

CONNECTIONS

Education News From Northeastern Connecticut

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\$2 Million CAN Grant To Aid New England Schools

It's all about the teachers.

And their classroom strategies.

And their devotion to an important truth: that disadvantaged middle-school students who lack the basic expectations for academic success, can, in fact, succeed in both the high school classroom and in college when they are embraced early enough by a proactive, encouraging educational environment.



EASTCONN's College Access Now Grant Manager Adele Swart, above, talks to a group of educators about the details of the CAN grant during a recent meeting in Cranston, Rhode Island.

To that end, EASTCONN is managing the two-year, \$2 million *College Access Now* (CAN) federal grant in cooperation with the state of Connecticut.

See **CAN**, page 4

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Vivian Paley, Renowned Childhood Expert, Visits With Youngsters, Teachers

“Storytelling is the theater of childhood.”

—Vivian Paley, author, educator

Wide-eyed and eager, a group of curious preschoolers could barely contain their excitement as they sat in a semi-circle at the feet of their esteemed visitor, Vivian Paley, and waited for their turn to tell a story out loud.

Paley, the world-renowned early childhood educator and author, had already visited with many of the 3- and 4-year-olds before joining their story circle at the Windham Public School Early Childhood Center.

At the invitation of EASTCONN's Early Childhood Initiatives staff, Paley recently spent two days interacting with preschoolers and exchanging ideas with their teachers at Head Start sites in Killingly, Putnam and Windham. This visit to



Vivian Paley encourages a Head Start youngster to share a story during her recent visit to the Putnam Preschool in Putnam.

eastern Connecticut was Paley's second; she presented a workshop on supporting social skills and language development to 80 early-childhood teachers from the EASTCONN region last year. EASTCONN oversees the federally funded Head Start

See **PALEY**, page 3

Calendar of EASTCONN Events



JANUARY 2007

- 18 Regional Staff Development Council
- 18 Technology Council
- 19 ConnCASE
- 19 URSA/NASA
- 24 & 25 Data-Driven Decision Making, Data Teams
- 26 Explore Forces and Motion Using Legos and Web-Based Technology
- 26 & 3/23 .. Effective Teaching Strategies

FEBRUARY 2007

- 1 Helping Students to Think Algebraically
- 2 Supervision for Learning (& 3/2, 3/30)
- 5 Making Ratios Real
- 6 Live and Let Live: Ecosystems Simplified
- 6 Analyzing Formative Assessment Data Using *Excel*
- 7 *ELL Strategies for Classroom Teachers*
- 8 Introduction to CT Energy Education: Explore 5 Lessons and Activities
- 12 Science Council
- 16 ConnCASE
- 16 URSA/NASA

MARCH 2007

- 14 Regional Staff Development Council
- 16 ConnCASE
- 16 URSA/NASA
- 20 Strategies and Lesson Ideas for ELL Paraprofessionals and Tutors
- 27 Thought-Provoking Questions at the Primary Level
- 29 Technology Council

APRIL 2007

- 2 Math Council
- 9, 10, 11 ... Connecticut Public School Data Showcase, Crowne Plaza, Cromwell
- 13 ConnCASE
- 24 Introduction to CT Energy Education: Explore 5 Lessons & Activities (for new attendees)
- 24 CT Energy Education: Explore 7 New Hands-On Lessons (for participants who attended the February workshop)
- 25 Science Council
- 27 URSA/NASA

MAY 2007

- 3 Connecticut Data Conference, Crowne Plaza Hartford-Cromwell

Note: Workshops fill up quickly. Please reserve seats early. EASTCONN workshops are subject to change. Please e-mail the EASTCONN Conference Office at conferenceoffice@eastconn.org for more information about any of the meetings and workshops listed here. Register online for any of the above workshops at www.eastconn.org. Click on Workshops.

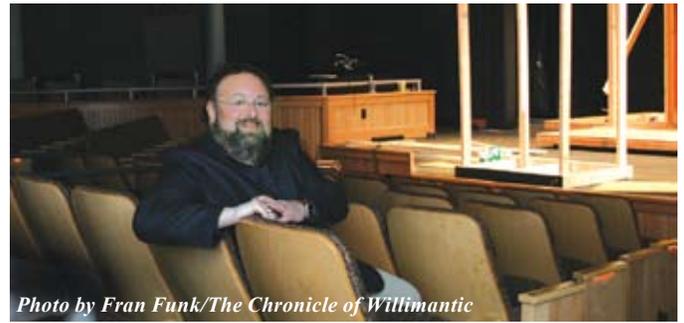


Photo by Fran Funk/The Chronicle of Willimantic

New Capitol Theater Arts Academy Starts Classes Jan. 29th

EASTCONN welcomes Adam Friedman, above, to the Capitol Theater as its new Facility and Marketing Manager. Friedman will manage the new Capitol Theater Arts Academy, which offers classes to eastern Connecticut residents of all ages, starting Jan. 29 through June 4. Classes are \$165 to \$225 for 15-16 weeks. There are morning classes for toddlers and evening classes in Creative Drama, Acting, Comedy Acting, Adult Acting and Improv Nights, Musical Theater, Technical Theater, Television Production, Telling Your Life Story, Cartooning, Voice and Broadway Tap/Jazz. To view or download a brochure and register and/or pay online, visit www.eastconn.org/capitoltheaterarts or, call Adam at 860-465-5636. Capitol Theater, 896 Main St., Willimantic.



