

# STORIES FROM THE CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Talent Office

## Telling Our Stories – Making a Difference for Students in Connecticut

By Sarah Barzee, Chief Talent Officer

People have been telling stories throughout history. Stories give meaning to our lives; they inspire, motivate, and help us to understand one another and our place in the world. Stories have the power to amuse, influence, stimulate, teach, and transform. Earlier this year, educators from across the state were invited to share their stories about teaching and leading at the second annual coherence conference, Moving from Compliance to Coherence: Aligning Student and Educator Goals and Practices, hosted by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Talent Office in partnership with the RESC Alliance and the Connecticut Association of Schools.

For the past two years, this conference has provided a forum through which educators from across the state can share their emerging promising practices with colleagues. The most exciting aspect of this conference is that all the presenters are Connecticut educators who are willing to share their practices and their stories about how they are making a difference in the lives of students every day.

Educators from 18 districts and four students presented at this year’s conference. While we must not deviate from our commitment to continuous improvement to ensure that each and

*Continued on page 2*

### Congratulations to Jahana Hayes, 2016 National Teacher of the Year!



Waterbury history teacher and National Teacher of the Year Jahana Hayes was honored by President Barack Obama on National Teacher Appreciation Day on May 3 at the White House. Read more on page 2.



### In this issue:

Connecticut is Proud to Call One of Our Teachers National Teacher of the Year .....	2
Special Section: 2nd Annual Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference .....	3
New Haven .....	4
Regional District 6 .....	5
Coventry .....	6
Bloomfield .....	7
Willington .....	8
East Lyme .....	9
Trumbull .....	10
Watertown .....	11
Hartford .....	12
How India Inspired My Teaching .....	14
TEAM Makes a Difference! An Interview with Two Teachers .....	15
A Teacher’s Creed .....	17



**TALENT OFFICE NEWSLETTER**  
*Claudine Primack, Chief Editor*

Office of Communications:  
*Matthew Falconer, Andrea Wadowski*

## Connecticut is Proud to Call One of Our Teachers The National Teacher of the Year

By Claudine Primack, Talent Office

**O**n November 10, 2015, Jahana Hayes of Waterbury was named 2016 Connecticut Teacher of the Year. But that was only the beginning for Mrs. Hayes, who was selected as one of four finalists in January and subsequently named 2016 National Teacher of the Year by the Council of Chief State School Officers on April 29, 2016. She was honored by President Barack Obama at the White House on National Teacher Appreciation Day, May 3, 2016.

Jahana's story begins in Waterbury, Connecticut where she was raised in a housing project, surrounded by poverty, drugs, and violence. She loved school, and her teachers told her she could someday go to college. At 17 she became a teenage mother. At the same time, she was an excellent student in high school and didn't want to give up on her dreams. She attended an alternative school for teenage parents and finished her education. She graduated from high school and worked for several years as a nurse's aide before returning to school to pursue a degree. She earned an associate degree from Naugatuck Valley Community College and went on to earn a bachelor of science degree from Southern Connecticut State University, a master of arts degree from the University of Saint Joseph, and a sixth-year certificate from the University of Bridgeport. She teaches history at John F. Kennedy High School in Waterbury.



Watch President Obama honoring the National Teacher of the Year and finalists.

A new journey has begun for Jahana, who is now in the national spotlight as an ambassador for the teaching profession. She will spend the next year traveling across the nation, where she will represent educators and advocate on behalf of teachers. In an interview with the Washington Post, Jahana states, "I really think that we need to change the narrative, change the dialogue about what teaching is as a profession. We've spent a lot of time in the last few years talking about the things that are not working. We really need to shift our attention to all the things that are working." She is committed to reminding Americans that teachers have the potential to be powerful, positive forces in their students' lives.

In her Connecticut Teacher of the Year application, she wrote, "Being constantly faced with negative media perceptions surrounding teaching practices and a perceived lack of accountability makes me much more determined to be vocal and supportive of teachers and teaching as a profession."

In Connecticut, we are proud to know that Jahana Hayes is one of our teachers; going forward as America's teacher, she will continue to elevate the national dialogue about what it means to be a teacher!

---

### ***Telling Our Stories – Making a Difference for Students in Connecticut***, continued from page 2

every student in Connecticut has access to an excellent education, it is time to change the narrative about teachers and teaching. We must continue to share the stories of Connecticut educators who are making an impact.

This newsletter features stories of educators who are making a difference for students. I want to congratulate Jahana Hayes on being named 2016 National Teacher of the Year. Read Jahana's story about her journey to achieving this prestigious national recognition. I encourage you to tell your own good stories. Each one of us has powerful stories to tell. We need to start to telling our stories and framing productive conversations about teaching and learning in our communities. Let's start a movement. Write it, tweet it, post it! Tell your story!

## Special Section

Second Annual

# Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference:

## Aligning Student and Educator Goals and Practices

Hosted by the Connecticut State Department of Education  
in collaboration with the RESC Alliance and CAS

### Second Annual Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference: Aligning Student and Educator Goals and Practices

**O**n February 25, 2016, the Connecticut State Department of Education, in partnership with the RESC Alliance and the Connecticut Association of Schools, sponsored our second annual professional learning conference entitled, Moving from Compliance to Coherence: Aligning Student and Educator Goals and Practices, at the Radisson Hotel in Cromwell. Over 280 educators attended the conference.

