

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Attachment P

A MONTHLY UPDATE BY THE CAPITOL REGION EDUCATION COUNCIL

February 2014

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Executive Director's Message

Bruce E. Douglas, Ph.D.

In Honor of Black History Month

Source: <http://padresteve.com>

"Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. was appointed to West Point in 1932. He graduated and was commissioned in 1936, graduating 35 out of 278, the fourth African American graduate of West Point. During his time at the Academy, most of his classmates shunned him, and he never had a roommate. Despite this, he maintained a dogged determination to succeed. The Academy yearbook made this comment about him:

'The courage, tenacity, and intelligence with which he conquered a problem incomparably more difficult than plebe year won for him the sincere admiration of his classmates, and his single-minded determination to continue in his chosen career cannot fail to inspire respect wherever fortune may lead him.'



He was denied entrance to the Army Air Corps because of his race and assigned to the Infantry, first to the all black 24th Infantry Regiment at Fort Benning where, because of his race, he was not allowed in the Officers Club. Upon his commissioning, the Regular Army had just two African American Line Officers, Second Lieutenant Davis and his father, Colonel Davis. After completion of Infantry School, he was assigned as an instructor of Military Science and Tactics at the Tuskegee Institute. In 1941, the Roosevelt Administration moved to create a black flying unit and in July 1942, the younger Davis was assigned as Commanding Officer of the 99th Pursuit Squadron which served in North Africa and Sicily flying Curtiss P-40 Warhawks. He was recalled to the United States in September 1943 to command the 332nd Fighter Group. However, some senior officers attempted to prevent other black squadrons from serving in combat alleging that the 99th had performed poorly in combat. Davis defended his squadron and General George Marshall ordered an inquiry which showed that the 99th was comparable to white squadrons in combat and that during a two-day period over the Anzio beachhead, the pilots of the 99th shot down 12 German aircraft. Davis led his Tuskegee Airmen to glory in the war and their performance in combat helped break the color barrier in the U.S. Military, which was ended in 1948 when President Truman signed an executive order to end the segregation of the military. Colonel Davis helped draft the Air Force plan, and the Air Force was the first of the services to fully desegregate. Colonel Davis transitioned to jets and led the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing against Chinese Communist MIGs in the Korean War. He was promoted to Brigadier General in 1954 and served in numerous command and staff positions. He retired in 1970 with the rank of Lieutenant General and was advanced to General while retired by President Clinton in 1998. He died in 2002 at the age of 89.



The legacy of Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. is a testament to his character, courage and devotion to the United States of America. He helped pioneer the way for officers such as General Colin Powell and helped change this country for the better. During times when discrimination was legal, he overcame obstacles that would have challenged lesser men. Davis remarked, *'My own opinion was that blacks could best overcome racist attitudes through achievements, even though those achievements had to take place within the hateful environment of segregation.'*

District and School News

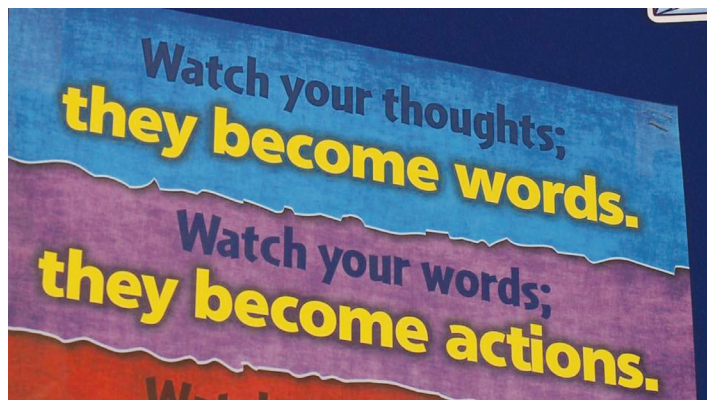
Bully-Free Zones and Acceptance Training Helps Make Schools Safer

During a recent meeting of the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, a group was formed to investigate the factors that drove Adam Lanza to kill 20 children and six adults and to study the state's mental health system. Doctors spoke of the need for schools to adopt concrete principles of inclusion and recognition in order to become even safer places.

"Since what happened in Newtown, people are more aware and more sensitive to what students say," says Jennifer Ukanowicz-Parrett, a math teacher and team leader at **King Philip Middle School in West Hartford**, a school with active programs aimed to end bullying while promoting respect and acceptance of differences.

