

CONNECTIONS

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Parents who are among the 40 Windham adults enrolled in a 2Gen Program this fall gathered at Eastern Connecticut State University's Shaeffer Hall, where a field trip took them to explore some of the many Windham community resources that are available.

2Gen Supports Windham-Area ELL Parents and Children

Parents who attend the 2Gen program in Windham are benefiting from a variety of programs that support families and develop adults' basic education, parenting skills, work readiness, English proficiency and a greater understanding of how to become active in their hometown communities.

2Gen, also known as the Two Generations program, is aimed at supporting Windham's English Language Learner (ELL) families by bolstering parents' learning, while also serving the early-childhood learning needs of their children. This year, the Windham-region 2Gen program will enroll 80 ELL parents and 80 children, from age 3 to grade 3. To qualify, parents must reside in Windham and take EASTCONN Adult Programs English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes.

"Parents, children and society win with the 2Gen program," said Kristin Hempel, Assistant Director of EASTCONN's Adult Programs. "2Gen supports ELL parents' skills not only at home and in the workplace, but in their communities. Parents who become community contributors often build stronger, more financially stable families, which ultimately results in children having a stronger network, a stronger sense of place and greater success in school and in life."

EASTCONN has been providing 2Gen programming to

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ACT Pilots Harvard-Inspired, Teacher-Led Instructional Rounds

EASTCONN is piloting a Harvard-inspired, teacher-led rounds initiative that leaves behind the more common administrator/district-led model and instead empowers teachers themselves to make school-wide instructional observations, decisions and improvements.

Teacher-led instructional rounds have already begun at Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT), EASTCONN's arts magnet high school in Willimantic. If ACT's year-long pilot is successful, EASTCONN will use teacher-led rounds in all of its K-12 schools and programs.



ACT's newly formed rounds team has begun observing ACT classrooms to collect objective data about student participation.

Last winter, a small group of EASTCONN administrators was accepted into the intensive and competitive Instructional Rounds Institute at Harvard, along with about 150 other educators from the U.S., Canada and Australia.

While attending the week-long Harvard Institute, EASTCONN's team grew to appreciate the powerful benefits that a teacher-led instructional rounds approach could bring to EASTCONN schools and programs.

"By allowing our ACT teachers to own the rounds process, the intent was not only to have them understand more about the nature of ACT's instructional practice, but to feel empowered to make instructional changes at the heart of where instruction lives, which is in their own classrooms," said Toni Ryan, Ed.D., EASTCONN's Director of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment and Accreditation for the Educational Services division. Ryan led the EASTCONN team that attended the Harvard program.

"This approach asks teachers to dig deep into what matters

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most to them as professionals, which is focusing on determining how they can collectively and effectively move students forward,” Ryan said.

Teacher buy-in is critical to the rounds’ success.

“In order for rounds to work, and because of the nature of the data that is collected through the rounds process, it’s also important that everyone understand that teacher-led rounds are entirely distinct from teacher evaluation, in purpose and methodology,” Ryan said.

After undergoing summer training and identifying “problems of practice” centered around student learning, two ACT teams of three teachers each began visiting ACT classrooms in September to collect objective, non-judgmental data on what, specifically, students were doing. ACT’s teacher teams are basing their data collection on the Instructional Core (defined as the dynamic interaction among teachers, students and content).

“Having worked in both urban and suburban school districts, I know that instructional rounds are usually led by district administrators, so EASTCONN’s teacher-led approach is very cutting edge,” said EASTCONN Education Specialist Alicia Willett, who helped train ACT’s teacher teams.

“In my opinion, the instructional rounds process has been a very positive one,” said ACT rounds team member Rebecca Weir, a science teacher. “We came in thinking that we knew what patterns we would see in the school and what we thought we should focus on. Two days of data collection and we are now thinking about patterns that we did not even consider over the summer. We are looking at trends in data from snapshots in a classroom, with objective, factual evidence ... “

ACT English teacher and rounds team member Stacy Vocasek observed, “We just completed our first round, and it really opened our eyes to some of the wonderful things happening at ACT. Many of us found that it was not as scary as we had anticipated it to be, and we were able to collect objective data that should help us propel our school into the future.

“If I can help uncover what makes us great and what we need to work on to be even better, then I will consider this process a success,” Vocasek said.

Using the evidence collected, the ACT team will create an action plan for the school to help move instructional practice forward in a planful, positive way, Ryan said.

“The rounds process at ACT will allow staff to have honest and open conversations around best teaching practices,” said ACT Interim Principal Sarah Mallory, who attended the Harvard Institute with Ryan and helped train the ACT rounds team along with Ryan and Willett.

“The idea that educational improvement can come from within the school, from colleagues and peers, is exciting,” Mallory said.

