

# Explorations Charter School

## 2013-2014 Annual Report



A public school dedicated to cultivating positive attitudes toward life-long learning in an experiential, non-traditional setting.

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*“Achieve Through Self Discipline.”*

# Explorations Charter School

The Brian J. O'Neil Building  
71 Spencer Street, Winsted, CT 06098

860-738-9070

[info@explorationscs.com](mailto:info@explorationscs.com)

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**Jill Johnson - Executive Director / Principal**

860-738-9070

[jill@explorationscs.com](mailto:jill@explorationscs.com)

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# Motto

## **“Achieve Through Self Discipline”**

Educational success is more attainable when the student is personally invested in their choices for their future.

# Mission Statement

It is the mission of Explorations to create a public school that will cultivate positive attitudes towards life-long learning in an experiential, non-traditional educational setting.

Explorations will provide an environment that models inter-dependencies as a foundation of society.

The program will emphasize activities which foster the acceptance of responsibility; development of positive decision making and problem solving skills; and encourage students to develop a healthier attitude towards their school, community work, family and most important, towards themselves.

Family and community involvement at Explorations Charter School demonstrates how each of us takes ownership in contributing to a better future for each other.

# Goal

It is the goal of Explorations to develop students into adults who will be good citizens that value being productive role models in the community and see the need in “giving something back” to society.



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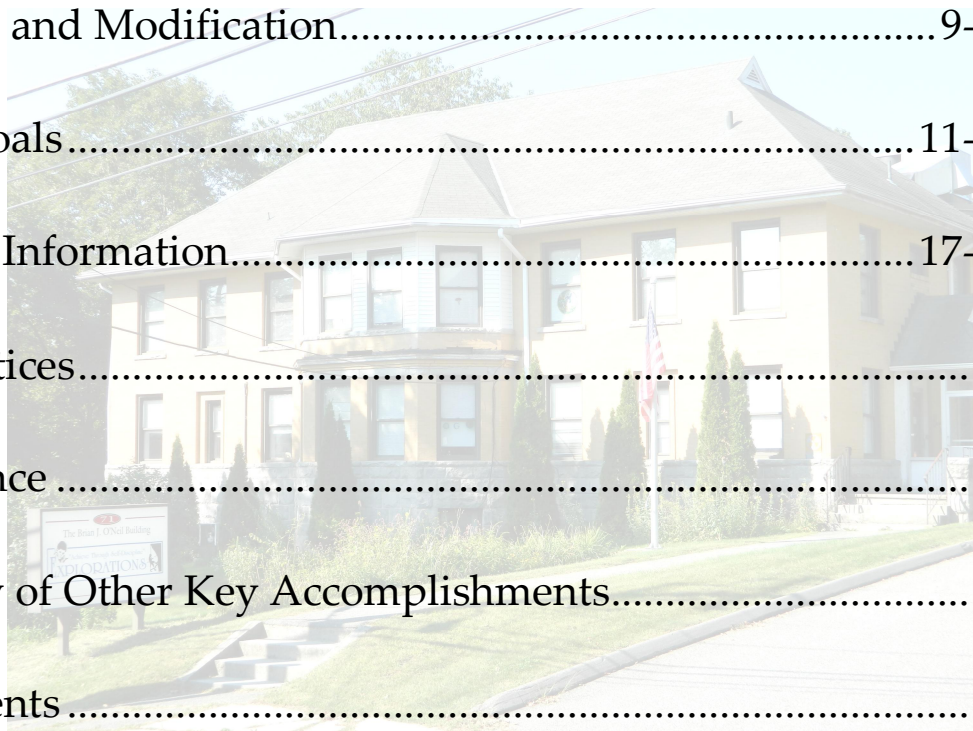
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## A Letter from the Director, Principal, and Governing Board Chair

September, 2014

Stefan Pryor, Commissioner  
Connecticut Department of Education

Dear Commissioner Pryor:

The 2013-2014 school year was one of transition for Explorations. In January of 2014 long time Executive Director/Principal Gail Srebnik retired and William Hallam stepped in to complete the school year. Before the beginning of this school year, the board appointed new administration to lead the school for the 2014-2015 school year.

We are very proud to say that we graduated our fifteenth senior class this past June and we have made positive strides in several areas. For the second year in a row, our outreach to local school districts has resulted in full enrollment for the beginning of the school year. While initially we were disappointed to be named a Focus School, we have embraced the opportunities that this designation has presented to the school: monies to improve technology, a School Governance council to work with the school Administration and funding to enhance programming aimed at improving student retention and attendance. The Focus School funding used in conjunction with other grants have allowed us to increase the number of computers in the building, enhance our server and wireless infrastructure and outfit three iPad carts for use by classroom teachers.

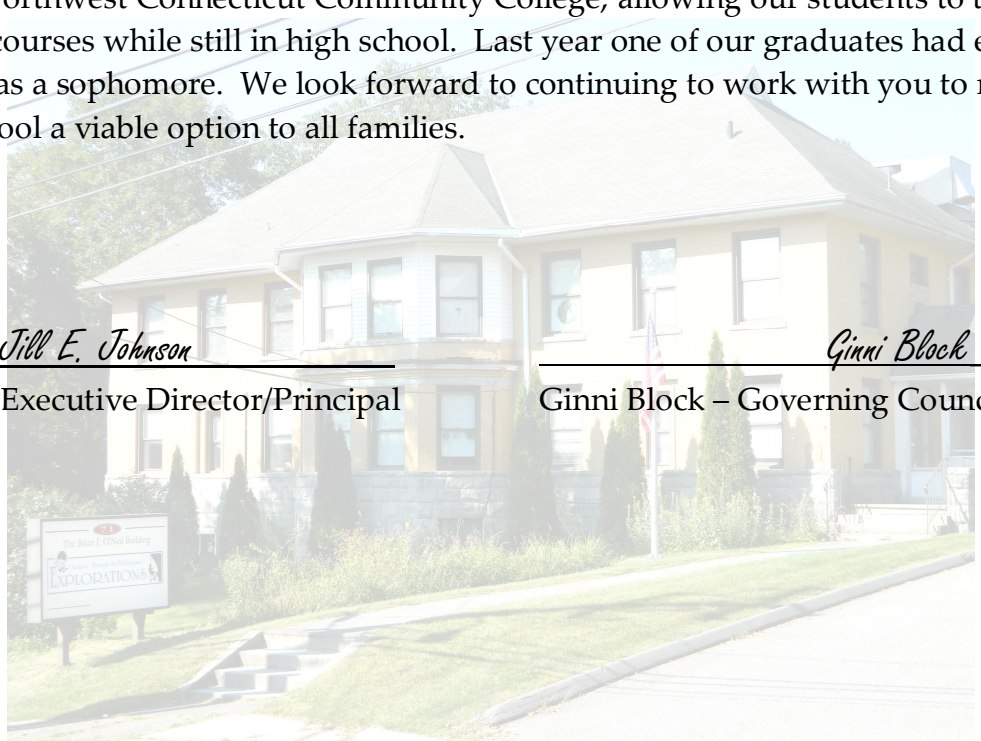
Each year we realize that the funding formula from the state does not cover the increasing costs associated with operating the school. One way of securing additional funding is to increase the number of students, however with part of our mission being to offer small class sizes and more of an individualized instruction, this causes us concern. For the 2014-2015 school year we have increased our numbers, however going forward we feel we are at full capacity for our program, staff and building. We are so fortunate to have incredibly supportive partners such as the Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut and Northwest Community Bank to help with capital purchases that are not part of our annual budget.