An exciting feature of this year's conference was the culminating event — a storytelling hour, in partnership with Matthew Dicks, a West Hartford school teacher and 23-time Moth Story SLAM champion, whose stories have been featured on NPR's nationally syndicated Moth Radio Hour and weekly podcast and founder of CT Speak Up. Five educators and one student told personal stories about their experiences. The day ended with Commissioner Dianna Wentzell sharing a story of her own. Overall, the day provided a unique opportunity for educators to come together and learn from one another.

All the resources, materials, and contact information for the conference presentations are posted on the CSDE's [Educator Effectiveness and Professional Learning](#) website.



Watch the culminating event from this year's Moving from Compliance to Coherence conference: [Storytelling: Educators Making a Difference.](#)

## Special Section: Compliance to Coherence Conference



# Evaluating Embedded Professional Learning

By Justin Boucher, Ed.D, Talent Associate, New Haven Public Schools

Over the last three years, the New Haven Public Schools (NHPS) has been exploring various means of improving professional learning. Embedded learning communities are one facet of this work. Whether implemented as data teams, professional learning communities (PLCs), vertical teams, or grade level teams, learning communities seek to harness the combined capacities of teachers to improve their practice. Like many other school districts, NHPS has implemented a wide variety of learning communities. A recent evaluation of one of those programs has provided useful insight into the implementation of learning communities and the broader process of evaluating professional development.

The Empowered Effective Educators (E3) program is an embedded professional learning program that relies on trained teacher leaders to assemble and facilitate learning communities throughout NHPS. Between 250 and 300 teachers have volunteered for these groups in each year of the program. Their work centers on a problem of practice or protocol that is agreed upon by group members. E3 groups were furnished with time in the school day to meet, as well as stipends and trainings for the teacher leaders who facilitated the groups. After running the program for two years, the NHPS Talent Office conducted a program evaluation comparing the evaluation results for teachers participating in the program with a comparison group of teachers who did not participate. The results of that comparison were significant, correlating with higher scores on all measures of professional values within New Haven's evaluation rubric. This finding is all the more important in a context where most professional development shows little connection to a change in educator practice.

These findings highlight some of the promise inherent in professional learning communities, namely that learning communities build professionalism and improve morale among teachers. The findings also underscore the significant investment needed for measureable gains. The investment in the E3 program was intended to provide visible improvement on student achievement measures. Though professional values may be a precursor of student achievement, it is by no means certain that improvement on professional values will lead to improvement in student achievement. We expect that in time, the evaluation will show evidence of improved student achievement. The results are encouraging in that they provide both actionable feedback and confidence that the E3 program should continue.



Justin Boucher

*These findings highlight some of the promise inherent in professional learning communities, namely that learning communities build professionalism and improve morale among teachers.*



View the materials from New Haven's presentation, [Seeking Coherence Through Program Evaluation](#), at the CSDE's Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference.

## Special Section: Compliance to Coherence Conference



Regional School  
District 6

# Regional School District 6 Teachers Present at CSDE Conference

By Brooke Matuszczak, Business/Technology Teacher, and Wayne Prescott, Library Media Specialist, at Wamogo Regional High School

On February 25, 2016, Brooke Matuszczak, business/technology teacher, and Wayne Prescott, library media specialist, at Wamogo Regional High School, delivered a presentation entitled *Let the Students Take Charge: Using Inquiry, Technology, and Challenge-Based Projects to Increase Engagement and Learning* at the CSDE's Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference in Cromwell, CT. The presentation focused on goal setting, instructional practices, strategies, and measures that support student learning through increased rigor, higher-order thinking skills, student engagement in the learning process, and instruction aligned with CT Core Standards.

A recent Junior Achievement [report](#) concludes, "Educators and businesses concur, many students are not prepared for today's workplace because they lack basic communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills." [Research](#) also shows students lack the soft skills required to succeed in today's constantly changing academic and business landscape. Brooke and Wayne believe that teaching learners to ask questions encourages them to develop interest and curiosity about their surroundings. Accordingly, students' enthusiasm and motivation dramatically increased since they have more ownership of their learning. Attendees learned how technology and project/challenge-based curricula promotes inquiry, reflection, and deeper thinking. Participants left the session with tools and strategies they could implement immediately, including innovative questioning techniques and student-centered classroom activities.

Brooke and Wayne also highlighted a variety of Regional School District 6 initiatives that connect classroom content to real-world problems, including participation in the nationally recognized [Skills 21 program](#), projects and information about the student [ExpoFest](#) that was held at the Oakdale Theatre in Wallingford, May 13-14, 2016, and the elementary and high school makerspaces—creative, do-it-yourself spaces where students can gather to create, invent, and learn. They shared district initiatives that promote curiosity through inquiry, allow students to set their own goals, offer opportunities for students to measure and reflect on their learning, and move towards mastery/standards-based assessment.