For more information, contact Toni Ryan, Ed.D., at tryan@eastconn.org, or at 860-455-1580.

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19 EASTCONN-Region Districts Win CSDE Coaching Grants

Nineteen northeastern Connecticut school districts have won in-district coaching grants from the Connecticut State Department of Education to help teachers incorporate Connecticut Core Standards into their classroom practice. Only 72 school districts were funded statewide.

The 19 districts, as well as EASTCONN’s two magnet schools, will use the CSDE’s In-District Coaching/ Technical Assistance grant to focus on professional learning in ELA and math. Winning districts include Andover, Bozrah, Canterbury, Colchester, Coventry, Eastford, Griswold, Hampton, Killingly, Lisbon, Mansfield, Pomfret, Sprague, Stafford, Sterling, Tolland, Union, Voluntown and Willington.

EASTCONN will provide the in-district coaching.

Contact Scott Nierendorf, Director of EASTCONN Teaching and Learning, at 860-455-1621, or at snierendorf@eastconn.org.



Newsweek Ranks Woodstock Academy Among CT’s Top 10

Newsweek has ranked Woodstock Academy among Connecticut’s Top 10 high schools, and among the nation’s Top 500 high schools, a heady honor for one of the state’s oldest educational institutions.

Founded in 1801, Woodstock Academy boasts a graduation rate of 99.6%, with its number of college-bound students near 90%, according to the Newsweek Web site.

Newsweek high school rankings evaluate and identify schools that excel at preparing students for college.

Woodstock Academy is an independent, co-ed, college preparatory high school for 1,025 students in grades 9-12. Partner towns that send students to Woodstock Academy include Brooklyn, Canterbury, Eastford, Pomfret, Union and Woodstock.



During an informal ceremony at EASTCONN’s Head Start site in Dayville, the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance presented its 2015 Children’s Champion Award to state Sen. Mae Flexer and state Rep. Christine Randall. The Alliance annually recognizes legislators who help shape laws that improve the well-being of young children. Attending the ceremony were, left to right: Killingly Superintendent of Schools Kevin Farr; Sen. Flexer; Rep. Randall; Executive Director of CT Early Childhood Alliance Merrill Gay; EASTCONN Executive Director Paula M. Colen; EASTCONN Early Childhood Initiatives Director Diane Gozemba.

EASTCONN Fall Happenings



Connecticut's new Commissioner of Education Dianna Wentzell was the guest speaker at September's URSA/NASA meeting at EASTCONN, which hosts the monthly event. Left to right, Windham Superintendent Patricia Garcia chatted with EASTCONN Executive Director Paula M. Colen, Commissioner Wentzell and Brooklyn Superintendent Louise Berry.



Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman greeted about 85 northeastern Connecticut employers, legislators, Dept. of Labor (DOL) staff, EASTCONN staff and area organizations to open the Hampton Region Employers' Step Up Conference at EASTCONN, sponsored by the DOL. Wyman, far left, paused for a quick pic with Windham Chamber of Commerce's Diane Nadeau and CBIA's Adam K. Ney, before stepping to the podium.



EASTCONN partnered with educators from the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History to present a day-long "Let's Do History Tour" workshop, above, hosted by Tolland High School, where 38 teachers from 14 districts learned about exciting new strategies and resources for engaging students in the study of American history.

Diane Gozemba Named Early Childhood Director



Diane Gozemba
Early Childhood Director

Diane Gozemba, M.S. Ed., M.B.A., has been named EASTCONN's Director of Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI). Gozemba has been the Assistant Director of ECI since 2013, overseeing the agency's Head Start and Early Head Start programming.

Former EASTCONN ECI Director Elizabeth Aschenbrenner will fill a new role as an early childhood special consultant for the agency and oversee its Birth-to-Three division.

"We are very pleased to announce that Diane is EASTCONN's new Director of ECI," said EASTCONN Executive Director Paula M. Colen. "Diane has done exceptional work on behalf of EASTCONN and the young children and families of northeastern Connecticut.

"I look forward to working closely with her as she continues to pursue excellence in early childhood programming and advocacy across our region and statewide."

Prior to arriving at EASTCONN, Gozemba chaired the Department of Education at Mitchell College, directed a lab school, administered a School Readiness program and developed a Family Center at Brooklyn Friends Schools. A teacher of teachers, Gozemba is an experienced presenter and coach with a background in successful grant-writing, facilitation and community conversations.

"I look forward to collaborating with the state Office of Early Childhood, the CSDE, our RESC partners and school districts to impact policy that will improve outcomes for children and families," said Gozemba. "I have long been an advocate who believes that working with families and using an intergenerational approach will positively influence our communities and support a more targeted approach to minimizing the achievement gap."