In December, EASTCONN's Executive Director Paula Colen, left, had the honor of introducing Ginny Seccombe, Executive Director at LEARN, center, as she received the prestigious Justice A. Prentice Award at the Association of Educational Service Agencies conference in Palm Springs, California. Linda Lowe, AESA Executive Council member, is pictured, right. Last year, EASTCONN's retired Executive Director David J. Calchera received the award, given annually in recognition of outstanding executive leadership at the regional, state and national level.

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programs in numerous eastern Connecticut towns.

“Mrs. Paley’s books are required reading in many early childhood courses,” said Debra Stipe, EASTCONN’s Early Childhood Specialist, who arranged for Paley’s visit. “The opportunity to talk with, listen to, and learn from this leader in our profession was a privilege for all who have read her books and have tried to use storytelling and storyacting as a way to give young children a voice.”

A kindergarten teacher for 37 years, Paley writes and teaches extensively about the world of young children, and has for decades closely examined children’s stories, play and “storyacting,” as well as their logic and thinking, as she searches for meaning in the social and moral landscapes of classroom life.

“As I began to dig deeper and deeper into the culture of play in children and the way it emerges as stories and theater, I found that the spontaneity of the storytelling process is totally meaningful to every child,” said Paley, pausing to speak for a moment before entering a preschool classroom at one of three facilities where Head Start services are provided.

Paley’s decades-long work challenges the assumption that childhood cruelty is normal. She champions storytelling strategies that help children tell their own stories in the classroom, which subsequently helps them develop a sense of importance and belonging.

“What excited me the most was searching for and finding profound meaning in the play of children and really listening to what they say to one another,” Paley said.

“What excited me the most was searching for and finding profound meaning in the play of children and really listening to what they say to one another,” Paley said.

“The mystery of early childhood development is my passion. Every child, every story they tell is unique,” Paley said, adding, “Storytelling is the theater of childhood.”

Back in the Windham classroom, Paley prompted one little girl to share a story with the group.

“What’s your story?” asked Paley, 77, in a gentle, but clear voice as she invited the little girl to stand up. Paley, a petite, spritely woman, sat on a child-sized school chair and carefully noted every word of the youngster’s story.

One by one, every child who wanted to speak, told a story and acted it out. Every story was charmingly brief, which is typical at this age, said Paley later. But, she added, it’s the child’s blossoming sense of community that counts.

After each storytelling/teaching session at the Head Start sites in Killingly, Putnam and Windham, Paley spoke to early childhood teachers about her theories and about encouraging children to tell their stories in a group setting.

“This has to be the great advantage of early childhood



Vivian Paley encourages a little girl to share a story during her visit to EASTCONN’s Killingly Head Start. Paley’s groundbreaking work explores the importance and power of childhood storytelling to children’s blossoming sense of belonging.

education — that children learn at the earliest stage possible that their peer group will like them and support them and help them,” Paley told teachers during one of several conversations during which she not only shared her observations and insights but also sought teachers’ opinions.

“The stage, storytelling and storyacting all help to promote community and community-building in the classroom,” Paley said.

“Mrs. Paley’s storytelling and storyacting approach is consistent with the goals that we have for children in our Head Start program: developing confidence and a sense of self; developing a sense of belonging; and increasing language and vocabulary,” said Elizabeth “E.A.” Aschenbrenner, EASTCONN’s Director of Early Childhood Initiatives.

“Teachers are excited about using these techniques in the classroom,” Aschenbrenner said.

In 2000, Paley earned the John Dewey Society’s Outstanding Achievement Award, and in 2004, she was named Outstanding Educator in the Language Arts by the National Council of Teachers of English. Paley has earned numerous other prestigious awards for her work, and has written 10 books, including *Wally’s Stories*, *You Can’t Say You Can’t Play* and *A Child’s Work*, among others like her award-winning *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*. She travels extensively throughout the world, bringing her early education teaching and storytelling techniques to children, teachers and parents.