Being the only charter school in Litchfield County offers the challenges of being isolated from some of the conveniences available to our sister charter schools in larger urban settings. A major challenge we face is transportation to our students. A few years ago we encountered declining enrollment due to students not having transportation. While many of the districts that we draw students from provide transportation to students, our largest sending district does not. We now provide transportation to these students at a cost to the school of over \$40,000. We made this decision to assist the families in Litchfield, Thomaston, Morris and Torrington who needed the transportation in order to allow their child attend this "school of choice".

Despite the challenges we face, we focus on the positive. The number of students reaching Goal on the CAPT test continues to rise and our enrollment is the highest it has been in years. For the second year our students have made a strong showing at the Connecticut Student Film Festival in the History Short Documentary category. A group of students participated in the Music in Common Program and wrote, produced and performed an original piece of music and accompanying music video. At our June 20<sup>th</sup> graduation we were honored to have our founding Executive Director, MaryAnn Buchanan, as our guest speaker. She spoke about the ideals that brought her to create this school and how proud she is to see her legacy carried on.

Explorations offers opportunities to students from over fifteen towns in two counties. We continue to blend our strong academic curricula with our adventure education courses, our job-site program and our personal enrichment opportunities. In addition we are fortunate to continue our partnership program with Northwest Connecticut Community College, allowing our students to take advantage of college level courses while still in high school. Last year one of our graduates had enough courses to enter college as a sophomore. We look forward to continuing to work with you to make our small charter high school a viable option to all families.

Respectfully,



*Jill E. Johnson*

Jill E. Johnson – Executive Director/Principal

*Ginni Block*

Ginni Block – Governing Council Chairperson



## About Our School

### School Program

#### Description of student admissions process including deadlines

Explorations Charter School accepts applications throughout the school year and the summer. Prospective students are required to have an interview with the Executive Director / principal along with their parents. At this meeting, the policies of the school are reviewed and the school contract discussed. If there are 'spots' open after the first semester, any student on a waiting list is accepted, following our charter, which delineates towns to be pulled from first. In some cases, students are accepted at the start of a quarter if there is room and if they are currently maintaining passing grades.

#### Student recruitment methods

Explorations Charter School places ads in local newspapers and on various radio stations twice a year. In addition, we have created and sent out informational brochures. We have attended information sessions at area high schools when invited and we have made presentations in local schools to parents, students, and guidance departments.

#### Student transportation

Transportation remains a major issue for the school. Explorations' suffers as our rural location and our draw from 24 towns has no public transportation available to students. Students living in Winsted can take the Winsted school buses. Students from Region 1 may take the Oliver Wolcott Technical Bus and students from Northwest Region 7 are provided transportation to Northwest Region 7 High School. However, that accounts for one third to one half of our population each year. This lack of transportation prevents some families from being able to send their children to Explorations. This year, we provided a bus for students in Torrington, Litchfield, and Thomaston. This allowed us to add additional students who otherwise would not be able to attend Explorations, but it did come at a substantial cost to the school.

#### Our Facility

With the funding to renovate and expand our building, we have a modernized facility for our students. Previous grants permitted us to add additional space and allowed us to add an Art Room, a Science room, and an all-purpose area that was the result of an addition completed during the 2008-09 school year. We added an intercom system to increase security at our school. We are in the process of seeking a grant to renovate our front walkway to provide for more security and handicapped accessibility.

#### Our Uniqueness

Adventure Education continues to be an integral part of our program. Students joining staff on outdoor programs encourage the development of trust and caring that carry over into the academic classes. Helping students overcome fears and/or develop new abilities outdoors goes far in helping them develop pride and self-esteem. Our small class size also goes far in helping students develop confidence in their ability to learn and understand. Most classes are 15:1 (or less). Special education programs are tailored for individual needs with much success.

## Student Information 2013-14 School Year

83 students completed an application by October 1, 2013. The final June 2014 (left column) student body, shown below, came from 24 different high schools and towns.

Towns	Number of Students
Avon	2
Bantam	1
Barkhamsted	1
Collinsville	3
Canaan	1
Canton	7
Colebrook	1
East Canaan	1
East Hartland	1
Harwinton	1
Lakeville	1
Litchfield	1
Morris	1
Newington	1
New Hartford	2
Northfield	1
Plymouth	1
Riverton	1
Taconic	1
Thomaston	1
Torrington	40
Waterbury	1
Winchester	17
Wolcott	1

### Total Number of Applications Received for the School Lottery

**2013-14**

<b>Freshmen</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Sophomore</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Junior</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Senior</b>	<b>6</b>

**2014-15**

<b>Freshmen</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Sophomore</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Junior</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Senior</b>	<b>3</b>

### Total Number of Students on a Waiting List After the Lottery Period

**2013-14**

<b>Freshmen</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Sophomore</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Junior</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Senior</b>	<b>0</b>

**2014-15**

<b>Freshmen</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Sophomore</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Junior</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Senior</b>	<b>0</b>

Explorations Charter School does not typically have a waiting list - we did not on October 1, 2013. However, with the addition of freshmen our numbers are improving. After the October count and at the close of the first semester, we usually add students. Additionally, we often do not reach our full student enrollment or begin putting students on a waiting list until mid to late summer. Our count varies and over the school year and we worked with as many as 89 students, as they come in and then leave at different times in the school year. In terms of a lottery, we plan to have one as of May 1<sup>st</sup>, but have not held a formal lottery because we have had room for all students who applied in both 2013-14 and 2014-15.



# Curriculum Design and Instructional Method

## Brief Summary

The charter for Explorations was modified thirteen years ago to allow for seniors at the school. Recently, four year ago, we modified the charter again and added ninth grade students. This has helped us to be seen as a viable, four year high school choice to many whom had not previously considered us. The day is broken into seven periods at 46 minutes each. Special Education programs run on an inclusion model, with further remediation offered in the resource room and in specific classes.

The school's graduation requirements are consistent with state law. At minimum, all students must graduate with four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies (one half year of Civics), two years of science, one year of art, a half a credit of health, a full credit in Physical Education (via Adventure Education), and successful completion of Job Program / Friday Activities. Seniors must also complete a portfolio and 20 hours of community service. Juniors and Seniors are encouraged to take college courses through our partnership program with Northwest Connecticut Community College (NCCC) and all students must be in compliance with our 95/80 policy (attend school 95% of the time, pass 80% of their classes). Students failing to pass courses during the year have an opportunity to make up credits during summer school, held at Explorations.

Our curriculum continues to evolve and grow with our students and their needs. In the 2013-2014 school year, we continued our and yoga program, and added a film and fiction course and "Playshop" (building social skills through improvisation) during our Friday rotation schedule. Teachers continued to work with both formative and summative assessments to better serve the needs of our students and help to prepare students for both CAPT and Smarter Balanced assessments. All academic curriculum guides were expanded and continue to be adjusted to align with the Common Core standards. We also spend our first days assessing students' basic skills in Mathematics, Science, and Language Arts to better identify and evaluate their academic deficiencies. Currently, our core classes focus on the following skills:

1. **Language Arts proficiency** - Read closely to determine what the text says to logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text; determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas; analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text; interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the structure of texts; assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text; integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats; delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text; read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently at grade level.

