

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Attachment VV

A MONTHLY UPDATE BY THE CAPITOL REGION EDUCATION COUNCIL

June 2016

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Executive Director's Message

Greg J. Florio, Ed.D.

Dear CREC Community Members,

As the school year comes to a close, June feels like the end of a cycle for most school districts. For CREC, however, it is a little different.

As students graduate from CREC's magnet high schools and student services programs, we do experience closure, but many of our programs and services will continue throughout the summer regardless of the calendar. Summer is also an opportune time for the organization to examine itself and look for ways it can improve.

Summer will certainly find a more relaxed pace as many staff enjoy time off during the lazy, hazy days of summer, but work on CREC's strategic initiatives will not take the same respite.

Connecticut's recently adopted state budget will have significant impact on all aspects of CREC's programs and services, and we are trying to decipher the potential impact on our magnet schools and other programs and services. As we do so, CREC will also be planning for its future.

It would be nice to believe that the challenges of the state's fiscal condition are behind us, but that would be unrealistic. The next fiscal year will be just as challenging, if not more so, than the one we are completing now.

Beginning this summer, CREC will assess the entire agency in an effort to clarify its vision and mission. CREC's role in the region's educational environment has transformed over the past decade, and we must make sure that our strategic plan matches the current needs of the region and the agency. This is a perfect opportunity to begin that assessment.

This process will include input from all of our key partners, including the CREC Council, our member districts, our own staff, the Connecticut State Department of Education, and many others.

CREC is an agile organization that flourishes when presented with challenges. In an uncertain fiscal climate, our agility to be responsive to sudden shifts in funding or programmatic needs will be a key to success. We intend to keep providing high-quality educational services and creative and affordable solutions for many years.

I look forward to working with you as we develop CREC's vision and mission. Strong, continued partnerships with our member districts will always be at the core of our mission. We, along with so many others, will strive to provide every student in Greater Hartford with the best possible educational outcomes.

Enjoy your summer!

Sincerely,

Dr. Greg J. Florio



District and School News

Southington Mural Celebrates Rails to Trails Project

SOUTHINGTON — Local third-graders joined parents and teachers behind Dean's Stove and Spa recently to unveil a mural in honor of the state's Rails to Trails project.

The colorful 23-by-13-foot mural depicts local attractions and festivals. The Town Green, the Apple Harvest Festival, Camp Sloper, Crescent Lake, Mount Southington and Rogers Orchards are featured in the collaborative work.

The unveiling was met with enthusiastic applause, which competed with the sound of cement trucks across the street. Guests strained to hear the students discuss what it was like to work on the project.

Jan Verderame, principal of Derynoski Elementary School, introduced teachers and students who contributed to the mural and thanked local organizations for their support.

For the second year, the Southington Education Foundation and the Community Foundation of Greater New Britain donated \$20,000 to fund a trip to the New Britain Museum of American Art to inspire the students.

The grant also allowed the schools to buy supplies for the project and bring in local artist Sue Riley of Rooday Designs to offer guidance.

Jayden Prinzhorn of South End School painted "the amazing Rogers Orchards"



Photo credit: The New Britain Herald

in the style of Lois Ehlert, an illustrator of children's books.

"I enjoyed this project because I think when we all work together great things can happen," said Jayden. "One of them is happening right here and right now. We couldn't have done this without Mrs. Riley and Mrs. (Joelle) Castonguay. They both inspired us and helped a lot. I also learned that no matter how much you add you can always make a piece of art better. You're probably thinking, 'There's no way that they made that', but we all did."

"The section of Southington we represented in the mural is the Southington Town Green with the clock and lamppost," said Ainsley Latz, from Derynoski Elementary School. "The artist who inspired our style was Edward Hopper. I enjoyed this project because we got to work with resident artist Mrs. Riley. Also, many people will be able to see what we did to make it. Another reason I enjoyed this is because when I grow up I want to become a famous artist."

Source—The New Britain Herald article published by Brian Johnson on May 30, 2016

Classical Magnet Educator Named Hartford's Teacher of the Year

HARTFORD — Gary Lotreck, a veteran of city schools who teaches English at Classical Magnet School, has been named Hartford's 2016 Teacher of the Year.