### Let the Students Take Charge

Using inquiry, technology and challenge-based projects to increase engagement and learning

CSDE Second Annual Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference:  
Aligning Student and Educator Goals and Practices, February 25, 2016

Brooke Matuszczak, Business/Technology Teacher  
Wayne Prescott, Library Media Specialist

Wamogo Regional High School  
Regional School District No. 6  
Litchfield, CT

View Region 6's presentation, [Let the Students Take Charge](#), and resources, [Using Inquiry, Technology, and Challenge-Based Projects to Increase Student Engagement and Learning](#).



Regional School District 6 initiatives that connect classroom content to real-world problems include participation in the nationally recognized Skills 21 program, the student ExpoFest that was held at the Oakdale Theatre in Wallingford, May 13-14, 2016, and elementary and high school makerspaces.

## Special Section: Compliance to Coherence Conference



# Using Collaborative Processes to Improve Pedagogy

*By Michele Mullaly, Director of Teaching and Learning, Coventry Public Schools*

As a district that values collaboration, the educators in Coventry Public Schools have been committed to finding time and developing structures that allow teachers regularly scheduled opportunities for group inquiry and planning instruction. Teachers and leaders developed a districtwide, structured protocol for looking at student work and disaggregating data in teams with the emphasis on careful selection of pedagogical approaches. The district provides dedicated professional development time, staff meetings, team, department, and content planning meetings for this endeavor.

Primarily, collaborative inquiry has focused on CT Core Standards for mathematics and reading. Teachers align their student learning outcomes for evaluation to these areas of concentration. To have a high impact on student learning, professional development has been provided on specific instructional strategies identified in the work of Robert Marzano, Debra Pickering, and Jane Pollock, as well as John Hattie. In addition, Instructional Rounds involve teachers and leaders. Feedback from the Instructional Rounds is used to inform professional development.

All the work addresses the question, “How can feedback be best utilized to foster student learning, achievement, and self-managed applications of understanding and skill?” Pre- and post-assessment data, formative assessments, and multiple other measures have been developed and used to monitor student learning and to provide teachers with feedback on how to customize instruction to deepen learning. Student achievement results suggest that Coventry Public Schools’ move to achieve coherence is enhancing student learning!



Coventry Public Schools’ Principal Beth Giller; Educational Technology Director, Cathie Drury; Reading Consultant, Margo Vachon; and Reading Teacher, Lauren Jordan, collaborate on developing instructional materials.

View the materials from Coventry’s presentation, [Using Collaborative Processes to Improve Pedagogy](#), at the CSDE’s Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference.

## Special Section: Compliance to Coherence Conference

---



# Closing the Achievement Gap in Bloomfield Public Schools

*By Allison Borawski, Teacher Leader, Bloomfield High School*

Closing the achievement gap in Bloomfield Public Schools was the result of a shared vision focused on a climate of high academic achievement and a strong theory of action. Collaborative data-driven instructional strategies and decision-making at every level, from the districtwide data team to the instructional data teams, strengthened the sustained improvements in both literacy and numeracy at Bloomfield High School (BHS). A laser-like focus on rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessment ensures we are competing with and among the most successful schools in Connecticut and across the country.

All classes at BHS begin with a cognitive conditioning exercise that challenges students to incorporate their skills in literacy, numeracy, and rationale writing into every content area. The student work is assessed using our schoolwide rubrics, which focus on complex text and paired text-dependent questions. Students are also expected to implement the mathematical problem-solving matrix when approaching numeracy problems in all content areas. Common formative assessments (CFAs) and performance tasks are used to promote sustained thought and problem solving.

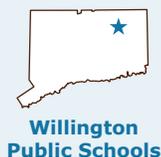
One of the most powerful practices implemented with fidelity at BHS is multi-grade-level interdisciplinary data teams, with a job-embedded professional development component, which meet every day of the week. Data teams operate with a deliberate focus on analysis of student work in order to select instructional strategies that will have the most effective impact on the needs of the students. Best practice lies within being transparent with data and instructional strategies. Data team meetings are spent vetting performance tasks and rhetorical reading- and writing-based CFAs. Additionally, teams engage in professional learning, presented by our own faculty, to build skills in creating rigorous selected response questions based on the distractor rationale taxonomy. We value transparency in examining the role of adult practices in the development of rigorous, complex text-dependent questions. Teachers are highly engaged in collaborative and calibrated scoring, and collegial conversations are all focused on increasing student achievement and improving our craft.

Through discourse around student data, educators are able to conference with students, provide meaningful feedback, and coach them on how metacognition can increase their academic success. The BHS staff members pride themselves on eliminating the “silos” in which content area teachers have worked for so long. Our staff has developed into interdisciplinary teachers of literacy and numeracy in every classroom, every day.

We invite you to visit our school and see our data teams in action.

---

## Special Section: Compliance to Coherence Conference



# Implementing a Personalized Professional Development Model

By Kara Hennessey, Grade 5 Team Leader, Hall Memorial School, Willington Public Schools

**H**all Memorial School in Willington, Connecticut, began implementing a personalized professional development model addressing state and national initiatives by forming a relationship with CREC in 2009 and developing a new relationship with EASTCONN in 2013. This model was created to support teachers who were responsible for their own curriculum development and realignment in the absence of curriculum coordinators. Our current model uses the district professional development days, as well as professional learning opportunities throughout the year, to develop and vertically align curriculum in all subjects. Currently, the district is working to create assessments and performance tasks and design common assessment practices and rubrics.

