Tariff moderated a CAACE statewide forum for Adult Education providers on Connecticut Legislation PA 1240, a new remediation program supporting

adults' transition to college that pairs RESC Adult Programs with community colleges.



Elizabeth Aschenbrenner

Elizabeth Aschenbrenner, EASTCONN's Director of Early Childhood, has been invited to serve on the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) advisory panel that will inform the development of the OEC's Pre-K to 3rd Grade Leadership Program. Under development by UConn, the new program is being designed to increase educators' knowledge about the preK-to-grade-3 period in child development.



Toni Ryan, Ed.D.



Tracy Goodell-Pelletier



Sarah Mallory

A team from EASTCONN's Educational Services division was accepted for participation in the highly competitive Harvard Graduate School of Education's Instructional Rounds program. **Toni Ryan**, Ed.D., EASTCONN Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Accreditation, joined **Tracy Goodell-Pelletier**, Principal of EASTCONN's Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT) school, and **Sarah Mallory**, ACT Dean of Students, to attend the intensive Harvard program in December. The Instructional Rounds methodology, which is modeled on medical rounds practices, engages educators in working together to solve problems of practice and to support systemic improvements in teaching and learning.

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

EASTCONN Provides Customized, Free PD in CT Core Standards



EASTCONN's Cathy Smith-Carolan, far right, engages Voluntown Elementary School educators in a CCS-based coaching session to "unpack" new ELA literacy skills for lesson planning. EASTCONN provides a customized coaching plan for each participating school.

EASTCONN is providing free professional learning focused on Connecticut Core Standards to 19 EASTCONN-region school districts, thanks to a State Department of Education grant.

The CSDE grant is intended to offer tailored coaching services to schools that request technical or coaching assistance as they incorporate Connecticut Core Standards (CCS) in English/Language Arts, Math and Literacy into the content areas.

"This grant allows us to engage in meaningful conversations with school and district leaders about what their teachers need in order to implement the CCS," said EASTCONN's Director of Teaching and Learning Scott Nierendorf, whose staff are delivering the coaching to EASTCONN-region districts.

"We'll be working with classroom teachers, in-district coaches and instructional specialists to build their knowledge and confidence in applying CCS standards, which will help prepare them and their students for the Smarter Balanced Assessments, coming this spring," Nierendorf said.

Nierendorf and his staff met with district leaders this fall to clarify plans for coaching, which, in most of the 19 northeastern Connecticut districts, has already begun.

Ellen E. Cohn, the CSDE's Interim Chief Academic Officer, said that state-funded, in-district coaching was a logical extension of the CSDE's overall effort to provide CCS implementation support to every district that requests it. As part of that effort, the CSDE is also offering a new resource-filled Web site (ctcorestandards.org), online and on-demand PD, as well as workshops that have served more than 2,000 educators to date, she said.

"Offering the in-district coaching/technical assistance days to districts was a logical next step," Cohn said.

"More than 70 districts have applied for and received in-district coaching/technical assistance days, ranging from four days to 30 days (depending on the size of the district)," Cohn continued. "The feedback has been very positive and the 'on

continued next column

the ground' training and coaching has been a much needed support for teachers during this transition."

"Our experience has been very productive and engaging from the start," said Mark Westkott, Principal at Bozrah's Fields Memorial School, about the EASTCONN coaching.

"[EASTCONN's] education specialists have worked with our district to tailor the professional development to the Speaking and Listening Standards in a way that was global to the Common Core Standards, while at the same time practical, with strategies to take away and implement, which every teacher loves," Westkott said. "Teams of teachers have been able to incorporate the standards into their units and lessons in a meaningful way."

Jean Wierzbinski, Principal and Technology Coordinator at Sayles School in Sprague, said EASTCONN was helping her staff concentrate on CCS-related writing and scoring.

"We are focusing on the shifts in writing, including collaborative scoring using a CCS rubric during grade-level team meetings," Wierzbinski said. "We will continue this work into the spring with [EASTCONN] providing both grade-level team support and individual coaching to teachers who request it. It has been extremely valuable to have [EASTCONN] lead our discussions and provide suggestions and feedback to our teams as we move toward CCS implementation."

To learn more about the EASTCONN CCS-related coaching, contact EASTCONN's Scott Nierendorf at snierendorf@eastconn.org, or reach him at 860-455-1569.



Congratulations!