Lotreck, 51, of Tolland, has taught in the Hartford school system for 27 years, including at Hartford Public High School and Pathways to Technology, where he started a community service club. In recent years he served as a teacher-in-residence for English language arts and writing.

School officials honored Lotreck at the district's awards banquet Thursday night.

"As an English teacher, he believes in making literature come to life, to bring the ideas off of the page and into the classroom," according to a short biography that was part of Lotreck's finalist bid. At Classical he offers meditation sessions and "teaches his students that to succeed they must engage in risk and struggle, and he

models this in his own practice, as well."

Lauren Davern, a social studies teacher at Capital Preparatory Magnet School, and Sanchez Elementary School third-grade teacher Richard McHugh Jr. were also finalists for the district's top teaching honor. They were picked from an initial pool of 43 candidates.

Source—The Hartford Courant article published by Vanessa de la Torre on May 26.

High School Student Hopes New App Will Make Hartford Safer

HARTFORD — The death of a friend shot and killed in Hartford in October gave Carilianna Felix, a senior at Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy, an idea for a mobile app.

“He was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and they meant to kill someone else, but of course he was there, sadly, and they took his life,” Felix said of her friend.

She came up with the idea to create an app that would let people report crimes anonymously with a tap on their cellphone, alerting police to gang activity, theft or other crimes.

Felix worked with three other girls, who called themselves the Lady Phoenix team, and together they created the Say Something app.

Felix was one of hundreds of students who worked this year under the guidance of their computer science teachers, all of whom received training at Trinity College through a program called the Mobile Computer Science Principles project.

On Tuesday, about 100 of those students from nine high schools presented their new apps at Trinity and voted on whose they liked the best. The Lady Phoenix’s app came in second.

First prize went to Frank Kulak for a game app called Gravity. Kulak is a student at University High School of Science and Engineering in Hartford.

Other apps included Fat Facts, an app developed by Connor Gillis, a senior at Trumbull High School. It provides students with not only the number of calories in their lunch, but also counsels them, if the number of calories is over 800, that they might want to cut back on dinner.



Photo credit: The Hartford Courant / From left, Carilianna Felix and Chamara Wiggins of Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy talk with Thahera Shafi from Westhill High School in Stamford about an app they developed.

“He was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and they meant to kill someone else, but of course he was there, sadly, and they took his life.”

— Carilianna Felix, of Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy

Indianna Allen, a ninth-grader at the Connecticut International Baccalaureate Academy in East Hartford, had an app called Free Me that provided jokes for small children who want to entertain themselves or their friends.

And Daniel Scalzi and two friends from Westhill High School in Stamford wanted to shorten a late bus ride home after school, so they developed Bus Router,

which would provide the bus driver with the most efficient route to take when delivering students home.

The app expo day is part of a National Science Foundation-funded project led by Ralph Morelli, a Trinity College professor of computer science.

Source—The Hartford Courant article published by Kathleen Megan on May 25, 2016

Recognition and Honors

Doran, Akbarzai Secure Discovery to Cure Internships

This summer, two CREC high school juniors will participate in Yale University's Discovery to Cure Internship Program: CREC Greater Hartford Academy of Mathematics and Science student Nickolina Doran, of Southington, and CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering's Mansoor Akbarzai, of Ashford.

To be considered for the six-week program, Doran and Akbarzai each had to submit essays, competing against other high school students to participate.

Established in 2003 and supported by the National Institutes of Health, the Discovery to Cure Internship Program's goal is to expose high school students throughout the world to Yale University's laboratories, encouraging them to pursue careers in science and medicine. Today, the highly competitive program is also for undergraduate college students

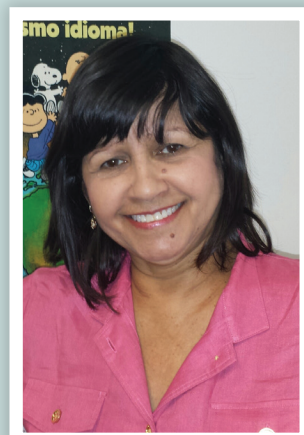
and high school teachers.