2. **Mathematics proficiency** - Students are able to apply a variety of strategies and explain their reasoning in a variety of problem-solving situations; to use whole numbers, decimals and fractions to solve multi-step problems; to read and use instruments to compute areas of geometric shapes; to recognize relationships among common units of measure; to calculate averages; to select and interpret data from a variety of graphs; to find the probability of a simple event; to evaluate simple expressions; to solve and graph linear equations and systems of linear equations; and to graph points on coordinate axes; and be able to use inductive and deductive logic in problem solving and to prove mathematical statements. In addition to numeracy and operational proficiencies, we are working with students to reinforce their Standards of Mathematical Practice as outlined in the CCSS. These standards help students to know what to do with the information that they have, and how to use it to reinforce the learning of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.

3. **Science proficiency** - Students are able to apply knowledge, skills and reasoning abilities to interpret scientific and technical data from simple tables and to make inferences about outcomes of experimental procedures; to evaluate the appropriateness of the design of an experiment; to apply knowledge in interpreting information from text and graphs; follow precisely a complex multistep procedure when carrying out experiments, taking measurements, or performing technical tasks, attending to special cases or exceptions defined in the text; analyze the structure of the relationships among concepts in a text, including relationships among key terms (e.g., *force, friction, reaction force, energy*).g technical tasks, attending to special cases or exceptions defined in the text; translate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text into visual form (e.g., a table or chart) and translate information expressed visually or mathematically (e.g., in an equation) into words; and assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claim or a recommendation for solving a scientific or technical problem.

4. **Social proficiency** - Students are able to express themselves in public with all civilities present. Students are able to participate in a group activity in a contributing and supportive manner. Students are able to explore career options and develop a plan for post high school. Students are comfortable with their identity and show tolerance and acceptance for others. Students will mature and develop psychologically as they gain increased knowledge of the importance of an education.

## School Goals

*In the areas of:*

### I. Educational Progress of Students.

**Goal A:** Students will be monitored at data team meetings using benchmark assessment, curriculum data, and parent involvement.

**Measurable Objective A.1:** Students will show a 15% improvement on quarterly benchmark assessments.

**Measurement Tool:** Study Island Benchmark assessments.

**Benchmark:** 75% of the students will show improvement on benchmark assessments.

**Measurable Objective A.2:** A data team will be formed from existing staff to meet twice monthly.

**Measurement Tool:** Data reports will be generated and shared with administrators.

**Benchmark:** A minimum of 15 meetings with reports will be generated by data teams.

**Measurable Objective A.3:** Teachers will contact the parents of their advisory students twice a month.

**Measurement Tool:** Teacher recorded information documenting contact.

**Benchmark:** 100% of the teachers will make contact twice monthly.

**Progress in Meeting the Goal:** At the end of the 2013-14 school year, we found the use of Study Island to be both cumbersome and difficult to extrapolate meaningful data. The assessment tool no longer aligned to curriculum advances or requirements for high stakes (state) assessments, and the insistent nature of the data, as well as the time, taken to administer tests deterred from class time. Once again, we found that time for intensive data team discussions was limited - we were only able to meet eight time over the course of the year. **80% of our staff contacted parents on a bi-weekly basis.**

**Improvements Needed:** For next year, we still need to work on improving student performance towards reaching our benchmark goal. We will be looking toward using a different benchmark tool to replace Study Island. We will also need to create more opportunity to increase data team meeting frequency. Last, we need to create a more formal procedure for documenting parent contact.

**Modification in Goal/Objectives for the 2014-2015 School Year:** We will make the following changes for the 2014-15 school year:

- Set a new benchmark goal using a new assessment tool.
- Meet twice quarterly to discuss classroom data and data from benchmark assessments.
- Have 90% of staff contact parents on a bi-weekly basis.

**Goal B:** Students will achieve academic success as measured by state exams.

**Measurable Objective B1:** Students will demonstrate proficiency based CAPT testing in Reading, Writing, Science, and Mathematics.



**Measurement Tool:** Results from 2014 CAPT test.

**Benchmark:** 60% of students will meet or exceed a Proficient Level 3 on all CAPT tests; students taking 'college' exams will show improvement from their junior year tests.

**Measurable Objective B2:** Juniors retaking CAPT exams will demonstrate improvement.

**Measurement Tool:** Results from the 2014 CAPT.

**Benchmark:** 60% of students will show improvement on CAPT exams.

**Progress in Meeting the Goal:** Our CAPT scores did not reach the benchmark set (see below).

**CAPT 2013-2014 data for tenth graders:**

**Percent of Students Achieving Proficient on the CAPT**

	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Math</b>	46.2	50	59	46.7
<b>Science</b>	53.8	66.7	69	52.6
<b>Reading</b>	50	61.9	82	53.3
<b>Writing</b>	57.7	90.5	88	68.8

**Special Ed population of tenth graders – 26.3%**

2 out of 16 students who tested (12.5%) were Special Ed students. (Because of some Special Education Students' sending district exemptions, not all Special Education Students were tested.)

**Free/Reduced Lunch tenth graders – 31.6%**

5 out of 16 students who tested (31.3%) were either on free or reduced lunch.

**Tenth graders who scored Goal or Advanced on the CAPT**

	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Math</b>	11.5	20	24	26.7
<b>Science</b>	19.3	14.3	13	31.6
<b>Reading</b>	3.8	14.3	12	20
<b>Writing</b>	19.3	23.8	12	37.5

We require eleventh graders to retest if they did not score at a GOAL level. On the 2014 CAPT, 36.8% of juniors added a GOAL certificate to their existing results from the 2013 exam. Additionally, 52.3% of all Juniors who retested improved at least one test from the 2014 CAPT.

✿ Although some of the testing areas show a growth from one year to the next, we do not find this to be the most reliable report. Instead, we should be looking at each student as an individual, and discussing that one students' progress from one test year to the next is our best indicator of student achievement. We strive to utilize the results of individual student data in conjunction with discussion at our staff meetings to assess the level of a students' performance and what steps need to be taken to help them improve.

## Steps taken to assist students with declining scores

### Reading Comprehension:

- ⊗ Reading comprehension questions for all novels and short stories.
- ⊗ Appropriate strategies for reading comprehension (underline, read questions, eliminate answers).
- ⊗ CAPT Coach and Ladders to Success (Reading and Writing)
- ⊗ Use of Secondary Solutions lesson plans for novels (Common Core aligned assessments and tasks).

### Writing Mechanics:

- ⊗ CAPT Coach – Writing Mechanics
- ⊗ CAPT Coach and Ladders to Success (Writing)
- ⊗ Grammar Mini-Lessons (covering Capitalization, Mechanics, and Punctuation).
- ⊗ SMART Board editing (as a class) with student essays, writing prompts, and sample CAPT responses.
- ⊗ Use of school wide literacy assessments to measure fundamental skills.

During the 2011-2012 school year we began using Study Island, a web-based intervention and instructional program where students can work at their own pace and teachers guide students through the program. We used this program again in 2013-14 to assess students both in the beginning of the year and periodically throughout the school year. We used this program to set learning goals for the students and work with them on their individual needs. This program made the process of goal setting with the students and tracking their results far less labor intensive than the program we had previously used. This program was used in the areas of Math and Reading and Writing. Students, as well as the teacher, were able to track competencies in the various sub-sections of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and then see their progress when they took the next level of the benchmark weeks later. However, use of the program often up all of our computers and took a significant amount of time. We are in the process of finding a more streamlined approach to benchmark testing that will provide data in more domains and that can be used on iPads. We hope the new program will provide valuable data for staff and students.