"There's a poster right outside in all the hallways that says, 'This is a free-bullying zone' and if you see bullying, you tell somebody," says eighth grader Cyrus Henry, explaining his school's Safe Zones, spots where administrators, teachers, and youngsters can talk openly. "It's going to be part of their life," says Ukanowicz-Parrett.

The school also has a Character Counts program, rewarding students for honesty and helping others. Henry was honored for perseverance: "I was in Spanish class in sixth grade, and I wasn't very good at it at first but I kept trying and now I have a B plus." Each month, students are acknowledged publicly, as a way to celebrate positivity in the corridors and classrooms. "It feels great. Everybody is clapping for you. You get a pencil and a certificate," says Henry. His friend, fellow eighth grader Kyra Bukowski, agrees. "After a while, it's in your mindset. So, you start to do more acts like that without even knowing it. If there's a bullying case, I feel like I have a voice and can speak out against it. The atmosphere is so great, I can form these different friendships."



Signs and murals with inspirational messages hang everywhere at King Philip, empowering the students and helping create an environment designed to lessen isolation and increase kindness.

Bukowski and her mom recently took Hartford Hospital's pledge to "Stop the Stigma" (www.stopthestigmact.org), a movement to educate the public about mental illness and eliminate the use of offensive words, such as "psycho" and "demented", in casual conversation. According to the website, mental disorders are the leading cause of disability in the U.S. So far, the hospital has received 5,500 pledges, working towards a year-long goal of 10,000 promises for change.

On February 25, Hartford Hospital and West Hartford Public Schools will host a forum called "Reducing Myths in Child & Adolescent Mental Health" at 6 p.m. at West Hartford's Town Hall.

I Am Robot: Why Robotics is Cool in Farmington

In talking with several members of **Farmington High School's Team 178 Enforcers** robotics team, many conveyed the same message about their experiences with robotics – It's a place they can go to be themselves.

On January 25, the team helped Farmington children in a younger robotics program be themselves and showcase their technology ideas in the second annual Jr. FIRST Lego League. Walk into the Enforcers' headquarters and it's like stepping into a business. The team has several departments, from animation, graphic design, engineering and programming to the archives and marketing.

For the annual FIRST competition, the team worked on a robot that can launch balls into goals to score, but team members can work on whatever they'd like when they come to meetings.

In doing so, they're gaining valuable experiences that could prepare them for a job one day in STEM, fitting with a state push for more Connecticut students pursuing fields involving math, science, technology, and engineering.

Jr. LEGO leaguers will demonstrate their ideas for a technological invention and participate in many activities organized by the Enforcers.

Recognition and Honors

CREC Magnet Schools

Sarah Worley, a second grade teacher at the CREC Discovery Academy, is the recipient of the Connecticut Science Teacher Association's "Excellence in Elementary Science Teaching" award. This award is bestowed on teachers who have demonstrated excellence in classroom science teaching, contributed professionally by providing workshops and/or other support for colleagues, demonstrated dedication to personal and professional growth, participated in conferences and workshops, and have been productive participants in extra-curricular activities and community projects.

Ms. Worley was nominated by Teresa Wilson, Elementary Science Curriculum Specialist for Magnet Schools, "because she brings a passion to her teaching, especially in science, and demonstrates a willingness to stretch herself professionally." Sarah will be honored at a banquet on April 23 at the New Haven Lawn Club with a reception prior to the banquet at the Yale Peabody Museum.

Soundbridge

A third grade student from Danielson, who is supported by the CREC Soundbridge Academy, was recognized for his artistic talents. His work was been on display at the Wethersfield Town Hall for the month of January.

River Street School

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) has acknowledged the achievement of **Joyce Rioux, Ed.D.**, OTR/L, SCSS, Assistant Director (IPM) OT/PT Services, in obtaining the recognition of Specialty Certification in School Systems (SCSS). Dr. Rioux is the first occupational therapist to receive the SCSS credential from AOTA. Through a rigorous peer-reviewed process, it was determined that she demonstrated the capacity to meet established school system criteria related to knowledge, critical and ethical reasoning, and interpersonal and performance skills, as well as communicate meaningful practice changes and client outcomes. Completion of this certification demonstrates scholarly and professional involvement in activities that promote professional growth and contribute to the field of occupational therapy in the area of school systems.



Joyce Rioux, Ed.D.

Data Analysis, Research, and Technology

CREC's division of Data Analysis, Research, and Technology (DART) was recently awarded a grant in the amount of \$50,000 from the H.A. Vance Foundation to fund a professional development academy entitled "Transforming Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum: Realistic and Immediate Classroom Connections."

