

Connections

with the West Hartford Public Schools

Connections is a districtwide publication presented to you by the Office of the Superintendent,
West Hartford Public Schools, 50 South Main St., West Hartford, Connecticut 06107
Phone (860)561-6651

New Administrator Profile – Paul Vicinus

- Graduated from the University of Connecticut with a BA in mathematics
- Received a graduate degree from Trinity College and a Sixth Year from the University of Hartford
- Began his career in West Hartford as a math teacher and served as Mathematics Department Supervisor from 2000 to 2007
- Worked as the Assistant Principal at Conard High School prior to serving our country in Afghanistan as a First Sergeant in the Connecticut Army National Guard
- Returned from Afghanistan in early 2011, has led several district initiatives, and most recently served as Acting Principal at Smith School of Science, Math and Technology.



We are pleased and proud to announce the appointment of Paul Vicinus as the new Director of Teaching and Assessment. He was selected from an impressive pool of candidates and will officially assume his position on July 1st. Paul's exceptional leadership skills and knowledge of instruction and curriculum will be an asset to the district as we continue the work of strengthening our standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Distribution Of *Connections*

An on-line version of *Connections With the West Hartford Public Schools* is now available at <http://www.whps.org/connections.pdf>. If you do not wish to have a copy of *Connections* mailed to your home, please email connectionsopiout@whps.org with your name, address, child's name and school. Thank you.

Connections is printed on 100% recycled paper.

Upcoming Events

Inter-Elementary School Festival of Music

May 19, 2011, 7:30 PM
The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, Mortensen Hall
Tickets: \$12.00, General Admission
For more information or tickets, call 860-561-6638

Bristow Middle School, Select Ensembles Concert

June 1, 2011
For more information, call 860-231-2100

Sedgwick Middle School, Pops Concert

June 1, 2011
For more information, call 860-570-6500

King Philip Middle School, Summerfest

June 6, 2011
For more information, call 860-233-8230

School Concerts and School Art Shows

Throughout the spring there are concerts and art shows at all schools in town. Call individual schools for specific information.

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Super Adventures in Learning (SAIL) Program

The Bridge Family Center, its Family Resource Center, and the West Hartford Public Schools (WHPS) have embarked on a new collaboration to provide 72 students in grades kindergarten through five (the goal is 36 children at Charter Oak Academy and 36 children at Smith School) with high quality programming that is an extension of the school day. The new program, Super Adventures in Learning (SAIL), is funded by a 21st Century Community Learning Center (21CCLC) grant from the State Department of Education. SAIL takes place from 3:20 PM to 6:00 PM on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays in both school buildings.



In the past three years, the demographics of students enrolled at Charter Oak and Smith schools have changed, with more Asian American children of Vietnamese descent attending the two schools. Nearly half of those served by the FRC at Charter Oak live in poverty. Since 25 different languages are spoken in the neighborhoods surrounding the schools, SAIL will address both language and cultural barriers while helping to close gaps in academic and enrichment services available to these economically disadvantaged children and their parents. The FRC will set up a Parent Advisory Council and engage parents in activities to reduce their isolation, help them achieve their goals, develop their leadership skills and further their own education. SAIL will work to achieve the goals of the WHPS Development Plan and the 2007-2011 district goals for elementary school children.

SAIL is one of only five 21CCLC programs that were awarded funding this year in Connecticut. The program began at Smith School and Charter Oak in January. The children start their extended day with a healthy snack and then get to work on their homework. Assistance is provided by school staff and by the three dedicated SAIL staff members at each building. The program is fortunate to have three interns from Saint Joseph's College and Central Connecticut University coming two afternoons a week.

From the Homework Centers the students head off to two forty minute enrichment blocks. The Children's Museum, local community television and the Playhouse on the Park are some of the community partners providing these enrichment activities. Each of the partner organizations sends staff once a week to work with the program. Parents pick up students at 6:00 PM. With the cooperation of these community partners, the Bridge and the district have extended the school day to provide these students with new learning opportunities. While at SAIL the students receive a nutritious snack, academic support and then participate in high quality enrichment activities in a safe and familiar environment. SAIL also provides opportunities for parental involvement including weekend activities for families and educational field trips.