**Improvements Needed:** While the scores on the CAPT were below our benchmark, we are realistic that the results may vary widely from year to year. It has been recognized that the CAPT results with our small population does not give an accurate picture of our yearly progress. Nevertheless, we continue to find better approaches to bridging the gaps in education that the majority of our students may have when they come to Explorations. We will continue to find areas to add remedial time, including in the general education classroom and on our Friday rotations.

**Modification in Goal/Objectives for the 2014-2015 School Year:** 60% of students will meet or exceed a Proficient Level 3 on the Science CAPT; 15% of juniors will show improvement. Once Smarter Balanced benchmarks have been set, we will incorporate that into our Goals/Objectives.

## II. Accomplishment of Mission, Purpose and Specialized Focus.

**Goal A:** Explorations students will strive to develop self-assuredness and a positive attitude toward becoming lifelong learners.

**Measurable Objective A.1:** Students will be involved in activities and courses that help to develop confidence and skills in getting answers to their questions.

**Measurement Tool:** Observations by staff members that document changes in student mannerisms and behaviors as well as anecdotal correspondences with parents about what they are now seeing in their child that differs from previous experiences in other schools.

**Benchmark:** All students will demonstrate their confidence about themselves and their learning by advocating for themselves and participating in all school activities.

**Measurable Objective A.2:** Students will participate in Adventure Education programs to develop self-assuredness.

**Measurement Tool:** Students will be evaluated on participation and cooperation in ten outdoor programs.

**Benchmark:** 85% of the students will attain passing grades above 80% in Adventure Education.

**Measurable Objective A.3:** Students will be in compliance with the school 80%/95% policy.

**Measurement Tool:** Reports cards and attendance records.

**Benchmark:** All students will be passing at least 80% of their courses and will present 95% of the time.

**Progress in Meeting the Goal:** Out of the entire student body, only ten students were in violation of the 80%/95% at the end of the year. 89.2% of the students were passing Adventure Education at the end of the year.

**Improvements Needed:** We need to ensure that parents are more aware of changes to state policy and we will look to build in supports for students who were in violation of the policy.

**Modification in Goal/Objective for the 2014-2015 School Year:** None needed.

**Goal B:** Explorations students will develop a healthy attitude toward their school, community, work, family, and most importantly to themselves.

**Measurable Objective B.1:** Students will be involved in career exploration as measured by positive responses in Career Cruising.

**Measurement Tool:** The career interest inventory and learning profile from Career Cruising

**Benchmark:** Students will be involved in career exploration, ten times a year, and will achieve positive responses from job-site mentors 90 % of the time.

**Measurable Objective B.2:** Students, and parents, will participate in fund raising activities to help raise funds for Cancer research, to add funds to our scholarship account, and to ease the burden for some students on meeting costs of extracurricular activities.

**Measurement Tool:** Class participation in fund raising is recorded by our bookkeeper.



**Benchmark:** 75% of students (with their parents) will help us help students in need of financial assistance to further their education and help us work globally to end Cancer.

**Progress in Meeting the Goal:** We have done a good job, overall, in developing a positive image of our students and school in our community. We had 55% participation in school fund raising both for charitable causes and class projects. Our participation in volunteer programs and our demonstration of a student body that helps each other is something we are very proud of. We raised funds for both the Susan G. Komen foundation and the Leukemia Foundation.

Our career exploration program was again successful and all of the students received excellent reviews from the places they worked at. We continued to work with non-profit groups who would accept small groups of students with staff to work on projects. These groups were helpful in providing job sites for our freshmen and sophomore classes.

**Improvement Needed:** None.

**Modification in Goal/Objectives for the 2013-14 School Year:** None.

### III. Efforts to Reduce Racial, Ethnic and Economic Isolation to Increase the Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the Student Body.

**Goal A:** To decrease racial, ethnic, and economic stereotyping and to increase respect for diversity as a whole. Measurable Objective A.1: Explorations will increase efforts to attract students of racial and ethnic diversity through marketing strategies tailored to neighborhoods with other identified cultures and races different from those currently represented in our student body.

**Measurement Tool:** Racial/Ethnic student Data – ED006C

**Benchmark:** 10% increase in the number of persons of different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds than those currently represented in our student body.

**Measurable Objective A.2:** Explorations will educate students to be accepting and aware of others of different racial, cultural and economic backgrounds.

**Measurement Tool:** All pupils will be involved in pre-and post-assessment using journals and class discussions.

**Benchmark:** We have experienced very few incidents involving stereotyping, and will strive to reduce the occurrences.

**Progress in Meeting the Goal:** We had no instances of stereotyping behavior among our students this past year. Among our 83 students in June 2014, our minority population was 9.6% of our total student population. This is a decrease of almost 1%. However, as of September 2014, our minority population is 18.1% - an increase of 8.6%.

**Improvements Needed:** Adding transportation did give students in the Torrington, Litchfield, and Thomaston areas greater access to our school. However, there is no transportation available for families wishing to have their children attend Explorations who live outside the transportation areas. The lack of transportation to charter schools continues to make it an option limited.

**Modification in Goal/Objectives for the 2014-2015 School Year:** None, as we are realistic that the towns we draw from also have a low minority population.

## Efforts to Effectively Attract, Enroll, and Retain Students from Among High Need Populations

### ***Students with a history of low academic performance***

Explorations Charter Schools' application asks for basic information as well as a student writing sample. After students are enrolled, we discuss their transcripts and test them to provide academic staff with an idea of what supports the student may need. We strive, through this process, to treat all students equally and the school ends up serving students of all abilities. We do not believe we need to change our admission or recruiting practices with this population, as our unique setting is often appealing to students who have struggled in larger public schools.

### ***Students who receive free or reduced priced lunches pursuant to federal laws and regulations***

In June 2014, 32% of our population qualified for free or reduced lunch. We are classified as a Title 1 school and Explorations Charter School does not believe it needs to change its admission or recruiting practices with this population.

### ***Students with a history of behavioral and social difficulties***

Explorations Charter School does not receive disciplinary reports on students before acceptance and we have little knowledge of our students' prior behavioral or social difficulties. However, we know anecdotally that we deal with a number of students with behavioral or social/emotional difficulty. We do our best to provide supports for these students, as the school does not employ a full-time social worker, guidance counselor, or psychologist. We work closely with a part-time counselor, who meets weekly with Special Education students and other students in crisis. Explorations Charter School does not believe it needs to change its admission or recruiting practices with this population.

### ***Students identified as requiring special education***

During the 2013-14 School year, 31% of students had an IEP and 11% of students had a 504; this is a total of 42% of students requiring special education. Our population is significantly higher than local and state averages. While this presents a challenge, we are happy to work with these students. Explorations Charter School does not believe it needs to change its admission or recruiting practices with this population.

