

CONNECTIONS

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Fourth-Graders Prepare for Carnegie Hall Debut in May



Fourth-graders from East Hartford and Coventry recently practiced music that they will perform together with thousands of students at New York City's iconic arts venue, Carnegie Hall.

When May 22nd rolls around this year, it promises to be a day like no other for dozens of Coventry and East Hartford fourth-graders, who will have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to sing and perform at New York City's world-famous Carnegie Hall.

"I think it's really fun and I'm very excited about it," said Coventry fourth-grader Kaitlyn, who, like most of her Coventry and East Hartford peers, has never been to The Big Apple. "When we get to New York City, I think I'm going to see some pretty tall buildings."

Kaitlyn's favorite piece of music from among the seven songs she is practicing for her Carnegie Hall debut? "I really like the 'New World Symphony.' I think it sounds pretty," she said.

Thanks to an EASTCONN Interdistrict Grant called "Making Waves: Optics and Acoustics," 140 students from Coventry's G.H. Robertson Elementary School and East Hartford's O'Connell School have been working together to learn how to read music, practice and play a soprano recorder, as they prepare to perform seven songs, ranging from classical to folk, along with 2,500 New York City-area fourth- and fifth-graders at Carnegie Hall. The students will perform from their seats, while a full orchestra accompanies them onstage.

"We were able to include Coventry and East Hartford students in this unique music program with a trip to New York City because they were already using soprano recorders as part of their fourth-grade curriculum, and they were also participating

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Killingly High School's Advanced Placement Biology students prepared to look through one of their laboratory microscopes.

AP Programs Flourishing in Three NE CT High Schools

Advanced Placement (AP) programs are thriving at three northeastern Connecticut high schools, where concerted efforts to expand student access to and success in AP classes are meeting with success.

Two of those schools – Killingly High School and Region 8's RHAM High School – are among 18 Connecticut schools recently named to the AP Honor Roll by the College Board's 10th Annual AP Report to the Nation.

That same report ranked Connecticut first in the country for growth on AP exams, both in participation and student performance between 2003 and 2013.

Colchester's Bacon Academy, which was named to the College Board's AP Honor Roll in 2012, joins Killingly and RHAM as being among the area high schools whose AP programs are flourishing, according to EASTCONN's Helen Weingart.

"All three of these high schools deserve recognition for their AP programs," Weingart said. "By broadening student access and support, creating an environment of positive expectation among students, and by offering targeted professional learning to pre-AP and AP teachers, students and teachers are better prepared for the rigors of AP classes and testing," she said.

Killingly and Bacon Academy participated in EASTCONN's Project Opening Doors (POD) AP program, which offered AP preparation and support to participating schools, students

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in EASTCONN's Interdistrict Grant, 'Making Waves: Optics and Acoustics,' which incorporates themes of music, science and sound," said EASTCONN staff developer/science coordinator Nancy Magnani, who facilitates the grant.

"That focus allowed us to seamlessly add our students to Carnegie Hall's 'Link Up' program, a wonderful, annual arts outreach program for students in grades 3-5," she said.

All year, the EASTCONN Interdistrict Grant has been exploring existing fourth-grade strands that include reading music and playing a recorder, along with the science and engineering behind skyscrapers, while also introducing students to the basic science of sound waves, Magnani said.

"It's a lot to learn, but it's a wonderful opportunity for both urban- and rural-based students, since this gives them a chance to work together on science concepts and music, and then travel to a big city," Magnani said, "where they'll have a rare cultural experience at Carnegie Hall. All the while, they are forging new peer connections and perspectives."

"It's really opened my students' eyes, to learn more about what's out there and what lies beyond the walls of Coventry,"

— Jim Dzwonchyk, Coventry fourth-grade teacher

"I'm having a great time," said Emily, a Coventry fourth-grader, following a recent practice session with O'Connell students at her school, G.H. Robertson Elementary. "I'm really excited to be going to New York City and to be participating in such a great event with my friends."

Matt, a fellow classmate, said, "Today was the first time I met the kids [from East Hartford] and it was fun. I've never been to New York City. On my recorder now, I can make my baby brother go to sleep." Matt has been practicing at home.

Gabrielle, from East Hartford's O'Connell, said, "I really loved it [practicing with students at G.H. Robinson]. I'm also really happy about going to New York City."

It's hard to decide who's more enthusiastic about the upcoming trip and performance: the students or the teachers.

"I'm so excited! And the kids are excited, too!" said Coventry fourth-grade teacher Michelle Wade.