DART provides consulting services, technical support, and training on technology integration for CREC Magnet Schools and other Connecticut school districts. While working with districts, DART staff found that despite the recent implementation of the Common Core, adoption of personalized learning, and knowledge of the SBAC testing platform, districts continue to be challenged by outdated technology resources. They also found that districts were in need of solutions for delivering professional development that helped schools revamp existing curriculum and instruction through technology. In order to assist districts with these challenges, the H.A. Vance Foundation grant will provide funding for a professional development academy.

"The overarching goal of the academy is to transform the teaching and learning environment, experiences, and opportunities for students and teachers," explained **Sarah Ellsworth, Ph.D.**, Director of DART. "By supporting teachers in this manner, we can easily identify ways to deepen understanding for all learners through the infusion of technology tools and make immediate curriculum and pedagogical connections."

The H.A. Vance Foundation is a family foundation that funds systemic education reform efforts in Hartford. CREC is grateful for their support of this important project, which in its initial stages will include teachers from Hartford Public Schools and CREC Magnet Schools.

CREC Health Services

The CREC Health Services Team of **Judy Niedzielski, Meghan Wishneski, Heather Smith, David Cusick, and Andrea Dillon** were selected to participate in the highly competitive Johnson and Johnson School Health Leadership Program this summer at Rutgers University. The Leadership Institute is a six-day residential living opportunity for the team of nurses to develop leadership and management skills that enable them to become leaders in the community to improve practices that impact student health.

Events and Updates

Elementary Students Explore Insides of Machines at Take-Apart Labs

During the month of February, young students at the **Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School** explored engineering during the school's popular "Take-Apart Labs." Everyone is interested in knowing more about what is inside everyday inventions such as phones, DVD players, broken toys, and computers. The Take-Apart Labs were held in the school's science lab and gave all students in Kindergarten through Grade 5 the opportunity to dive in, deconstruct, and explore the workings of these common objects.

With the help of 80 adult volunteers from the school community, students used real tools and safety equipment to carefully open broken or obsolete items and explore how they work. The experience is memorable for students and volunteers alike. "This is how I became interested in engineering," shared Ken Boucher, an engineer at Hamilton Sunstrand. "I loved to take things apart as a kid!"



Chinese-Japanese New Year Celebration



On February 1, staff, students, and parents of the **Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School** celebrated Guo Xin Nian – the Japanese-Chinese New Year. Guo Xin Nian is a fun-filled day of hands-on experiences and performances for guests of all ages. The goal is for the community to learn more about the Japanese and Chinese traditions and cultures.

This annual event is enjoyed by hundreds of families and is made possible thanks to the efforts of parents, teachers, and student volunteers. Students were particularly excited about the event, which featured a Japanese Lion Dance, Kung Fu, a Chinese Dance demonstration, a planetarium show, origami folding, yo-yo fishing, a chopstick competition, lantern making, dumpling making, rice ball eating, and sushi. Students from Glastonbury High School were on hand to assist with activities.

The study of Japanese has been a core component of the Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School curriculum. Beginning in the 2012-2013 school year, the school began transitioning toward teaching Mandarin-Chinese to students in the Preschool grades. In a few years, students will study Mandarin-Chinese at every grade in order to align with offerings at the middle and high schools in the area.

Celebrating Japanese-Chinese New Year is one of the ways that Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School integrates learning about Japanese and Chinese culture into its language instruction.

Two Rivers Students Learn About Bison and Environmental Conservation

On January 14, students from **CREC Two Rivers Magnet High School** visited Ted's Montana Grill in South Windsor to learn about the restaurant's passion for bison and environmental conservation. Tenth grade students participating in Julia Porter's Principles of Nutrition class met with the grill's proprietor John Halpin and his staff to discuss how the restaurant and school might develop a new partnership related to environmental conservation and sustainability.

The students were given a tour of the kitchen, practiced making bison burgers, used the decades-old French fry cutter, and were given a lesson on the nutritional value of bison meat versus traditional beef. Kevin Ramirez, a sophomore at Two Rivers High School, was amazed at how much time went into the food. "I love the way they make their food from scratch, especially how the fries were fresh and cooked to order."

The focus at Two Rivers is environmental conservation and sustainability, so it is no wonder that Zachary Thomas, a sophomore, liked how the restaurant "is trying to save the environment by saving water, recycling plastics and other materials." He especially enjoyed drinking out of paper straws provided by the restaurant.