## Financial Information for 2014-15 Fiscal Year

	<u>Jul '13 - Jun 14</u>	<u>Jul '14 - Jun 15</u>
<b>Ordinary Income/Expense</b>		
<b>Income</b>		
4030 · Pupil Services	233,693.00	250,000.00
4050 · State Per Pupil Allocat	840,000.00	946,000.00
4800 · Rental Income	2,000.00	2,000.00
4900 · Interest & Dividend Inc	45.00	10.00
<b>Total Income</b>	<u>1,075,738.00</u>	<u>1,198,010.00</u>
<b>Expense</b>		
8950 · New Intercom Purchase	5,000.00	
8101 · Budget Adjustment	-64,352.00	16,776.00
8750 · Technology		
8753 · Programs/Software	3,000.00	5,000.00
8751 · Materials	500.00	500.00
<b>Total 8750 · Technology</b>	<u>3,500.00</u>	<u>5,500.00</u>
8110 · Administrative Salaries & Wages		
<b>Total 8110 · Administrative Salaries &amp; Wages</b>	71,400.00	70,747.00
8120 · Certified Staff		
<b>Total 8120 · Certified Staff</b>	670,168.00	663,692.00
8150 · Custodian	23,100.00	30,000.00
8200 · Employee Benefits		
8201 · Health	80,000.00	75,000.00
8205 · SS & MC Employer Portion	27,372.00	25,000.00
8206 · State Unemployment Tax	5,500.00	10,455.00
<b>Total 8200 · Employee Benefits</b>	<u>112,872.00</u>	<u>110,455.00</u>
8300 · Purchased Prof & Tech Serv		
8320 · Contract Professional Serv		
8321 · Audit	7,600.00	7,800.00
8324 · Pupil Services	47,100.00	61,000.00
8325 · Substitute Teacher - Intern	6,000.00	13,000.00
8327 · Payroll Service & Admin Fees	2,300.00	2,740.00
8329 · Accounting & Bookkeeping	18,000.00	18,000.00
<b>Total 8320 · Contract Professional Serv</b>	<u>81,000.00</u>	<u>102,540.00</u>
8330 · 8330 Prof Technical Serv/Adv Ed	2,000.00	2,800.00
8340 · Student Activities		
8345 · Student Transportation	27,000.00	25,000.00



8342 · Yearbook	300.00	300.00
8343 · Field Trip	<u>5,000.00</u>	<u>5,000.00</u>
<b>Total 8340 · Student Activities</b>	<u>32,300.00</u>	<u>30,300.00</u>
<b>Total 8300 · Purchased Prof &amp; Tech Serv</b>	115,300.00	135,640.00
<b>8400 · Rent/Purch Prop.Service</b>		
8410 · Copy Machine Lease	4,500.00	5,500.00
<b>8450 · Repairs &amp; Maintenance</b>		
8452 · Elevator Maintenance	4,000.00	4,700.00
8454 · Snow Removal & Landscaping	3,000.00	4,200.00
8450 · Repairs & Maintenance - Other	<u>15,000.00</u>	<u>15,000.00</u>
<b>Total 8450 · Repairs &amp; Maintenance</b>	22,000.00	23,900.00
<b>8470 · Utilities</b>		
8471 · Heat & Hot Water Expense	7,000.00	12,500.00
8473 · Electricity	20,000.00	21,000.00
8474 · Sewer Usage & Water	1,500.00	4,500.00
8475 · Refuse Expense	<u>3,200.00</u>	<u>3,500.00</u>
<b>Total 8470 · Utilities</b>	<u>31,700.00</u>	<u>41,500.00</u>
<b>Total 8400 · Rent/Purch Prop.Service</b>	58,200.00	70,900.00
<b>8500 · Other Purchased Services</b>		
<b>8510 · Transportation Exp</b>		
1814 · New Vehicle Purchase		14,000.00
1813 · Registrations/Emissions	250.00	600.00
1812 · Repair & Maintenance	5,000.00	5,500.00
1811 · Gas	<u>5,750.00</u>	<u>7,000.00</u>
<b>Total 8510 · Transportation Exp</b>	11,000.00	27,100.00
8530 · Telephone/Communications	5,000.00	4,500.00
8540 · Website Design & Maintenance	600.00	2,000.00
<b>8590 · Other Purchased Services</b>		
8591 · Advertising	2,000.00	2,000.00
8592 · Insurance	36,000.00	36,000.00
8593 · Medical Supplies	<u>500.00</u>	<u>250.00</u>
<b>Total 8590 · Other Purchased Services</b>	<u>38,500.00</u>	<u>38,250.00</u>
<b>Total 8500 · Other Purchased Services</b>	55,100.00	71,850.00
<b>8600 · Supplies</b>		
8606 · Postage	700.00	700.00
8505 · Professional Development	1,500.00	1,000.00
8611 · Instructional Supplies	4,000.00	5,000.00

8612 · Administrative Supplies	2,000.00	1,500.00
8641 · Textbooks	2,000.00	1,000.00
8642 · Library Books	750.00	500.00
8660 · Dues & Subscriptions	500.00	750.00
8690 · Office Supplies & Other		
8691 · Finance Charges		1,000.00
8690 · Office Supplies & Other - Other	<u>6,000.00</u>	<u>5,500.00</u>
<b>Total 8690 · Office Supplies &amp; Other</b>	<u>6,000.00</u>	<u>6,500.00</u>

<b>Total 8600 · Supplies</b>	17,450.00	16,950.00
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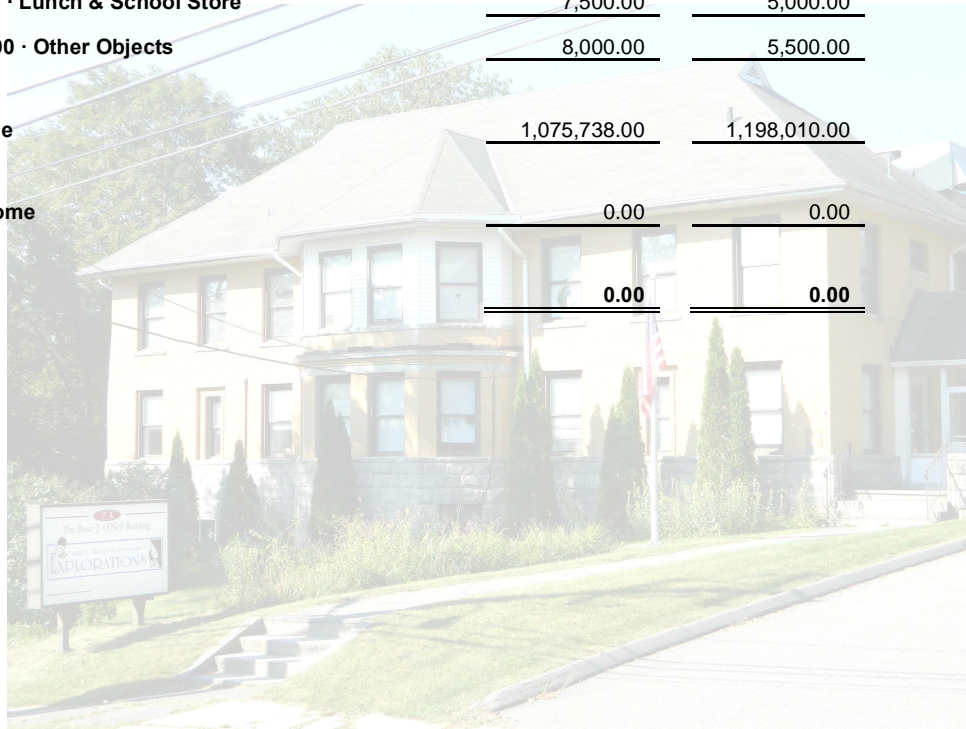
**8890 · Other Objects**

8891 · Miscellaneous	500.00	500.00
8893 · Lunch & School Store	<u>7,500.00</u>	<u>5,000.00</u>
<b>Total 8890 · Other Objects</b>	<u>8,000.00</u>	<u>5,500.00</u>

<b>Total Expense</b>	<u>1,075,738.00</u>	<u>1,198,010.00</u>
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<b>Net Ordinary Income</b>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
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<b>Net Income</b>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
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## Best Practices

### Monitoring, Accountability and Assessment

In successful schools, teaching and learning are continually adjusted on the basis of data collected through a variety of valid and reliable methods that indicate student progress and needs. The assessment results are interpreted and applied appropriately to improve individual student performance, the instructional program and curriculum.