Throughout their internships, Doran and Akbarzai will have access to the Yale's medical library and other university electronic resources. They will be assigned mentors and will work on projects in a university laboratory after completing lab safety training. They will also be able to attend lectures from university physicians, scientists, and other guests.

At the conclusion of the program, Doran and Akbarzai will be required to present their research to other program participants, mentors, Yale University faculty, and family and friends. Several students who have completed the internship program have gone on to present their research work at science fairs and other venues, and about 20 percent have their findings published in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

Flores Wins Neighborhood Service Award

Rosa Flores, program coordinator for CREC's Positive Parenting Program, received a neighborhood service award from the Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance at the organization's annual awards ceremony.



The award recognizes individuals who go beyond the call of duty to promote community service in Hartford.

Aleema Kelly Takes Top National Essay Contest Prize



Aleema Kelly, a sixth-grade student at CREC's Montessori Magnet School, won first place at the elementary school level in the Letters about Literature national essay contest.

The annual reading and writing contest is sponsored by The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and is for students in grades four through 12. Students read a book, poem, or speech. They are then asked to write a letter to that author about how the literature affected them personally. The letters are judged at both the state and national levels.

Kelly, of Hartford, wrote her letter about "George" to author Alex Gino, and her

writing will soon be published on <http://read.gov/letters>. She will also receive a \$1,000 prize and a congratulatory letter from the Library of Congress.

This is Kelly's second Letters about Literature honor. Last year, she won the essay contest for Connecticut at the elementary school level and received a \$100 reward, but did not place at the national level.

"We are so proud of Aleema's amazing accomplishment," said Principal Antonio Napoleone. "To win a national contest is not easy, and our entire school is celebrating her success."

CREC Awards Bruce E. Douglas Scholarship for Overcoming Adversity

In May, four students received the Bruce E. Douglas Scholarship for Overcoming Adversity. This is the first year that the scholarship was awarded, and it is named in honor of Bruce E. Douglas, who served as CREC's executive director from 2001 to 2015.

High school seniors who receive this scholarship must attend school in the CREC region and must be enrolled in two- or four-year colleges for the upcoming school year.

This year's recipients are Willie Taylor, a CREC Medical Professions and Teacher Preparation Academy student from Newington; Adriana Colon, a CREC Metropolitan Learning Center for Global and International Studies student from Windsor Locks; Brianna Tribble-Bryant, a CREC Metropolitan Learning Center for Global and International studies student from Hartford; and Lariab Afzaal, a CREC Two Rivers Magnet High School student from Windsor.



CREC photo

Neseralla Wins Award for Sailing Unit

CREC Discovery Academy theme coach Clare Neseralla, an avid sailor, recently received the 2016 Connecticut Educators Computer Association's Educator Award for her work on the school's Volvo Ocean Race Sailing Adventure project, which integrated math, science, sports, language arts, and international studies as fifth-grade students created a website to record the route of sailboats traveling from Brazil to Newport, Rhode Island.

Each year, the award is given to three integrated technology projects that use computer technology to positively impact student learning. Winning projects receive a \$1,000 award, and educators present at the organization's fall conference.

Neseralla has won this award before for work she did for West Hartford Public Schools.



Photo credit: Clare Neseralla

Arts Middle Named Professional Learning Community

The CREC Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts Middle School was recently recognized by Solution Tree as a professional learning community because of its success in raising student achievement.

Solution Tree is a leading provider of educational strategies and tools that improve staff and student performance.

Professional learning communities are schools and districts that recognize the key to improving student achievement is ongoing, job-embedded learning for educators. Professional learning communities ask educators to focus on learning, building a collaborative culture, and creating an environment that stresses the importance of results.

Schools are selected as professional learning communities based on strict criteria. For example, they must demonstrate a commitment to professional learning community concepts and implement these concepts for at least three years. There must also be clear evidence that student learning has improved over that period.

Events and Updates

CREC Public Safety Students Participate in Law Day

On Law Day, nine students from CREC's Public Safety Academy participated in a mock hearing at the Connecticut Appellate Court in Hartford.

The May 4 event was organized by the Connecticut Bar Association's civics education committee.