Prior to the visit, Two Rivers students learned about Ted Turner's vision of raising bison from the brink of extinction to be served in restaurants all over the country. Turner, along with George McKerrow, a restaurateur, began the first bison preserve in the nation. While at the restaurant, students saw first-hand how the "green team" works to develop new ways to reduce energy consumption, food waste, and water usage. The to-go containers and utensils are all made out of biodegradable corn starch. The straws are made of paper rather than plastic. The soap dispensers in the restrooms dispense a gritty mixture called Boraxo soap made of borax. Many of the menu items are gluten free and locally sourced.



The students in Mrs. Porter's class are currently learning about the environmental value of choosing foods that are grown closer to home. Cutting down on the amount of time a food is in transit significantly impacts the environmental cost of that food product. There are also other benefits to eating food that is fresher. Two Rivers student Mark Williams said it best: "It showed me that you can have an amazing tasting meal that is made from fresh ingredients that are better for you too."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration



Stacy-Ann Wallen and Henley Solomon

At the 18th Annual West Hartford Celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., special guest speaker, John Doar, 2012 Presidential Medal of Freedom Recipient, shared his experiences as a civil rights attorney and working with Dr. King before his death. In addition, Hartford Region Open Choice students, **Stacy-Ann Wallen, a junior at Hall High School** and **Henley Solomon, a junior at Conard High School** shared their perspectives of what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. means to them and how they honor his memory.

The annual celebration honors Dr. King's civil rights movement through the power of words and acts of nonviolent resistance, including protests, grassroots organizing, and civil disobedience to achieve what were seemingly impossible goals. During the two-hour presentation, residents of West Hartford and neighboring towns listened to the Conard Jazz Combo, Sedgwick Sounds, and Conard Voices of the World Choir, while exploring the artworks of West Hartford students who expressed the meaning of human rights.

Hartford Region Open Choice Book Club

The Institute of Teaching and Learning and the Hartford Region Open Choice Program recently hosted the Open Choice Book Club Kickoff Dinner at the Holiday Inn in East Hartford. Participants from Berlin, Coventry, Enfield, Farmington, Granby, Newington, and West Hartford were joined by Teaching and Learning and Open Choice staff. Following dinner, **Tim Nee**, Director of the Institute of Teaching and Learning, welcomed the group and introduced the book that groups will read this year, *The Latinization of U.S. Schools*, by Dr. Jason Irizarry, Director of Urban Education at the College of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

David Daye, Managing Director of Hartford Region Open Choice, spoke to the group about the goals of the Hartford Region Open Choice Program and provided a snapshot of statistics focusing on Latinos, including student enrollment in Open Choice programs and parent participation. **Kara Gavin**, Education Specialist for Teaching and Learning, discussed the format of the book club and district and participant responsibilities.

Keynote speaker **Marta Diez**, Education Specialist for the Institute of Teaching and Learning, discussed the experiences of Latinos in U.S. schools, beginning with her personal experiences as a Latina from Puerto Rico working in education. She emphasized the importance of teachers getting to know their students as individuals, in light of the diverse backgrounds and cultures of Latinos.

Ms. Diez also discussed the value of biculturalism and its distinction from assimilation and she encouraged participants to have courageous conversations with each other and with their students.

Berlin, Enfield, Farmington, Granby, Newington, and West Hartford are currently participating in book club discussions, which are co-facilitated by staff from the Hartford Region Open Choice Program and CREC's Institute of Teaching and Learning. The culminating event is a dinner and discussion with the author scheduled for April 9, 2014.



CREC Online Learning Programs

Through online learning programs, CREC's Technical Assistance and Brokering Services offers students across the state the opportunity to participate in additional schoolwork electronically. Programs such as the Virtual Learning Academy (VLA) from the Jefferson County Education Service Center and Virtual High School (VHS), a non-profit collaborative in Massachusetts, provide Connecticut students challenging coursework designed to stimulate their thoughts and broaden their minds to a global perspective.

Through VHS courses, students may be in class discussions with students from around the world, while the teacher may be in a neighboring community or their own school. VHS has one of the largest online Advanced Placement catalogues in the country, gifted and talented courses for honors students, as well as unique electives in all curriculum areas.

Course work is asynchronous, allowing students to complete assignments within a scheduled week or as directed by the teacher. Courses are either semester-based or a full year. Elissa Brauman, Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy, utilizes VHS for many students each semester. "VHS has been invaluable for our growing school, particularly as we process remaining enrollments at the start of a semester. Students access quality courses taught by certified, highly trained teachers. VHS provides online and blended learning experiences, while supporting educators with professional development and services needed to provide an effective 21st century education."