#### Indicators

Explorations' works each year to find the best tools to assess our students. We accept students from over five 20 different towns and we find that a transcript does not tell the entire story. It is not unusual for us to find a student who has 'credit' in a higher math class but cannot do, what we consider, basic mathematical operations. Therefore, we use a variety of valid and reliable assessments, which are free from cultural, racial, and gender bias, are used to evaluate student performance.

Study Island online assessment and instruction program provide detailed reports for our staff. The information gained from these reports are evaluated first by a small data team and then shared with the entire staff. However, we will be finding an alternate assessment tool for the 2014-15 school year.

Scheduling changes are not uncommon and due to our relatively small size we willingly will generate a new class for remedial help when needed. In addition, our high special education population is driven by IEPs that once received by us we are able to make appropriate adjustments to schedules and classes. All IEPs have monitoring built into them. Staff is informed of needed accommodations and all special education students go through our assessment programs as well.

Connecticut Core Standards are aligned with our curriculum and drive instruction. In addition, we have our own developed assessments that are used in individual classes approximately every four weeks. Initially, we assess all incoming students at the start of the school year. We hold two and a half days of orientation and during that time we have students assessed in reading, writing and mathematics.

We meet weekly for two hours after school and devote half the time to reviewing data that each staff member supplies on students they teach. This material is then synthesized and attention is focused on what modifications can be done to assist identified students.

Students are assigned advisors at the start of the school year. This advisor is responsible for contacting student's home on a minimum of twice a month. Parents are also encouraged to attend evening meetings at the school where information is provided on academic initiatives and other topics. We share information with students, in private, on how they are progressing. Often students will approach the Principal for an update on their progress. Since we use an online grade-book it is easy to provide accurate information fairly quickly.

Though our budget makes it difficult for us to hire 'experts' for professional development, we take advantage of as many 'free' offerings we hear about at our local RESC and the SDE.



## Governance

### Governing Board Meetings held in 2013-14

Meetings were held on the second Wednesday each month.

### Summary of Major Policy Decisions

Throughout the year the Governing Council discussed a few topics. These included adding a bus to provide more transportation and updates to medical policies.

The school budget for 2013-14 was presented by the Finance committee to the Governing Council at the June 2013 meeting. The budget was accepted and seconded.

The budget for 2014-2015 school year was presented at the August 2014 meeting and accepted.

### Summary of Major Policy Decisions

- ⊙ Reviewed school salaries
- ⊙ Reviewed and approved 2012-13 Annual Report
- ⊙ Approved monthly budgetary changes
- ⊙ Reviewed school audit and made suggested policy corrections
- ⊙ Reviewed discipline policies and referrals



**Adventure Education**



**Environmental Concerns Club  
(ECC)**

## Summary of Other Key Accomplishments

### ⤴ **Impact on Local Districts (Partnerships with schools in/out of district)**

- ⤴ We have always had a good working relationship with all the schools and districts that have students attending Explorations.
- ⤴ In the case of a special education student coming to Explorations, we coordinate to guarantee that all services are delivered with the special education contact from each district.

### ⤴ **School Accomplishments**

- ⤴ Students worked to fund raise for their prom, senior trip, and senior picnic, including bake sales and other fundraising activities.
- ⤴ Staff continued to refine our data team work and everyone participated in workshops as needed.
- ⤴ Explorations hosted an open house in May 2014.
- ⤴ The governing council is active and continues to grow.

### ⤴ **Graduate Follow Up**

- ⤴ We follow-up on graduates and include that information with our annual report.

### ⤴ **Parents are very involved at Explorations.**

- ⤴ We have parent participation in our outdoor adventure education program as well as volunteers to help out with clerical work.
- ⤴ In addition, parents donate paper goods throughout the school year to help us stretch our operating budget.
- ⤴ Parent attendance at monthly meetings increased by 400% in 2013-2014 over 2012-2013.

### ⤴ **Computer/Technology Resources**

- ⤴ We utilized two grants, one from the state and one from the Draper Foundation, to purchase iPads for staff and students, to upgrade technology infrastructure, and to add an additional computer lab. The upgrades should be finished by December 2014.

### ⤴ **Summer School Programs**

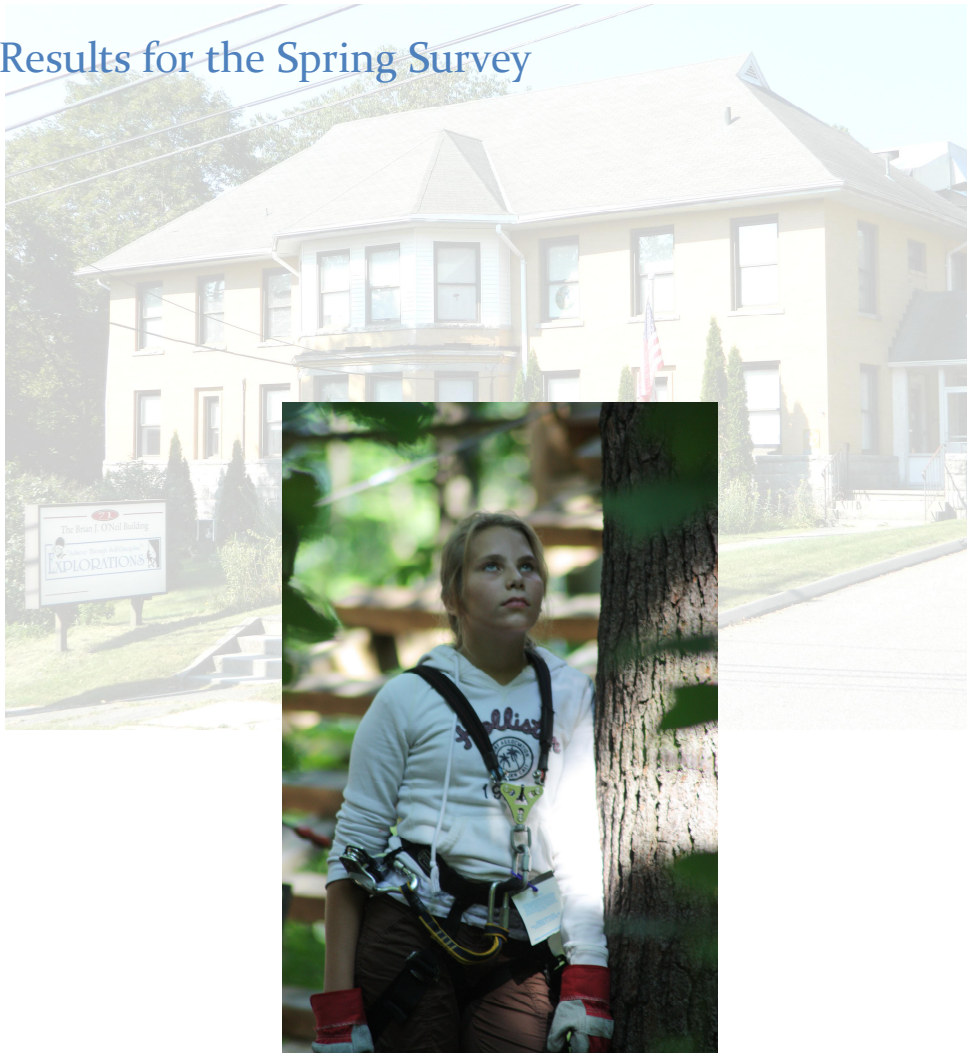
- ⤴ We again ran a summer school program that aided students not only from our school but from other high schools in earning credit for classes they have not passed (as long as the failing grade was no more than 15 points below the school's passing grade).
- ⤴ In addition, we provided remedial instruction to Special education students requiring yearlong intervention.