Mission

To inspire and prepare all students to realize their potential and enhance our global community

A Look Inside:

- New Administrator Profile
- Blueprint for Information Technology

- Jazz Band Honored
- Role of School Nurses
- A Parent/School Partnership
- Board Adopts Budget



New Administrator Profile-Catherine Buchholz

- Returns to our district as the English Department Supervisor for Bristow Middle School, King Philip Middle School and Hall High School
- Graduated from Marist College with a BA in English; also completed a Masters in Reading and a 6th year Certificate in Educational Leadership from the University of Connecticut.



- Is currently the K-12 Director of Language Arts and Reading for the Glastonbury School District
- Worked for our school district (before moving to Glastonbury), serving as Curriculum Specialist for Professional Learning and as English Department Supervisor for Sedgwick Middle School and Conard High School.

Effective leadership in our schools is crucial for effective teaching and learning in the classrooms. Catherine is passionate about teaching and learning and in addition to her content expertise is a certified trainer in the University of Kansas Model for Strategies Instruction. We are fortunate to have Catherine as one of our instructional leaders who understands the West Hartford Public Schools' Mission and who will inspire our teachers and students with her commitment to excellence.

School Nurses Play A Vital Role in Students' Lives

Our school nurses play an essential role in providing effective health programs and services both in and out of the classroom. Florence Nightingale described nursing as an art "that requires an exclusive devotion." Our school nurses devote themselves to fostering wellness and promoting a healthy and nurturing school community by ensuring that our students are intellectually, physically and emotionally healthy. Nursing is an art, but it is also a science requiring a high level of professional training. We are very fortunate to have highly qualified registered nurses with tremendous expertise and experience to effectively meet the diverse and challenging needs of our students.



Today's nurses provide treatment and intervention for children with significant physical and mental health concerns and with conditions such as diabetes, asthma,

seizure disorders, anxiety, depression, food allergies, heart disease and the occasional scraped knee. Collaborating with parents and health care providers, our school nurses work as part of an interdisciplinary team with teachers and other related service providers to foster an environment that is safe and inclusive for children with health care needs. Our nurses support student learning and achievement and advocate for high quality health care for students by participating on State professional organizations and district advisory committees. They provide input on school health/wellness issues and policies and practices that impact student health and learning.

Governor Dannel Malloy has proclaimed May 11, 2011, as School Nurses day in the state of Connecticut to honor their commitment to their profession and the care and contribution they make to our students, schools, and community.

Center for Educational Leadership & Technology Helps Develop Plan

The West Hartford Public Schools (WHPS) has recently contracted with the Center for Educational Leadership and Technology (CELT) to develop a comprehensive *Information Technology Blueprint*. This study will provide the framework, guidelines, and action plans for harnessing technology to help achieve our school district's mission and goals. WHPS and CELT staff working together will focus on improving student learning through the appropriate instructional and administrative uses of technology. This collaborative planning will also



involve the transitioning of existing technology applications in order to create a more comprehensive, seamless and integrated information technology system for the 21st century. Working with focus groups of teachers, students, parents, and administrators over the next six months, we will develop a Blueprint that will involve a three-phase research and planning study. The resulting report will provide a clear direction for the West Hartford Public Schools for the next several years.

Our changing society and workplace requires citizens who can take responsibility for their own learning and well being on a life-long basis. Since our students will need to be able to work collaboratively, innovatively, and creatively, educational reforms that will improve our students' academic achievement will require a widespread, efficient, and cost-effective use of technology. Hopefully, we can create new and more contemporary learning environments, while we rethink and plan strategically to further enhance the comprehensive use of technology in all facets of our operations.

IMAGINE
the Possibilities

West
Hartford
Public
Schools

Hall High School Jazz Band Selected for Essentially Ellington

Jazz at Lincoln Center recently announced that the Hall High School Jazz Band is one of 15 finalists for its prestigious 16th annual Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival. Bands had to submit a recorded performance of three compositions, which were then evaluated in a blind screening by jazz education experts. Bands chosen as finalists will compete and participate in workshops, jam sessions, and more during the three-day festival in New York City. The three top-placing bands will perform with the Artistic Director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, Wynton Marsalis, as guest soloist, followed by a performance by the 15-piece Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra whose members serve as mentors for the finalist bands throughout the weekend. The Festival's finale is an awards ceremony honoring outstanding soloists, sections, and the top three bands. The Competition & Festival is the culmination of the annual Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Program (EE), which also includes regional festivals, teaching resources, a summer Band Director Academy, monthly newsletters, and more.