We credit the success of our professional development model largely to a partnership with EASTCONN, which provides our district with coaches. Teachers, with guidance from the coaches, develop year-long action plans that outline the team's objectives. Coaches work with staff on initiatives connected to year-long teacher and student goals. Some of the professional learning has included the creation of common language and practices within subject areas, as well as performance tasks to assess student learning.

Our teachers feel consistently supported because of the ongoing coaching connected to their teacher evaluation goals. The coaches meet with staff members individually to provide resources, as well as to review and support teacher goals regularly. Coaches also observe and mentor teachers in their classrooms. Engaging in professional learning that is directly connected to teachers' evaluation goals helped teachers with the initial buy-in to the process and has resulted in strong success with goal achievement each year. Teachers develop one of their goals within their professional learning community. As the coaches foster growth with teachers, the teachers are then able to provide more support to their students to promote student achievement. As a result, teachers are able to provide culminating evidence demonstrating both achievement of their goal and student growth.

Professional learning should be meaningful to teachers and should foster their desire to be lifelong learners. The personalized learning model created in Willington, developed in partnership with EASTCONN, is a model for success in our small district. It provides our teachers with a voice for the structure and content of their personalized learning, as well as an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding over time. As a result, teacher practices have improved in our district as teachers have become more reflective and have developed a change in mindset.

*“Professional development is no longer a ‘one size fits all model’; it is much more specific and department oriented.”*

*“Collaborating with other teachers has really improved my teaching. As a group we created a scoring guide to use across grade levels using common language. I had a change in mindset on how to design the rubric while collaborating with my ELA team.”*

### Personalized Professional Learning: A Unified Approach



Presenters:  
Jennifer Colella  
Laura Gilbert  
Kara Hennessey  
Bridget O'Connor  
Erin Powers-Bigler

View the materials from Willington's presentation, [Personalized Professional Learning: A Unified Approach](#), at the CSDE's Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference.

## Special Section: Compliance to Coherence Conference



# Professional Improvement Through Co-teaching

By Judy A. DeLeeuw, Ed.D., Principal, East Lyme Public Schools

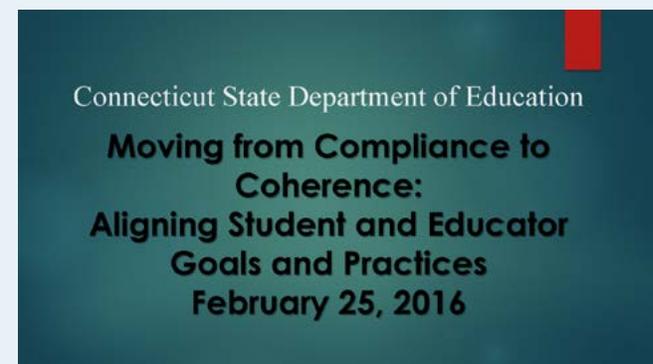
Over the past nine years, East Lyme Middle School (ELMS) has worked toward creating a high-quality learning system that increases teacher collaboration and improves student performance. At ELMS, we have created a positive school culture that includes high standards of professionalism for our administrators and faculty. Our faculty is able to thrive in a supportive environment that includes embedded time for collaborative planning and ongoing professional development. This work has brought coherence to the teacher's performance and practice goals of the teacher evaluation plan.

One of the major paradigm shifts in our building was the move to co-taught classrooms. At the CSDE's Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference, language arts teacher Jennifer Danis and special education teacher Doreen Santafianos spoke about the ongoing process of creating successful co-teaching relationships, which for them began in 2010. To begin, Jennifer and Doreen received invaluable professional development and were able to be observed in their classroom by experts in the field. Jennifer and Doreen also spoke about the work of Marilyn Friend and were able to provide examples of the various co-teaching models. As a classroom teacher, Jennifer noted how co-teaching has greatly improved her knowledge of her special education students' specific learning goals. Doreen spoke about how co-teaching has led to a greater understanding of the subject area curriculums. As a result of their co-teaching, both Jennifer and Doreen have been able to improve instruction for their students.

Besides the traditional co-teaching pairs of classroom teachers and special education teachers at ELMS, we also have nontraditional pairs of teachers that are co-teaching and co-learning together. On hand at the conference were library media specialist Carla Weitovich and social studies teacher

Neeley Overmoyer. Carla and Neeley described the Assured Research Project Program at ELMS, which is another element of our high-quality learning system that ensures every student at ELMS receives direct instruction in research skills. Carla and Neeley worked together to implement a research project that embodies CT Core Standards, C3 Framework Standards, ISTE Standards, 21st Century Learning Standards, as well as the subject area curriculum goals for social studies and library media. Because of their collaboration, Carla gained a new perspective on the project through the collaborative evaluation process, and Neeley learned about new technology resources. The instructional process was greatly improved by having two teachers in the classroom with different knowledge and skill sets.

The co-learning, co-teaching model at ELMS has been enormously successful and has improved student learning, as well as professional learning. The success would not have been possible without the implementation of a high-quality learning system that directly supports our teachers.



View the materials from East Lyme's presentation, [Aligning Student and Educator Goals and Practices](#), at the CSDE's [Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference](#).