Gozemba's areas of focus are in building cultural competencies, social studies in the early childhood years, and early childhood program administration. She received her bachelor's from Connecticut College, where she majored in dance, which led her to a dance career in New York City. She later earned a master's from Bank Street College of Education, with a focus on infant and parent development; she received her M.B.A. from the University of New Haven.

Contact Diane Gozemba at dgozemba@eastconn.org or at 860-455-1518.



Calling All Arts Teachers! New EASTCONN Arts Council to Meet

All northeastern Connecticut teachers of the arts, music and drama are invited to attend EASTCONN's new Arts Council. The council, which is free, will meet next on Jan. 13, and again March 30, 2016, from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., at EASTCONN's Hampton Conference Center, 376 Hartford Tpke. (Route 6), Hampton.

The Arts Council will be facilitated by Diane Gozemba, EASTCONN's Director of Early Childhood Initiatives. To learn more, contact Diane Gozemba at dgozemba@eastconn.org.

Windham Spanish speakers in collaboration with Windham Public Schools and its Early Childhood Education division for the last 20 years through Even Start and Family Literacy. 2Gen offers classes in ESL, parenting, literacy, civics and work skills, in addition to field trips to resource-rich Windham-area sites and agencies. EASTCONN and Windham partner to transport parents and children to 2Gen programs. Without transportation, many qualified families couldn't participate.

"We recruit parents and children not only from Windham Early Childhood program, which includes Head Start and Early Head Start, but also from Windham's elementary schools," said Hempel. "The 2Gen program is a wonderful collaboration between EASTCONN, Windham's Early Childhood Program, and Windham's Family and Community Partnerships. Our partners are very strong, very creative and completely dedicated. Without them, this program would not work. Each of them demonstrates daily their commitment to working in the best interests of Windham families."

Monday through Friday, while their children are attending school or Early Head Start/Head Start, parents attend several hours of 2Gen classes. Buses take children and parents home around noon. New to the 2Gen program in 2015 are Spanish GED and ESL night classes, which are in high demand. Also available are customer service training, civics classes and workplace technology training.

"What makes 2Gen really exciting for me is the fact that we know that one of the best indicators of future success for children is their parents' education level," said Alikei Caraganis, Supervisor of Windham's Early Childhood Education.

"One of the most powerful things for me happened when I had a parent say she had signed up for the 2Gen Spanish GED

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because she wanted to be a role model for her children. She said that when she started, she was studying every night. During that time, her child's grades changed from C's and D's to A's and B's. It brought tears to my eyes. For me, that is exactly why we're doing this program. In order to really help children and families, we need to provide the resources that families need to support education at home. That's what this is all about ..."

"Despite recent cuts to federal funding, the EASTCONN/Windham partnership has continued to flourish, thanks to braiding resources and nurturing partnerships," said EASTCONN's Director of Adult Programs, Rich Tariff.

Bill Stover, Director of Windham's Family and Community Partnerships, said, "It is our hope that this partnership will continue to expand in both the number of parents and children who are taking advantage of it, and also in the quality and quantity of programs that we can offer."

To learn more about Windham's 2Gen program, contact EASTCONN's Kristin Hempel at 860-423-2591, or at khempel@eastconn.org.



Rick Wormeli Workshop to Explore Standards- Based Grading

Which fits best in your district: Traditional grading practices? Or standards-based grading?

More than 200 educators will explore the options when author/educator Rick Wormeli makes a case for standards-based grading, including its merits, potential pitfalls and common concerns, on Monday, November 23rd, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the Holiday Inn East, 100 East River Drive, East Hartford. (The event is sold out; please call 860-455-1579 to be placed on the waiting list.)

"EASTCONN's Center for Educational Leadership [CEL] invited Rick because there's such uncertainty among educators about standards-based grading versus traditional grading methods," said EASTCONN's Amy Drowne, Director of the CEL. "Rick will help educators find clarity around this controversial topic."

Wormeli has an unvarnished philosophy about grading, some of which he shared in a recent e-mail: "Grades are clear and accurate communication, nothing more," Wormeli said. "They are not compensation, bribery, validation, affirmation, or reward. The moment we make them such, we corrupt the teaching and reporting enterprise, which hurts our students' learning and maturation. If we are ethical and we want grades to be accurate and useful, then grades must report students' learning, not compliance. They are inappropriately used by themselves for sorting or selecting among students. Instead, we should see them as tools to inform both students and teachers about students' progressions towards learning goals and to assist in that development. ... We need to have serious, candid conversations about grading at every level."

NOTE: EASTCONN's CEL will offer a Wormeli follow-up workshop on how to use PowerSchool for standards-based grading on Dec. 16, 2015, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., at EASTCONN's Conference Center in Hampton. Visit www.eastconn.org/powerschoolgrading or contact EASTCONN's Linda Brock at lbrock@eastconn.org.

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