Festival: May 12-14, 2011, at Frederick P. Rose Hall, home of Jazz at Lincoln Center
Final Concert: May 14, at Avery Fisher Hall, at 7:30 PM
Judges: Wynton Marsalis, Rich Derosa, David Berger, Vincent Gardner, Johnny Mandel

Background/Statistics: Throughout March and April, Jazz at Lincoln Center sent, free of charge, a professional musician to each of the 15 finalist and winning community band schools to lead an intensive daylong workshop of rehearsals, lessons, and master classes. In its rich 16-year history this unique music education program has reached more than 300,000 students in more than 3,000 high schools across all 50 U.S. states, Canada, Australia and American schools abroad.

PowerSchool Enhances Parent/School Partnership

This year, the West Hartford Public Schools began using a new student information system called PowerSchool. As we have integrated more and more features of the program into use, we have had time to identify operating issues and any difficulties that arise. We are pleased that a pilot of the Parent Portal feature began on Monday, April 25, 2011, for our grades 6-12 students and parents. This Parent Portal is an integrated tool that allows parents to use any computer with Internet access to view specific information about their children, including items such as attendance, assignments, and grades. We believe that this tool will further enhance the communication between parents and teachers. Parents who do not have Internet access at home can visit any branch of the West Hartford Public Library or other community resource centers where computers are available, such as the Elmwood Community Center.



We are asking for your patience during this pilot as we all learn how to make the most effective use of this communication tool. Hopefully, by piloting this over the last eight weeks of the school year we can be fully operational next year. It will also provide us with time to iron out any kinks that we find in the system. Please discuss any grading issues or concerns about students with your child's teacher directly, and allow teachers time to respond. We believe that this will be an effective communication tool for everyone. The parent and school partnership is vital in educating all of our children; this tool will aid you in discussing your child's progress directly with them in a meaningful way.

Board Adopts Budget for 2011-2012

On May 3, 2011, the Board of Education adopted a \$132.8 million budget that represents a 2.27% increase in total educational spending and a 4.86% increase in the General Fund budget for education. This was a very challenging budget year as West Hartford already ranks in the bottom third of per pupil expenditure – 113th out of 169 towns in Connecticut. Our 2009-10 budget was \$11.4 million below what it would be if we spent at the statewide average. In the previous 4 budgets we have reduced 15 teaching positions, 1.5 administrative positions and another 60 full and part time positions, resulting in ongoing annual expenditure reductions of \$4.2 million. Outside of expenditures for salaries, benefits, transportation, utilities, and tuition, we are spending 24% less in 2010-11 than we did in 2006-07.

Increased spending is the direct result of the loss of federal ARRA funds and increased health costs. Those ARRA funds (available in 2009-10 and 2010-11) supported \$3.8 million in teacher salaries, benefits, and instructional supplies. Since the funds are not available in 2011-12, the costs of those positions are returning to the General Fund. However, offsetting this loss of funding is an increase of \$2.2 million in Education Cost-Sharing (ECS) revenue that the town will receive and \$0.6 million in an Education Jobs Grant that the Board of Education is receiving. Another primary cause for the budget increase is higher health care expenses (adding \$2.22 million to the 2011-12 budget). Health care expense inflation is happening nationwide, and we see its' impact accounting for 75% of the total increase in education spending for 2011-12.

We have worked aggressively to lower salary expenses. Through the cooperation offered by our unions, we have negotiated wage freezes for teachers, custodians, and paraprofessionals for the first year of their new contracts in 2011-12. These wage freezes have saved us in excess of \$2 million in salary costs. We are very grateful for the continued cooperation of our unions to hold down expenses in these tight budgetary times. The adopted budget preserves key programs in the district such as small class size, full day kindergarten in all schools, World Language in grade 3, and comprehensive high school offerings including a wide array of AP courses. This budget maintains the excellence expected in West Hartford Schools, and it is a budget the community can be proud of.