William "Bill" Hull, Superintendent of Putnam Schools, has been honored with the UConn Neag School of Education Alumni Association's 2015 "Outstanding School Superintendent" award. "This award really recognizes a team effort by the Putnam community, our board of education, our administrators, teachers



and staff," said Hull, who has been Putnam's superintendent for six years. Hull earned a B.A., a master's and an O93 from UConn.



Save the Dates!

■ **EASTCONN Conference for School Support Staff, March 16, 2015.** This conference focuses on creating a welcoming school, leadership skills, school security and safety, FERPA laws and handling the media: www.registereastconn.org.

■ **Dr. Yong Zhao, "World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students," April 2, 2015.** [Editor's Note: See page 1 story in this issue.] www.eastconn.org/yongzhao.

ACT Magnet High School, from page 1

Goodell-Pelletier said. "Together, they teach students about the anatomy of the human body as it relates to a dancer and what a dancer must do. It's a rigorous science class, but students like to take it because it's also focused on what they love to do: dance."

ACT's impressive graduation rates speak volumes about how engaged ACT students are, said Goodell-Pelletier.

"ACT's graduation rates, year to year, range from 92% to 100%," said Goodell-Pelletier, who observed that because students choose to attend ACT, they have a vested interest in being there. "And our attendance rate is 90%-plus. On a bad day, we drop to 87%. Our kids just don't like to miss school."

Students also score especially well in reading and writing. In 2013's CAPT, ACT students scored 100% at-or-above-proficient in Writing, compared to the state's 88.9%, and in Reading, ACT students scored 93.8, compared to the state's 81%. A majority of ACT graduates go on to college.

ACT's 2012 valedictorian, Alyssa Rametta, is a junior at UConn. The Coventry resident says, simply, that ACT changed the direction of her future.

"My ACT teachers pushed me to expand outside of my comfort zone, and for that, I'm forever grateful. I would not be where I am today if I hadn't attended ACT. I owe everything to ACT because it changed the course of my destiny and taught me who I am – my strengths, my weaknesses, and how to manage them – and how to respect those around me," Rametta said.

"ACT allowed me to discover myself, to better myself," Rametta continued. "There is no judgment at ACT. Everyone

continued next column

can be themselves, and that's the beauty of it. I have extreme pride in that school. They molded me to be the best person I could be, absolutely."

Over the years, dozens of ACT students have garnered awards and recognition for their creative writing, for both prose and poetry, in prestigious contests like the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards; "Fresh Voices" (part of the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival); New England Young Writers' Conference ("Bread Loaf" program) at Middlebury College; the *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine; and the Connecticut Young Writers Trust competition.



A group of ACT's A/V students are shown claiming their First Place prize in the state DMV's Teen Safe Driving video contest in 2013.

ACT audio/video students' imaginative, high-quality video entries in the statewide Department of Motor Vehicles "Teen Safe Driving Video Contest" have earned them a spot in the Top 10 every year since the contest began in 2008; they recently took First Place from among a field of 150 video entries submitted by 550 high school students.

One of the ACT audio/video students who helped create Top 10 and winning DMV contest videos is Philip Chovnick, whose mother says she couldn't have asked for a better school for her son.

"It's changed his life," said Flo Caillard, Chovnick's mother. "At first, Philip didn't want to go to high school. But then he found ACT, and knew right away that it was the high school for him. Overall, it's been a really, really amazing experience. What ACT did is refine his passion and confirm what he wants to do, which is to make movies. ACT also made him an assertive, self-confident and well-rounded person, both academically and artistically."

"As a parent, I'm definitely a happy camper," Caillard said. "I think ACT works for a lot of kids because it's such a small, specialized environment."

"I love the school," said Chovnick, a senior. "It's a great school. They're always so welcoming. They accept you for who you are. Even on the days I don't want to go to school, I go – and there aren't many of those days. I love the film department. It's great. This year, we got new cameras because of the DMV award. They're very expensive cameras, but they let us take them out. They're very trusting. I don't know what I would have done without ACT. I don't know if I would have been this happy anywhere else. ACT has a nice balance of academics and arts. I would say if you're passionate about the arts, this is the best place to be."

Chovnick has applied to colleges with film programs, and has already been accepted to the Savannah College of Art and Design.

To learn more about ACT, contact ACT Principal Tracy Goodell-Pelletier at tpelletier@eastconn.org, or at 860-465-5636.

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

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