During the event, CREC's students played the role of a school board charged with deciding if students' rights were violated as a result of the 1966 *Miranda v. Arizona* decision. The landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, which is 50 years old this year, is the reason why we must be informed today of certain rights when arrested, such as the right to an attorney.

"Law Day was a very invigorating experience," said Anisa S. Guess, a CREC Public Safety Academy junior from Wind-



CREC photo

sor. "It really helped me understand how important Miranda rights are and how important it is to be aware of your rights."

Kristopher Pieper, a sophomore from Enfield, agreed, adding that being in a courtroom made the mock hearing come to life and the cases discussed were real-life scenarios.

"It was very informative and taught both

me and my peers a thing or two about the judicial side of our government," Pieper said.

Following the mock hearing, CREC Public Safety Academy students met judges and attorneys, and they spent time at the state Capitol, watching lawmakers in action on the last day of the 2016 legislative session.

"Having our students participate in Law Day at the Connecticut Appellate Court was yet another example

of the awesome learning opportunities that exist at the CREC Public Safety Academy," said Principal Jeff Larson. "I could not have been prouder of their performance in front of Chief Judge (Alexandra) DiPentima. We look forward to future collaborative efforts with the Connecticut Bar Association's civics education committee."

CREC Students Learn About Art by Sharing

Students enrolled in the creativity in the community course at CREC's Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts High School have been busy sharing their artwork with others.

Under the instruction of Nancy Doherty, students develop an appreciation for the arts within both the school community and the larger Hartford community. During the course, students look at websites for museums around the world and study specific works to learn about design, composition, and color. They also collaborate to learn how images, word, dance, and music can benefit and enhance other art forms.

This year, students participated in the Global Art Project, a program that allowed them to share art with students from India. CREC's students made collages out of tissue paper to illustrate their personal ideas of peace. The designs were later made into a large prayer flag and sent to student artists in India. In return, the students in India will send a gift to CREC.

Creativity in the community students also painted clay garden pots for this year's Center for Children's Advocacy Spring for Kids event and wrote short messages in each. The pots were table centerpieces at the event, which was held this month at Infinity Hall in Hartford, and they were auctioned off at the end of the evening.

As the school year comes to a close, students are working hard to complete another final project. They are painting scenes of Hartford for the dining room at Avery Heights, a local senior living facility. The paintings will be professionally framed and then installed in the dining room. An art opening was held on June 3 to mark the occasion.



CREC photo

New Britain School Benefits from CREC Technology Training

This school year, Smith Elementary School in New Britain benefited from more than 30 days of technology training and development courtesy of CREC's Division of Data Analysis, Research and Technology.

In a Smith Elementary School flexible resource room, students used Osmo, an educational game system for the Apple iPad that can help students with spelling and enhance certain subject areas. Another classroom used QR codes and digital devices to help with various phonics and writing concepts, and they used the Seesaw Learning Journal app to capture and document their learning through videos, photos, and audio recording, creating a digital portfolio.

"The technology is amazing," said Malyka Henderson, a flexible resource room teacher. "It meets many needs and supports students where they are and truly engages them."

Ratosha McBride, an education



CREC photo

technology specialist for CREC, used the Curriculum Revision Infusing Technology model to guide an intensive training process. This model is strategically designed to support student symmetric growth and change through the infusion of technology into teaching and learning. A key component in this process comes through modeling, coaching, and continued support and guidance.

New Britain's teachers and students

benefited greatly from the step-by-step approach. In many instances, McBride instructed while the classroom teachers and paraprofessionals observed, learning along with the students. This made teachers feel less anxious about incorporating technology into their classrooms, and they gained confidence and proficiency when using electronic devices.

Because of the training, a team of teachers at Smith Elementary School is now charged with the task of ensuring that the school continues to utilize technology in creative and helpful ways. They will provide professional development for staff, will assist students when they use technology, and will receive ongoing training to stay informed of new tools, resources, and strategies.

To learn more about the Curriculum Revision Infusing Technology model, visit www.crec.org/curit.