## Special Section: Compliance to Coherence Conference



# Math Teacher-Leaders Achieving Coherence in Trumbull

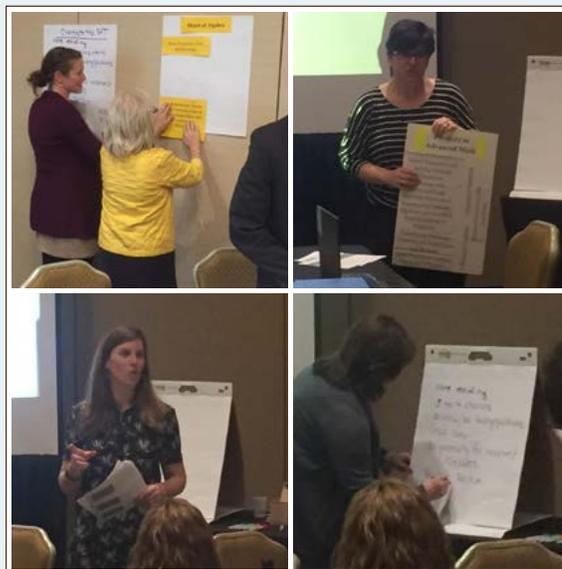
By Jonathan Budd, Ph.D., K-12 Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments, Trumbull Public Schools

Trumbull High School's (THS) mathematics department includes over 20 teachers with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and professional interests. Although these teachers have, for many years, developed a strong program for their students, many sensed that greater coherence in their goals and practices would likely lead to even stronger student achievement results.

In the fall of 2015, Trumbull's K-12 Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments, Jonathan Budd, Ph.D., and THS Principal Marc Guarino framed a structure of department-based professional learning communities, which linked to group-identified goals for improving both student achievement and teacher practice. In the THS mathematics department, Chairperson Fran Basbagill teamed with teacher-leaders Elizabeth Capobianco, Katie Laird, and Jennifer Payne to focus two department-wide professional learning communities (PLCs) on the recently redesigned SAT and its implications for teaching and learning.

The redesigned SAT provided important leverage for Fran, Elizabeth, Katie, and Jennifer to lead their department members this year in both process and product. Highlighting the need for all to work together based on collegial norms, the teacher-leaders led their peers through deep engagement with the redesigned assessment. By actually taking the mathematics section of the SAT, for example, the department members recognized the embedded mathematics and literacy skills necessary for student success. In subsequent meetings of the PLCs, department members worked in course-based teams to develop common assessments and then to analyze student work to determine curricular adjustments suggested by the data.

Based on this year's PLC goal, nearly all THS mathematics teachers report developing new and improved elements of their practice, including daily instruction, homework, and major assessments. Junior-year students report greater familiarity and comfort with the structure and content of the redesigned SAT. Some might suggest that a focus on the SAT emphasizes "teaching to the test," but these teachers' collaborative goal has allowed them to hone their teaching in ways that resulted in demonstrable student achievement gains. Just as importantly, the teachers have reported feeling supported by their peer teacher-leaders toward enhanced student achievement; the organic professional learning community structure thus appears to have enabled long-term department-wide process growth as well.



Trumbull High School mathematics teachers created two professional learning communities that focused on the recently redesigned SAT and were able to hone their teaching in ways that resulted in demonstrable student achievement gains.

## Toward the New SAT and a Vitalized PLC

Math Teacher-Leaders in Action to Enhance Instructional Quality



View the materials from Trumbull's presentation, [Toward the New SAT and a Vitalized PLC](#), at the CSDE's Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference.

## Special Section: Compliance to Coherence Conference



# Learning Targets to Improve Instruction

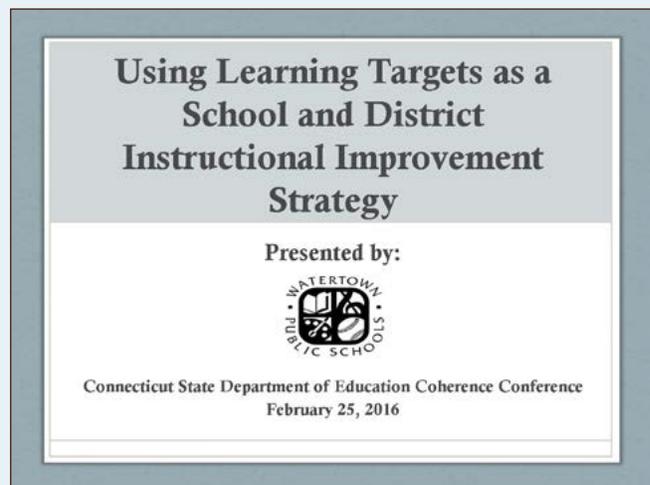
By Dr. Janet Parlato, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Watertown Public Schools

A team of administrators and teachers from the Watertown Public Schools presented information and examples about the use of the learning targets framework as a district and school instructional improvement strategy at the February coherence conference. The learning targets framework is a lesson planning and lesson organization tool that consists of the following sentence starters to be shared with students at the start of the lesson: *I can...; To do this, I must know and understand...; I will show I can do this by...; I will know I am successful when....*

Using the book *Learning Targets: Helping Students Aim for Understanding in Today's Lesson*, by Connie Moss and Susan Brookhart, as foundational information, the district administrative team developed a yearlong professional development series. Building administrators delivered the series in their own buildings, using a common PowerPoint presentation and common activities for each session. As a method of inspiring and ensuring district coherence, teachers from grades K-12 experienced the same information and participated in the same learning activities in lessons delivered in their own buildings with their own administrators.