After Paley returned to her home in Chicago, she wrote a note to EASTCONN’s Stipe:

“What a wonderful time I had with you, E.A. [Aschenbrenner], the children, their teachers, and the staff,” Paley’s note read. “You have, I think, a lovely educational community. I continue to be impressed by EASTCONN.”

For more information about Head Start or any of EASTCONN’s Early Childhood Initiatives, contact E.A. Aschenbrenner, at eaaschenbrenner@eastconn.org, or Debra Stipe, at dstipe@eastconn.org, or call 860-455-0707.

tion with the Connecticut State Department of Education, aimed at increasing the number of disadvantaged high school students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses in underprivileged communities across the six New England states. Studies show that students who take AP courses are more likely to attend, and succeed in, college.

EASTCONN collaborated with the CSDE to obtain the CAN grant. The CAN grant supports intensive professional development among participating teachers and administrators by offering both a summer institute and collaborative training throughout the year.

“The College Access Now grant provides New England teachers, administrators and students with two unique opportunities,” said the CSDE’s Jeanne Purcell, who worked with EASTCONN to obtain the CAN grant. She is Consultant for the Advanced Placement Program in the CSDE.

”First, it is one of the first times that educators and administrators have collaborated around the learning needs of high-potential, low-income, middle-school students in the region,” Purcell said.

The fact is, Swart said, the system must catch at-risk children early enough in their school careers to produce the kinds of personal expectations that will promote and support high expectations for students and enable them to succeed in high school and beyond.

“Second, it is an opportunity for teachers to pilot different research-based interventions: like Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), SpringBoard, and vertical learning. Our hope is to create differentiated curriculum models that can be disseminated to support the needs of school communities – across the nation – that share similar demographics.”

The CAN demonstration sites chosen for improvement must serve a student population that includes 40 percent or more low-income students, said Adele Swart, EASTCONN’s CAN Grant Manager.

The fact is, she said, the system must catch at-risk children early enough in their school careers to produce the kinds of personal expectations that will promote and support high expectations for students and enable them to succeed in high school and beyond.

“It’s all about getting both the conversation and expectations started with the students and their teachers,” said Swart recently.

“So many children from low-income environments have not been identified as college-bound students,” Swart said. “In many cases, we’re battling a lot of low expectations for these kids.”

During 2006-2007, the CAN grant will focus on improving sixth-grade curricula, helping teachers hone crucial classroom strategies, starting a dialogue between middle-school educators in the same districts, and reaching across state borders to draw together educators from across New England, said Swart.



David Adams, the College Board representative for SpringBoard, joins CAN participants during a recent CAN seminar in Cranston, Rhode Island.

During 2007-2008, the CAN grant will focus on creating enduring curricula and educational models for both sixth and seventh grades at the CAN demonstration sites with the idea that the models will be replicated in district after district across each state.

The innovative CAN grant expands educational opportunities and improves student achievement in urban and rural schools in four ways:

- 1. By building a K-16 New England Regional Council to create stronger relationships and conversation among middle, high school and college education programs.**
- 2. By developing middle-school demonstration sites in at least one school system in each of the six New England states to serve as a model for other districts.**
- 3. By increasing the rigor of curriculum in grades 6-12 in math and English.**
- 4. By increasing the achievement and participation rates of low-income students in pre-Advanced Placement courses at each model middle-school site.**

The CAN grant focuses on two different approaches to learning: AVID and SpringBoard. AVID focuses on students and improving their study skills by employing academic acceleration, not remediation. The AVID approach is driven by the WIC-R method, which stands for Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration and Reading. SpringBoard focuses on improving students’ math and English/Language Arts skills.

The good news is that the CAN grant will help districts “bring a very rigorous curriculum to middle schools, using these special funds to direct teacher training,” Swart said.

For more information on CAN, contact Adele Swart, EASTCONN’s CAN Grant Manager, at 860-455-0707, or reach her at aswart@eastconn.org.

EASTCONN Seeks Extension for Teaching American History Project

Exciting New Source of History Lessons Grows

The highly successful Teaching American History Project may be extended a fourth year, EASTCONN officials say, offering eastern Connecticut's history teachers more workshops, seminars, field trips and access to a growing collection of top-notch history lessons.

"We have requested a one-year extension for our Teaching American History Project," said Bruce Storm, EASTCONN's Assistant Executive Director, "and we're optimistic that our request will be approved." The TAHP grant is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. [Editor's Note: See *The Mysteries of History Grab Teachers' Imaginations* in the November 2005 Connections.]

EASTCONN collaborated with Windham Public Schools (the grantee) and other EASTCONN districts to obtain the TAHP grant.

Now in its third year, EASTCONN's TAHP has offered more than 60 social studies and history teachers (from the fifth to 12th grades) a series of professional development workshops, seminars and field trips focused on obtaining and using primary sources and local resources. History teachers subsequently share what they've learned with their students.