### ⤴ **Parent and Student Satisfaction**

- ⤴ Parents and students continuously show their satisfaction with Explorations by donating time to projects and by sending emails and letters of support and praise.
- ⤴ Results from our parent survey, used for SEED, were positive (see in attachments).

## Attachments

1. Explorations Graduates – June 2014
2. Student Spotlight – June 2014
3. School Recognition from the Thomaston Opera House
4. Staff and Student Volunteers at Local Food Drive
5. Parent Results for the Spring Survey





## 1. Explorations Graduates – June 2014

# Explorations graduates setting big goals

BY ABBY MACE  
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

TORRINGTON — While Explorations Charter School valedictorian Tanner Schuler has the capability to pursue any academic subject, he's had his heart set on one mission since grade school: cancer research.

Schuler was one of 16 students who graduated from Explorations Friday night at UConn's Torrington campus.

The East Canaan native recalls being in third or fourth grade when a commercial for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, a leader in child-

See **EXPLORATIONS**, Page 3B



Explorations Charter School graduate Tanner Schuler gives his valedictory address during graduation ceremonies Friday at the UConn-Torrington campus.

JIM SHANNON  
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

## EXPLORATIONS: Grads bond with alumni

Continued from 1B

hood cancer treatment, captured his attention.

Seeing children his own age suffer from cancer prompted Schuler to take action. He donated \$50 of his birthday money, he said, and vowed to one day work toward a cure.

"It breaks my heart every time I see someone with cancer," Schuler, now 17, said. "I want to take away its pain and the emotional and financial burdens."

Schuler will attend Houghton College in Houghton, N.Y., in the fall as a part of the science honors program.

Explorations students, however, are more like family members than classmates — a relationship that also holds true to alumni. Jeffery Sesko of Winsted, a Chief Petty Officer in Afghanistan, came back to give the graduates of his alma mater official permission to turn their tassels.

Before Sesko returned from the war, he mailed the American flag that his unit had used overseas to Explorations. "Explorations had always supported my military side, and I wanted to share that side of me with them," he said.

Salutatorian Brianna Bachman addressed her class on the stage of her future college's auditorium, UConn-Torrington. Like Schuler, she aims to make a



JIM SHANNON REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

Mary Ann Buchanan, Explorations founding executive director, gives the commencement speaker address during graduation ceremonies Friday at the UConn-Torrington campus.

career of helping others, though as a police officer or paralegal.

At 17, she said she's already had experience interacting with diverse types of people at Explorations that no school lecture or textbook can provide. The school's method of putting students of all academic abilities and

"walks of life" has taught her to befriend those who are completely different from herself.

"I've had no choice but to be friends with these people, but it definitely changed my idea of stereotypes," Bachman said. "Some students may need more attention, but they aren't any different from

us. Everyone should be treated equally."

As intimidating as conducting cancer research may be, Schuler will take his own advice — and the advice of the school's founder, Mary Ann Buchanan — set goals. Big goals.

"Dream big and shoot for the moon," he said.



## 2. Student Spotlight – June 2014



### Tanner Schuler

#### **Explorations Charter School, Winsted**

**Destination:** Houghton College in Houghton, New York

**Intended major:** Cellular and molecular biology; math

**Career goal:** Cancer research

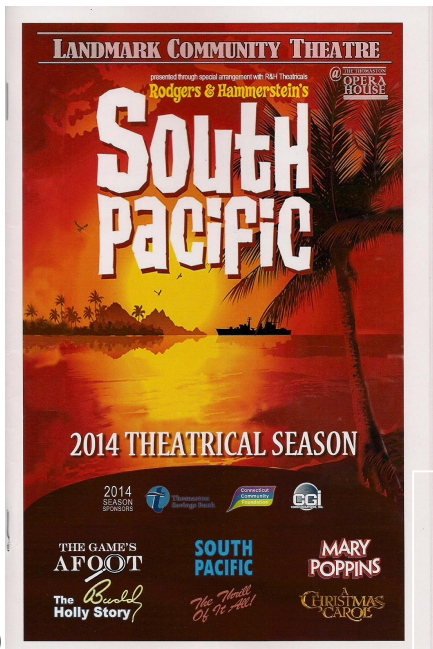
**Parents:** Jeffrey and Shelley Schuler of Canaan

**Secret to success:** “Work hard, and everything will happen for the best. I wouldn’t be where I am today without the support from my friends, my family and even my teachers. (Explorations) is like a family.”

**What can we expect from your generation?** “We can communicate faster and with people around the world. Through technology, we are creating opportunities we would never have otherwise.”



### 3. School Recognition from the Thomaston Opera House



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#### WHO'S WHO

their after school sites as well as wearing a few other hats in the program. She has been involved in theater most of her life on stage and behind the scenes. She was most recently seen here at the Thomaston Opera House in 'The Game's Afoot' (Daria Chase), 'Miracle on 34th Street' (Doris Walker), and in Rumors (Chris Gorman). She also worked as deck captain for 'Young Frankenstein' and as crew for 'Les Miserables'. This is her first time performing in a musical in almost 10 years, but she is loving every minute of getting back into the musical aspects of theater. "Thank you to the wonderful cast and crew of this show. You have all made my musical return such a joy. Also, thank you Peter for sharing this experience with me and always being my support on and off stage."

**CRISTIN TILLINGHAST**, (Nellie Forbush) - is thrilled to be back on the boards at LCT in one of her favorite roles! A few fun facts: At LCT The King And I (Anna), **BROADWAY:**By Jeeves, (directed by Alan Ayckbourn). **NATIONAL TOURS:** The Phantom of the Opera, (Christine Daae, directed by Hal Prince). **NEW YORK:**Company, (Amy), at

the Lucille Lortel Theatre. Favorite **REGIONAL** roles: The Sound of Music (Maria); Thoroughly Modern Millie (Miss Dorothy); Oklahoma(Laurey, with Rue McClanahan); Cinderella(Cinderella), Into The Woods(Cinderella); 1776 (Martha Jefferson); Little Shop of Horrors (Audrey). **TV& FILM:** Boston Legal, The Bold and the Beautiful, The Tonight Show, All My Children, National Commercials, and The Stepford Wives, (directed by Frank Oz). Mrs. Tillinghast now happily resides in Connecticut and enjoys teaching Voice and Musical Theatre in her Voice Studio, visit: [www.cmtvoicestudio.com](http://www.cmtvoicestudio.com).