"My students love the hands-on activities and music that go with this program," said Mark Weaver, a fourth-grade teacher from O'Connell. "They've been practicing, too. They have no problem getting right in there and getting to know the Coventry students."

"It's really opened my students' eyes, to learn more about what's out there and what lies beyond the walls of Coventry," said Coventry fourth-grade teacher, Jim Dzwonchyk. "I just want them to love this opportunity and I know they'll benefit from it."

The Savings Bank of Manchester has underwritten the Coventry students' travel expenses, while East Hartford's travel costs have been paid by the East Hartford Fine Arts Commission and the local Rotary Club.

Friends and family can attend the students' pre-Carnegie Hall performance on Thursday, May 1st at Coventry High School.

To learn more, contact EASTCONN's Nancy Magnani at nmagnani@eastconn.org, or reach her at 860-455-0707.

CABE Awards Presented



During a recent EASTCONN Executive Board meeting, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) President Richard Murray (far left) presented EASTCONN Communications staff, as well as EASTCONN's Executive Director Paula M. Colen (second from left) and Executive Board Chairman Herb Arico (center) with several awards from CABE's 38th Annual Awards of Excellence for Educational Communications Contest.



2 ACT Videos in DMV Top 10



Two ACT student videos are among the finalists in a Connecticut DMV contest promoting safe teen driving habits. Depicted are ACT students whose videos are in the Top 10: front row, l. to r., Eric Long, Danielle Wilson, Karlyle Palmer and Graham Frassinelli; back row, l. to r., Philip Chovnick, Tyler Mainville, Gage Stone-Baker, Elizabeth Keefe and David Nilson. Not Pictured, Emily Chromik. The DMV will announce the winners this month.

**View the EASTCONN Events Calendar
at www.eastconn.org**

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Professional Notes



Gozemba

Diane Gozemba, EASTCONN's Assistant Director of Early Childhood, has been appointed to the Connecticut Legislature's Head Start Advisory Committee, effective immediately. Gozemba directs EASTCONN's Early Head Start and Head Start programs in northeastern Connecticut.

Five of EASTCONN's Psychological and Behavioral Consultation Services (PBCS) staff presented and co-presented papers and posters with colleagues at the National Association of School Psychologists during its National Conference in Washington, D.C., in February, including:



Stein

PBCS Department Coordinator **Ravit Stein**, Ph.D., BCBA-D, co-presented "Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Interventions: Best Practices in Progress Monitoring."



Jaffery

PBCS Educational/Behavioral Consultant **Rose Jaffery**, Ph.D, BCBA-D, presented "Home-school communication for students with autism using Direct Behavior Rating."



Collier-Meek

PBCS Educational/Behavioral Consultant **Melissa Collier-Meek**, Ph.D., co-presented "Providing implementation support to teachers in a multi-tiered framework," as well as "Research-based strategies to assess and promote educators' intervention implementation," and a poster, "Supporting parents to implement student interventions."



Johnson

PBCS Doctoral Intern **Austin Johnson**, M.A., joined Collier-Meek to present "Is performance feedback an evidence-based practice? A review of research." Johnson also co-presented "Reliability of time-sampling data using multiple methods and targets."



Gallucci

PBCS Doctoral Intern **Jennifer Gallucci**, M.A., co-presented "Examining the promise of computer-based implementation planning: A pilot study."

Killingly's Richard Murray Is CABE's New President



Richard Murray recently stood near EASTCONN's awards wall.

In 2003, when Richard Murray was appointed to fill a vacant seat on the Killingly Board of Education, he had no idea what he was getting himself into.

"As a volunteer in my children's classrooms, I had a general interest in education," Murray said recently. "But then I realized I'd only been to one board meeting in my life and I was in a bit of a panic."

Murray said all he knew for certain was that he wanted to do a good job representing students and his community.

"But I didn't know how to do that until I found CABE [the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education]," Murray said. "I was able to take advantage of the incredible resources and professional learning they provide to board members and superintendents, and I have been a devoted advocate of education and CABE ever since."

Today, Murray is President of CABE, the first from northeastern Connecticut since 1977. He was sworn in last fall. He is still on the Killingly Board of Education.

"CABE is very lucky to have Richard as our president," said CABE Executive Director Robert Rader. "He is thoughtful, committed and caring about our students and public education. He is dedicated to CABE and travels great distances to attend meetings, speak at legislative hearings and lead the work of our board. He is a terrific role model for boards of education across the state and nationally."