"Everyone wins," said Dan Coughlin, EASTCONN's TAHP coordinator.

According to Coughlin, participating TAHP teachers will have access through eSchoolBuilder, an internet-based tool, to a growing database of high-quality American history curricula, created by participating TAHP teachers.

"We are building this history curriculum of successful lessons, organized by unit and tied to Connecticut's Social Studies Frameworks," Coughlin said. "As each teacher in the project contributes successful history lessons based on the use of primary sources and/or local resources, collectively the history project is building a valuable, teacher-friendly database,"



General and U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant meets with teachers to reflect on his life.



Roseland Cottage in Woodstock, site of a TAHP tour for history teachers led by Historic New England's Gail White last summer.

Coughlin said. "And the best part is that teachers can access it online."

Coughlin said that there are currently 41 history lessons in the TAHP database. The collection will larger as teachers contribute more plans this spring and summer. An even greater number of lessons will be available if the grant is extended.

For example, among the typically creative TAHP lessons that are available is one called *Cemetery Mapping Lesson*, forged by Plainfield eighth-grade history teacher Russell T. Hart. Hart's lesson asks students to interpret and record vital information from each headstone in a local historical cemetery, which they subsequently map. Students not only digitally and manually record data for the historical record, they also donate their findings to the town historical society. Students analyze data, discuss trends and patterns, and develop an appreciation for the micro and macro levels of history in a cemetery.

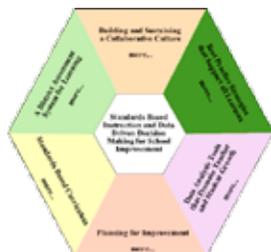
Each lesson in the TAHP database includes facts about the time required, and outlines in detail the lesson's objectives, assessment protocols, skills, content, materials and specific activities. Most of the lessons include copies of or links to primary sources.

"Teaching American History is one of the most worthwhile professional development opportunities I have witnessed," said Jerry Davis, Principal of Plainfield Central Middle School. "Through the use of primary documents, students are learning about history from those who lived and witnessed life in early America. "The project has also helped change the way history is being taught in the classroom," Davis said. "Students are working in cooperative groups and examining personal accounts, documents, and other artifacts...rather than sitting through lectures that were designed to inform."

In addition to workshops throughout the academic year, the 2006-2007 TAHP will offer a two-week Summer Institute that will include a number of history-related workshops and seminars at EASTCONN, as well as field trips to important historic sites. There are still openings available for teachers.

Participating teachers receive CEUs and a \$1,000 stipend each year of the project. In addition, teachers may apply for money to purchase materials and/or to hire a consultant to work with them developing materials and piloting a lesson for the TAHP curriculum.

To learn more, contact Dan Coughlin at 860-455-0707 or at dcoughlin@eastconn.org.



New Standards-Based Learning Center Web Site For Teachers Is *Up And Running . . .*

The Standards Based Learning Center Web site has been launched! Visit www.sblceastconn.org or www.eastconn.org/SBLC. It is EASTCONN's goal to provide customers with up-to-date information and resources that address their needs and recognize their achievements. The themes that we address on the site will focus on relevant topics, such as the role of discourse in teaching and learning, content areas, and standardized-test preparation strategies.

Another component of the site is the availability of projects that align with State Frameworks, imbed technology and reading strategies across content areas, connect classrooms using an online discussion forum, and provide tools for the classroom teacher.

Our first project is *Spice it up a Notch with Nutmeg*, which supports classroom teachers by using the high-quality literature of the Nutmeg Book Award program. It is an authentic, engaging, online project that addresses Connecticut's Standards. All projects will showcase student work on the World Wide Web and allow teachers to share some of their best practices with colleagues in the region and beyond.

To learn more, call Helen Weingart, Rebecca Pilver or Donna Drasch at EASTCONN, 860-455-0707.
E-mail them at hweingart@eastconn.org; rpilver@eastconn.org; dtrasch@eastconn.org.



EASTCONN's Faces of Culture Interdistrict Program, Launches New Web Page

Faces of Culture engages students in grades 8-12 in an interdistrict, interdisciplinary study of culture from several historical periods combined with a full array of visual, media and performing arts. Culminating art projects and performances are showcased on the Arts Symposium '06 Web site. To visit the site, go to www.eastconn.org, click on "Interdistricts" at the top of the home page, then go to "Faces of Culture," and click on Arts Symposium '06.

To learn more, contact Nancy Vitale at EASTCONN, 860-455-0707, nvitale@eastconn.org.



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EASTCONN, one of six Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) in Connecticut, has been serving the educational and training needs of schools, organizations, and individuals of all ages in northeastern Connecticut since 1980.

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