A total of eight learning targets sessions took place during 2015-16, mostly in 45-minute to one-hour segments, each of which included direct instruction about an aspect of the learning targets framework: frequently-asked questions about the learning targets framework based on the exit slips from the prior session, collaborative practice with the learning targets framework, using samples that teachers brought from their own classrooms, and whole-group sharing of the learning targets analysis completed in collaborative groups. Information gathered from the exit slips completed at the end of each session informed the content of the next session, so while the overall trajectory of the professional learning was established at the start of the year, adjustments

were made depending on teachers' needs and requested areas of additional explanation. Watertown Public Schools will continue its professional development about learning targets during the 2016-17 school year, in conjunction with specific learning for teachers about assessment development. Watertown's presentation at the coherence conference included student work samples from grade 2 and a video about learning targets created by the high school's video production class. Presentation team members included Lisa Fekete, principal of Polk Elementary School; Paul Jones, principal of Watertown High School; Marylu Lerz, principal of Swift Middle School; Roberto Medic, assistant principal of Watertown High School; Laura Meka, principal of John Trumbull Primary School; Dr. Janet Parlato, director of curriculum and instruction; and Maria Schweyer, grade 2 teacher at John Trumbull Primary School.



View the materials from Watertown's presentation, [Using Learning Targets as a School and District Instructional Improvement Strategy](#), at the CSDE's [Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference](#).

## Special Section: Compliance to Coherence Conference



Hartford  
Public Schools

# K-2 Curriculum Professional Learning Shifting Teachers' Instructional Practice

By Kathleen E. England, Chief Academic Officer, Hartford Public Schools

At the CSDE's coherence conference, members of the Hartford Public Schools' Office of Academics team highlighted the district's new K-2 literacy curriculum, which uses professional learning as the foundation for shifting teachers' instructional practice. A major focus in Hartford's strategic operating plan (SOP) is our commitment to "developing leaders to lead for learning." The literacy team has taken a broad view of development of leadership capacity to include teachers, instructional coaches, building administrators, and central office staff. A key component of the curriculum is the high-quality professional learning in which teachers and leaders are participating. Schools working with the new curriculum receive support through three tiers: putting students at the center of their learning, putting teachers at the center of their teaching, and developing leaders who lead for literacy improvement. Schools participating in the curriculum implementation commit to an extensive yearlong professional learning plan that incorporates both out-of-school, as well as job-embedded professional learning opportunities with focused, strategic, district level support.

As part of the K-2 literacy curriculum professional learning, the literacy team provides ongoing workshops and sessions throughout the year that are directly aligned to teachers' and coaches' work: cross-school learning walks, school-based collaborative planning meetings, and coaching cycles are some examples of the job-embedded opportunities in which practitioners participate. The 15 schools participating in the second phase of implementation this year are grouped in cohorts to provide an additional layer of support. Each cohort has a central office staff member assigned as the district point person and a team of school-based teachers and coaches serve as building-based cohort leads. This model has allowed us to maximize the project's capacity to provide ongoing coaching and feedback and to make adjustments based on the needs of our schools. Additionally, the cohort model has allowed us to develop leadership capacity in our teachers and instructional coaches. Teacher leaders are on curriculum writing teams, and at this point in the year, are leading learning walks and professional learning communities for the cohorts.

One of the strongest components of the professional learning model is the regular collection of both learning walk and coaching feedback data from each school. The literacy team uses the data to plan and implement professional learning

*Continued on page 13*



Watch the video of Hartford's presentation at the Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference.



View the materials from Hartford's presentation, [Implementing High Quality Early Literacy Instruction Through Collaborative Practice](#), at the CSDE's Moving from Compliance to Coherence Conference.

## Special Section: Compliance to Coherence Conference

---

### Watch some of the other conference presentations:



#### Using Collaborative Processes to Improve Pedagogy – West Hartford Public Schools

In this session, learn how West Hartford Public Schools created and implemented an ongoing professional learning process focused on district goals and a Model of Continuous Improvement. The model uses the CT Standards for Professional Learning as a foundation and addresses individual teacher needs to improve instructional practices that advance achievement for all students. Collaborative Inquiry Teams (CITs) promote self-reflection and identification of areas for growth, collaborative forums, and individual choice. Through ongoing evaluation of the CITs, the district is studying the impact of various teaching strategies and the key instructional shifts that drive deeper learning.



#### State Student Advisory Board Panel Discussion

High school student members of the State Student Advisory Council on Education (SSACE) present their findings on secondary education reform with a special focus on the 12th grade experience, health and wellness practices, and other matters related to aligning student and educator goals and practices.

---

#### ***K–2 Curriculum Professional Learning Shifting Teachers’ Instructional Practice***, continued from page 12

opportunities that meet the differentiated needs of schools, leaders, teachers, and students. We are excited to see that our recent data evidence shifts in instructional practice and improved student literacy achievement.