CREC Hosts Region's Minority Teacher Recruitment Fair

CREC hosted the region's largest minority teacher recruitment fair in May at CREC Two Rivers Magnet Middle School.

The fair attracted more than 65 educators from throughout the state and is part of an effort to diversify Connecticut's teaching staff. Representatives from 11 Connecticut school districts participated, including CREC Magnet Schools, and they met with potential employees in an effort to find the most qualified minority teacher and administrator candidates.

For the first time in history, the number of Latino, African-American, and Asian students in kindergarten through grade 12 public school classrooms is expected to exceed the number of non-Hispanic, white students, but the racial and ethnic makeup of Connecticut's teaching staff



CREC photo: School districts talk to minority teachers at a recent recruitment fair hosted by CREC.

does not reflect this shift. There is a shortage of African American, Hispanic and Latino, Native American, and Asian educators, and this annual recruitment fair helps to encourage those individuals to pursue a career in education.

New Partnership: Polaris, Community Partners in Action

Community Partners in Action, a nonprofit agency, now offers art lessons to students at the CREC John J. Allison, Jr. Polaris Center.

The lessons are similar to instruction offered to prison inmates through the Prison Arts Program. In fact, artwork designed by inmates is now featured prominently in the CREC John J. Allison, Jr. Polaris Center library. Students are anonymously analyzing and responding to the artwork in writing or by creating their own pieces of art.

Artwork created by CREC John J. Allison, Jr. Polaris Center students will be on display at Capitol Community College in Hartford throughout the month of June.

Events and Updates *(continued)*

Amber Owens to Graduate Farmington High School

Due to hard work and an intense commitment to her studies, Amber Owens will head to Marist College in New York next fall.

As a Hartford resident who attended public school in Farmington through the Hartford Region Open Choice Program, Owens has had many unique opportunities, but she has also faced challenges, such as traveling the distance from her home to her school each day.

“It wasn’t the easiest thing to take part in after school activities,” Owens said. “There are late busses available, but I was close to the last stop. It was a one-hour drive home.”

Still, a determined Owens persevered. She tackled Advanced Placement and honors classes, stayed up late to complete her homework, and then got up early to catch the bus. Owens did whatever it took to get to this moment—graduation from Farmington High School.

Owens has attended Farmington schools through the Open Choice program since the first grade and said she always felt supported by staff, especially her high school guidance counselor, Judi Gallinoto.

“She’s always presenting me with new opportunities,” Owens said. “She is



CREC photo

the reason that I’m part of the Student Ambassador Program.”

The Student Ambassador Program matches students at Farmington High School with a student transferring to the school from another school district.

“I was set up with a girl from Romania who spoke no English,” Owens said. “I showed her around and invited her to sit with me and my friends at lunch. We were all using Google translate on our phones to communicate with her.”

In addition to the Student Ambassador Program, Owens is involved in a mentoring program that helps incoming

freshmen and is a member of Interact, a school club that works on community-based projects.

At Marist, Owens plans to study business or economics, and she knows what she wants her life to be like in five years.

“I will have graduated from college, will have minimal debt, and have a job that I like,” she said. “The point of going to college is not just to find a job, but to get into a career.”

As her daughter gets ready for college, Owens’ mother, Ivette Hernandez, is hopeful. Going to school in Farmington has worked well, and the quality of the education Owens received, along with the friendships her daughter has formed, make up for any challenges.

“I do wish that Hartford and Farmington parents had more of a connection,” Hernandez said. “It would have been nice to get to know her friends’ parents better.”

Over the years, Hernandez has advocated for Owens, but knows her daughter earned much of her success on her own.

“I’ve always stayed involved, but Amber’s been self-motivated from the start,” she said. “Teachers have always been telling me how wonderful she is. Her whole life, she’s been strong. It’s important that we raise our daughters to be strong young women.”

CREC Medical Professions Hosts Go Baby Go and Literacy Night

In May, CREC’s Medical Professions and Teacher Preparation Academy hosted its first Go Baby Go event, helping to provide mobility to children who struggle on their own. This event was held in partnership with Central Connecticut State University.

It also held a Hawaiian-themed school literacy night. With audience participation, staff performed a “Murder in Maui” at the event.



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