As CABE president, Murray's days are remarkably variable, but with a single theme: to advocate for improved educational outcomes for all students. In his travels, board members from across the state have identified a few common concerns, including Common Core Standards, teacher evaluation and special education funding.

But as Murray puts it, he is one of the last people one might expect to be president of CABE.

"I was a high school drop-out," he said. "Back in the '70s ... I was completely directionless. So I dropped out and hitchhiked to California, which seemed like a good idea at the time. But I paid a steep price, with low-paying, undesirable, crummy jobs, working with unkind people. I talk to kids about this. I want them to know there's hope and that the arc of my life is proof." He later earned a degree.

Among Murray's objectives is helping boards better serve both the urban poor and the rural poor, the latter of

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and teachers. POD's funding ended last year, but that hasn't slowed Killingly or Bacon Academy's commitment to AP learning. Weingart coordinated EASTCONN's POD program at Killingly and Bacon Academy.

"The impact of POD will be felt for years to come," said Killingly High School Director of School Counseling and AP Coordinator Kevin Marcoux. "The guidance and direction [POD] gave us was outstanding. Our results speak for themselves ... POD deserves much of the credit for guiding us in the proper direction and supporting us through the process."

Killingly created a long-term AP plan five years ago, aimed at increasing AP enrollments and passing percentages.

"It was important for us to open opportunities to a much more diverse population of students," Marcoux said. "Through the efforts of many people, that has become a reality. Our entire faculty had to be part of this process and they embraced it 100%."

In 2008, 16 Killingly students took AP exams and 37.5% passed. In 2013, 141 students took AP exams and 71% passed. Killingly requires every AP student to take the AP test. "We are very proud of the great work our teachers are doing and the results that our kids are showing on these exams," Marcoux said.

At Bacon Academy, the total number of AP exams administered grew from 57 in 2008 to 329 in 2013, said Principal Mark Ambruso, who added that Bacon had surpassed POD's goals for achieving passing scores every year, which also led to Bacon Academy's being named to the College Board's AP Honor Roll in 2012.

Continued next column

"Project Opening Doors is the best thing that has happened to Bacon Academy academics in 35 years," Ambruso said. "Students, parents and teachers appreciate increased access to the AP program. With recent graduates reporting back the positive results of the AP program on their confidence and academic success, we have no doubt that the AP program will continue to provide lasting benefits to Bacon Academy students and graduates."

"Bacon Academy and the 19 teachers who instruct our AP courses are deeply committed to expanding the opportunities for all students who desire the challenge of college-level study," Ambruso said. "The ultimate goal is for every graduating senior to have taken an AP course ..."

"Once reserved for the academic elite, [Bacon Academy's] AP program has reshaped the attitudes of teachers and students alike with our 'open-door policy,'" he said.

RHAM's district-wide AP expansion plan started several years ago, when RHAM began to offer free PSAT tests to its students during the school day. As a result, teachers were able to identify and recruit more pre-AP and AP students, said RHAM High School Principal Scott Leslie.

"We've made a lot of scheduling shifts to provide additional AP sections," Leslie said. "Our plan is to make AP learning opportunities more and more available to students. And there is no question that our AP program's success comes not just from our students, but also from the inspiration and hard work of our teachers."

Between 2008 and 2013, the number of RHAM students taking AP exams jumped from 112 to 177, and the total number of AP tests taken rose from 181 to 307. Since 2008, the average percentage of RHAM students with AP scores of 3 or higher has been consistently around 95 percent.

RHAM's AP Statistics and AP Calculus BC teacher Shaun Keane, who participated in teacher training through POD several years ago, praised RHAM teachers who help prepare students for the demands of AP courses. RHAM was not a POD school.

"The success of the AP program at RHAM would not be where it is if students did not have a great foundation in the pre-AP classes," said Keane.



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whom he says are often forgotten. He would like to improve high school drop-out rates, too, particularly in northeastern Connecticut, but also statewide. "There's an urgent need to ensure that all of our students graduate," Murray said.

Other objectives?

He wants to promote high-quality, early childhood education. "It is an investment that will pay off, not only for our children, but for society as a whole."

Murray said he would also like to see the composition of boards of education more closely reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, both economically and ethnically.

Murray's biggest challenge these days is scheduling his meetings and trips across the state. He's grateful for all the assistance CABE and Killingly school staff supply.

In the end, Murray said he doesn't view his new role as "work."

"It's not a job," Murray said. "I'm so proud to represent this area and students across the state. I enjoy it every day."

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