Many thanks to this great cast and crew, and a special thank you to my amazing husband who fills my heart every day and truly is the most "Wonderful Guy"!

**BRIAN VALLETTA** (Sailor) Of course I want to thank everyone involved with my first production for helping me along the way! Previous credits include: Tony & Tina's Italian Wedding (Michael Just) Seven Angels Theater. Love ya Mom, Dad, Kimberly, and Tisha and a thank you to Jimmy D!

#### SPECIAL THANKS

Landmark would like to thank The First Congregational Church & Covenant Church of Thomaston

Our gratitude and compliments to our volunteer scenic painters of Fine Arts Connections

Lisa Cherrie Photography

Staff & Students of Explorations School and Devereux School

Special acknowledgement to the cast, crew & volunteers for donating their time towards all aspects of this theatrical production.

To all who have assisted in our production of "South Pacific" after this program went to print - THANK YOU!



## 4. Staff and Student Volunteers at Local Food Drive

# OFFERING A FREE LUNCH



Volunteers Hannah Russo, left, of Thomaston, and Adam LaMothe arrive back at Coe Memorial Park in Torrington on Monday. Education Connection, in collaboration with End Hunger Connecticut, Connecticut Action for Healthy Kids and the Connecticut No Kid Hungry campaign, hosted a Volunteer Blitz Day to kick off its free Summer Food Program. In Torrington, every weekday from June 23 through Aug. 15, all children ages 18 and under are invited to receive a free healthy meal at either Coe Park or Vogel-Wetmore School.

## City touts summer food plan for kids

BY ABBY MACE  
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

TORRINGTON — Volunteers sporting orange-and-green T-shirts toured the city Monday to personally invite children 18 and under to receive free lunches this summer.

They gathered in Coe Memorial Park before partaking in the city's first "Blitz

Day" — an event designed to increase participation in the federally funded Summer Food Program.

"By sending this information right to them, it's like an invitation. It says, 'You are welcome,'" Mayor Elinor C. Carbone said. She thanked volunteers, as well as End Hunger Connecticut, Education Connection, Connecticut Action for Healthy Kids and

No Kid Hungry Connecticut for their participation.

Volunteers then headed to residential, school and business zones to pass out goody bags filled with bookmarks, business cards and posters promoting the program.

This summer, Torrington will offer meals featuring sandwiches, salads, fruits and milk to all children and teens Monday through Fri-

day, from June 23 through Aug. 15. Meals will be served at Coe Memorial Park from 11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. and at Vogel-Wetmore School from noon to 12:30 p.m.

Although the program is in its 10th year, Dawn Crecco of End Hunger Connecticut said that only one in four students statewide who participate in

See PROGRAM, Page 4B



Genevieve Caron, right, child nutrition coordinator, talks with Sabrina Delvalle of Philadelphia at Coe Memorial Park in Torrington on Monday. Education Connection, in collaboration with End Hunger Connecticut, Connecticut Action for Healthy Kids and the Connecticut No Kid Hungry campaign, hosted a Volunteer Blitz Day to kick off its free Summer Food Program.

## PROGRAM: Meals for children

Continued from 1B

free and reduced-price meal programs during the school year use the summer program. She said that many are unaware that there are over 400 locations in Connecticut where all children can get a free meal.

In Torrington, nearly half — 48.4 percent — of students

event marked the second of nine Blitz Days to promote Summer Food Programs across the state.

"In the past, we were more limited in our advertising," said Abby Peklo of Education Connection, the organization that prepares the meals.

"We relied on word of mouth to get the word out, so the participation would in-

group of 11 students to participate in Blitz Day. As a Torrington resident and a teacher in a school where around 40 percent of its students are eligible for free or reduced meals, she said, access to nutritious food for kids and teens is important.

"Hunger doesn't end with summer vacation," she said. Waterbury, Naugatuck and

## 5. Staff and Student Volunteers at Local Food Drive

### **1. Overall, I am pleased with contact from Explorations from:**

	Teachers / Advisors	Administrators	Nurse	Front Office	Total Respondents
Strongly Agree	80.49% 33	70.73% 29	85.37% 35	70.73% 29	41
Agree	62.50% 15	66.67% 16	41.67% 10	58.33% 14	24
Disagree	75.00% 3	50.00% 2	0.00% 0	25.00% 1	4
Strongly Disagree	33.33% 1	0.00% 0	33.33% 1	33.33% 1	3
N/A	0.00% 0	25.00% 1	75.00% 3	50.00% 2	4

### **2. I know how my child is doing in school, based on contacts, before receiving progress reports and report cards.**

Strongly Agree	52.94% 27
Agree	35.29% 18
Disagree	9.80% 5
Strongly Disagree	1.96% 1
Total Respondents: 51	

### **3. I am comfortable contacting the following people at Explorations:**

Strongly Agree	90.48%	83.33%	97.62%	88.10%	
	38	35	41	37	42
ó					
Agree	75.00%	93.75%	43.75%	62.50%	16
	12	15	7	10	
ó					
Disagree	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	50.00%	2
	1	1	0	1	
ó					
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0
	0	0	0	0	
ó					
N/A	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	66.67%	3
	0	0	2	2	

### **4. I am treated with respect by the following people at Explorations:**

6.

Strongly Agree	95.35%	86.05%	95.35%	86.05%	
	41	37	41	37	43
ó					
Agree	75.00%	91.67%	58.33%	91.67%	12
	9	11	7	11	
ó					
Disagree	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1
	1	1	0	0	
ó					
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0
	0	0	0	0	
ó					
N/A	0.00%	33.33%	100.00%	33.33%	3
	0	1	3	1	



**5. I am satisfied with the response I get when I contact Explorations school with questions or concerns.**

Strongly Agree	70.59%	36
ó Agree	25.49%	13
ó Disagree	5.88%	3
ó Strongly Disagree	3.92%	2
ó N/A	0.00%	0

**6. My child's grades are mostly in this range...**

A	13.73%	7
ó B	43.14%	22
ó C	39.22%	20
ó D	15.69%	8
ó F	7.84%	4

I Do Not Know 1.96%

## **7. What is the gender of your child? (You can select more than one.)**

Answer Choices –	Responses –
–	54.90%
Male	28
–	49.02%
Female	25

Total Respondents: 51

## **7. 8. What grade is your child in? (You can select more than one.)**

Answer Choices –	Responses –
–	23.53%
9th	12
–	19.61%
10th	10
–	39.22%
11th	20
–	23.53%
12th	12

## **9. Have you attended any of the following this year?**

	Yes –	No –	Total Respondents –
–	44.68%	55.32%	
Open House	21	26	47
–	51.02%	48.98%	
Parent Meetings	25	24	49
–	58.70%	41.30%	
Parent / Teacher Conferences	27	19	46
–	5.26%	94.74%	
Field Trips (including Adventure Education)	2	36	38
–	10.26%	89.74%	
Fundraisers	4	35	39