This summer, the Office of Academics literacy team will hold its second annual Summer Institute with teacher and coach representation from each of the 15 schools. This professional learning opportunity provides the time for school-based staff to collaborate with central office staff to review, edit, and revise the curriculum based on implementation data and feedback collected from the schools. The institute also provides us an opportunity to celebrate all the hard work and successes of the project.

---

## How India Inspired My Teaching

By Marina Outwater, Regional School District 16 (Beacon Falls and Prospect)

**D**rought, drip irrigation, and dry compost toilets. These are just some of the things that I spent my summer thinking about as I traveled across India as a Fund for Teachers Fellow. Although I set out to investigate the water crisis, I returned home with an entirely new way of thinking about life. Riding the Rajshree sugar company's training bus with 11 female farmers, intent on learning how to use a drip irrigation system, made me realize the importance of sustainable agricultural practices. Watching people bathe in the Ganges, despite the astounding amount of garbage floating by, made me question how it is possible to protect our environment and still maintain important cultural and religious traditions. Traveling through the Spiti Valley to witness how people live in such inhospitable conditions made me appreciate the ease and convenience of my daily life. Helping a mother who needed money to buy milk for her crying baby, sharing a meal with an interfaith couple who had to fight to gain their parents' approval of their "love" marriage, and taking a sunrise ride on the Ganges with a "boatman" named Sanjay who had slept in his boat all gave me a more profound perspective on my own existence. As a global citizen, my heart ached for the garbage collector who sorted recycled goods amidst a heap of rotting garbage with her baby strapped to her back. It was hard to hear that women who picked weeds in the sugarcane fields for six hours a day were paid

*Continued on page 15*



Region 16 teacher Marina Outwater recently traveled across India as a Fund for Teachers Fellow



FUND FOR TEACHERS (FFT) provides educators, possessing a broad vision of what it means to teach and learn, the resources needed to pursue self-designed professional learning experiences. FFT grants are used for an unlimited variety of projects; all designed to create enhanced learning environments for teachers, their students, and their school communities. By trusting teachers to design unique fellowships, Fund for Teachers grants validate teachers' professionalism and leadership, as well. Since 2001, Fund for Teachers has invested \$22 million in nearly 6,000 teachers, transforming grants into growth for teachers and their students.

118 Connecticut teachers have been awarded grants for 2016 to be used for a variety of projects; all designed to create enhanced learning environments for teachers, their students, and their school communities. Read about each of their [projects](#).

## TEAM Makes a Difference! An Interview with Two Teachers

By Erin Powers-Bigler, TEAM Field Staff, Education Specialist, EASTCONN



(Left) Michelle Bashaw, 6th grade teacher, Windermere Elementary School, Ellington;

(Right) Laura Estabrooks, high school English teacher, Regional District 19



In a previous issue of the Talent Office Newsletter, Carly Weiland-Quiros wrote about the important role that TEAM mentors play in the professional lives of their mentees. My conversation with two recent TEAM graduates confirmed just how critical mentors are to a beginning teacher's growth. Michelle Bashaw, a sixth-grade teacher at Windermere Elementary School in Ellington, and Laura Estabrooks, a high school English teacher in Regional School District 19, shared some of the highlights of their TEAM experiences, and though I met with them separately, several common themes emerged:

### 1. Mentors matter

I asked them to describe the support they received during their TEAM experience. Laura and Michelle both spoke about the integral role their mentors played in their development as new teachers.

Laura explained, "My mentor established a weekly check in for us, and he always held to that. He gave 'homework' each week, something to think about and reflect on, or an article to read . . .

these things became the basis for our conversations the following week. When talking about implementing a new strategy, we brainstormed together and shared ideas . . . he helped me think about my teaching in a deeper way. He often started our meetings by asking me about one lesson that went well that week and one that did not go so well, and then we discussed why. He then shared his successes and challenges of the week. He treated me as an equal not just a beginning teacher."

Michelle described her mentor's approach. "Even though my mentor has taught for many years, she explained to me that she is always still learning. She met with me consistently and constantly (we were on the same team), and she treated me as a professional

*Continued on page 16*

### **How India Inspired My Teaching**, continued from page 14

two dollars for such intense, backbreaking work. And I simply longed for home after visiting a local carnival, something my twin sons would have enjoyed if they had been with me. Now I have an authentic understanding that we may all live in different places, but our hopes and dreams are truly the same.

My teaching has evolved because I now teach with much more meaning and purpose. My students take a greater interest in serving the common good, and I make this a priority in their assignments. As a result of this fellowship, my sixth-grade world geography students have begun to move away from a textbook-centered curriculum and engage in real-world problems and solutions. I want my students to make a difference; I intend to create conservationists, innovators, and advocates out of them. As a result, I have created an inquiry-based, interdisciplinary unit that culminates in a water-awareness portfolio.

Students will gain awareness of the need for water conservation, compare India to another country facing similar problems, research several innovative solutions, and then create their own original inventions to assist in the area of sanitation, collection, or distribution of water. I created four sets of photo magazines to use in conjunction with this project.

To be given the opportunity to grow professionally and personally during the summer with this grant has been life changing. Not a day goes by that I don't think about the laundry men of Varanasi or the village leader in MehdiGANj who is fighting to keep the hand pumps in his community from drying up. I have transformed as a result of this Fund for Teachers grant, and I hope that many other Connecticut teachers will take the time to apply for their own grant.