VLA offers 100 core and elective courses for students in need of credit recovery or additional course work they are not able to secure through traditional means. VLA serves students



who are credit deficient, home bound, home schooled, or for any reason the superintendent deems appropriate. Students can take full-year courses, 36 units in length, or semester courses, 18 units in length. Elizabeth Hosmer, Southington High School, notes, "As schools consider the options of blended learning to meet the needs and expectations of all students, VLA has provided this service in a meaningful way. For the past three years, our district has used VLA for credit recovery, for students that wish to pursue a course not available in our high school, and for students with health issues. We have found that VLA provides a teaching staff that is dedicated to helping students succeed in a variety of ways. Every student has the possibility to succeed as the grading structure allows students to submit work and teachers the ability to have students re-do assignments before a final grade is submitted. In addition, VLA is associated with CREC and has been outstanding in providing training and resources to our district."

Course work is asynchronous, so student may begin at any time and complete the work as their schedules. Both VLA and VHS course work is aligned with Common Core State Standards and are offered through accredited institutions.

The global classroom allows students to actively participate in collaborative lessons, earn additional high school credits or secure credits they are deficient in, and learn of other cultures, ideas, and opinions. Online students can be better prepared to communicate effectively.

For additional information about how your district can get involved with online learning programs through CREC, contact **Kathy Randall** at 860-509-3655 or krandall@crec.org.

Events and Updates

CREC Schools Ribbon Cutting Ceremonies

In January, two CREC Magnet Schools held ribbon cutting ceremonies for their new, state-of-the-art school buildings. The **CREC International Magnet School for Global Citizenship** in South Windsor celebrated its grand opening on January 17 and the **CREC Reggio Magnet School of the Arts** celebrated on January 24.

Opened in 2008, both the CREC Reggio Magnet School and CREC International Magnet School have operated out of multiple temporary spaces. The new school construction projects were managed by CREC's Construction Division. They worked closely with CREC's Division of Magnet Schools to prepare final homes for the successful magnet schools. "We are excited to start 2014 with the opening of two new school buildings," shared **Dina Crowl**, General Director and Superintendent of CREC Schools. "Both facilities include the latest technology and are designed to foster learning at the highest levels for all students. At CREC, our learning environments are uniquely configured to encourage innovation, exploration, and the excitement of new knowledge." The buildings will allow the schools to grow to full capacity and are uniquely designed to meet each school's needs, featuring theme-specific areas and designs.

As a certified International Baccalaureate Early Years Programme, the CREC International Magnet School's theme is global studies and global connectedness. The theme of interactive exploration is expressed in the design of the building through the use of multiple display cases and walls to introduce interactive exhibits and shared student projects. The building floor plan is designed around the three-story library/media center which is the hub of the facility to promote collaborative learning and instruction outside the classroom. In addition, the building responds to the natural landscape with the use of warm façade and roof materials and by following the grade contours of the site.

"The CREC International Magnet School community is passionate, collaborative, and one hundred percent committed to the success of our students," shared **Cindy Rigling**, Principal. "The move into our new home means that we will be able to offer our teachers and students the very best resources and learning tools. They will have increased opportunities to communicate and collaborate with others across the globe. We look forward to being together, in one building, as one learning community. The ribbon cutting ceremony marks a new beginning for the International Magnet School. We look forward to working with the town of South Windsor and establishing strong roots here."

The CREC Reggio Magnet School is inspired by an educational philosophy that was started by parents from the villages

around the Reggio Emilia region of Italy. Like a village, the building footprint is designed around a centralized area known as a piazza, where children can intermingle or get together in large groups. The teaching approach also puts the natural environment at the center of its philosophy, so the piazza is infused with light from skylights and is accented with natural materials such as wood and stone veneer. The media center and art room are connected to the central piazza via glass walls, and are equipped with exterior doors which allow instruction to spill out into the natural environment. A second floor nature lab connects to a rooftop garden, which allows for further interaction between students and the outdoors.

"It has been the long held dream of our community to build a learning facility that provides the highest quality of education to students across the Greater Hartford region," shared **Josephine DiPietro-Smith**, Principal. "With the ongoing support of the Avon community, we have established an educational environment that maximizes the gifts and talents of our students and provides them with endless opportunities to creatively express themselves. This school promises to impact the lives of many children and will serve as a wonderful resource for the families and members of the town of Avon."



CREC International Magnet School for Global Citizenship



CREC Reggio Magnet School of the Arts