## *TEAM Makes a Difference! An Interview with Two Teachers*, continued from page 15

---

and an equal . . . Throughout our work together, she was open to hearing my direction and my ideas. In working with my mentor, I realized that even though you may teach the same thing year to year, you have different students, and in teaching, you are constantly re-directing yourself, your approaches, and your lessons. My mentor and I continuously re-worked lessons so we could find better ways to reach all our students.”

### **2. TEAM prepares you for teacher evaluation**

Laura explained, “My mentor and I observed one another . . . having someone observe you is not easy. You are very vulnerable. However, my mentor offered constructive criticism. His feedback was useful, and I knew it was intended to help me develop as a teacher, that it came from a caring place. Using the [TEAM] performance profiles and being observed by my mentor made me feel more prepared for formal observations because those good practices were already at the forefront of my mind and the language and expectations of the teacher evaluation rubric were familiar.”

Michelle noted that her focus areas for TEAM were beneficial in preparing her for teacher evaluation. “My focus areas for TEAM, especially around student self-reflection and self-assessment, goal-setting, and giving meaningful feedback to students helped prepare me for teacher evaluation since those practices are aligned with the teacher evaluation rubric . . . reflecting on your teaching and where you are going, also prepares you for the evaluation process.”

### **3. TEAM has lasting effects**

Laura explained that TEAM has affected her growth. “If left to my own devices, without TEAM, I probably wouldn’t have explored many of the avenues I did. Just because of the demands of the job, I wouldn’t have taken time for professional growth; it would have been about keeping my head above water. Going through this process helped me take the time to reflect, to stop, to think about what was happening before moving on to the next class . . . and helped me widen my skill base and develop the tools I need to grow.”

Michelle shared that her work in TEAM continues to influence her teaching and her students. “One of my focus areas in TEAM was on student self-assessment and giving meaningful feedback. The ideas I learned have become a part of my classroom practice. Students know that their work is going to be constantly revised and improved through my feedback and feedback from others . . . They are using rubrics and time for feedback is built-in. My students are experiencing learning as a real formative process and have become more self-directed.”

Laura and Michelle’s experiences are just a few examples of the TEAM program’s mission in action: “To promote excellence, equity and high achievement for Connecticut students by engaging teachers in purposeful exploration of professional practice through guided support and personal reflection.” Although a teacher’s first years in the classroom are not easy, TEAM mentors help beginning teachers become more confident, knowledgeable and better prepared to meet the needs of all learners. TEAM does make a difference.

## A Teacher's Creed

*By M. Noella Buschbaum, Ph.D.*



I believe

- in the vast potential of the human mind...and its abilities -  
...reasoning.....analysis.... discovery.

I believe

- in the uniqueness of you and of me...although we both have grown  
...and we have sung and we have cried...and we have worked -  
... I walked a way that was not the same way you walked –  
yet we both learned to walk -  
and both reached the crossroads of Time.

I believe

- in humanity...in the bond which secures us together -  
...adult and child...as one living organism -  
teacher and student learning from each other.

I believe

- there exists within each of us the desire to KNOW... many things –  
...why the wind howls in the pines-  
...where a song is born –  
...how the wild goose finds its way –  
...where we too are a part -  
and there is much to be learned.

I believe

- in the great soul of mankind...to which we all belong...  
...its capacity for good...for ceaseless searching  
to find ways to make a better world.

I believe

- in the power of knowledge to break the shell of ignorance...  
...to open locked gates –  
...to unveil the mysterious –  
...to excite the curious –  
...to give solutions, cures, understanding, hope.

*Continued on page 17*

*A Teacher's Creed*, continued from page 16

I believe

- we carry within us a reflection which can show us  
the good, the positive, the beautiful in ourselves...  
...whether it resembles the soft perfection of the rose –  
OR...the stark, wild splash of the cactus blossom –  
We have a share in all of this...  
the good, the positive, the beautiful.

I believe

- that the constant, yet changing universe speaks to every person  
and says -----  
...feel the downy softness of the duckling –  
...hear the fragile sound of the hummingbird's wings –  
...see the majesty of the everlasting sea and of the canyons –  
...taste the tangy sweetness of the wild strawberry –  
...smell the wetness of the field after a gentle rain...  
...a blend of earth, of herb, of grasses, and of unnamed plants.

I believe

- in the right...to learn...to experience...to question...to answer.

I believe

- that you and I share many needs –  
... success, love, to be heard, and to be respected.

I believe

- in the child who ...is as a gift to the future of mankind  
...and in the child who ...is angry...bitter...hostile.

I believe

- it is possible to walk together...you and I...  
...and one of us will find the violet –  
and the other will find the thorn –  
...and we can share the wonder of each.

I believe

- that we are all connected in the great cycle of life...  
...and if I have successfully guided you...  
you will in turn guide others who will follow.

I believe

- in...little people.....all people.

I believe

- in LIFE!

*M. Noella Buschbaum, Ph.D., is an Educational Consultant, Music Educator, University Supervisor, Professional Development, Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program Trainer, System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) Program Teacher Evaluator*