

THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS

The Sixty-Fourth Annual Meeting

June 2016

2015-2016 Annual Report

CSAC BOARD OF CONTROL

Submitted by Paul G. Cavaliere, Jr., Chair

For the seventh consecutive year, the Connecticut Student Activities Conference saw participation rates in many of its programs increase during 2015-16! In spite of the internal pressures of student achievement gains at the classroom level, and the good winter weather, this was, indeed, a pleasant surprise! CSAC has been focusing on building student activity program across the state at all three levels – elementary, middle and high. This year was no exception, as the board moved forward with a mixture of traditional activities, as well as new initiatives. The overall objective for CSAC in 2015-16 was to link activities to 21st century leadership skills, diversity awareness, and school climate initiatives. Thematically, our curriculum this year was built around the essential question: “I’m a leader, so now what are my responsibilities?”

The following is a brief summary of CSAC initiatives for 2015-16.

• Student Leadership Conferences

The Connecticut Association of Student Councils, led by Assistant Director of Student Activities, Jennifer Buckley, revised the 2015-16 calendar of activities by “front loading” the important programs to the fall and following up with regional activities in the spring. Working with the expanded faculty and student advisory board that increased membership significantly from last year, Buckley orchestrated a fall statewide conference in November. Hosted by the CT IB Academy in East Hartford, the two-day event featured amazing speakers and break-outs that explored the themes of 21st century leadership skills. *Find Your Spark, Be a Spark*, the theme provided not only the direction and the structure for the fall conference, but also drove the agenda for the CASC board throughout the 2015-2016 year. A jam-packed conference hosted by East Hartford High School and the CT IB Academy featured student-run workshops, speakers including Andrew Peterson (a Special Olympics champion), Mike Smith (creator of Skate for Change), and Chris Temple (Founder of Living on One and the documentaries *Living on One Dollar* and *Salam Neighbor*) and a performance by Looking In Theater (a student-led performance group from the Hartford Academy for the Arts). Students were challenged to find what sparks their passion and then, in turn, reach out and spark the passion in someone else. They were asked to look beyond resume builders and prestige positions to making room for everyone’s voice and leading and living life based on authenticity, openness and service to others.

Rounding out the Fall programs were two new programs: *Summit 2015 For Young Boys Of Color* and *Converge 2016: A Conference For Young Women of Color* (see additional details herein). Both programs exceeded expectations in terms of participation and evaluation. CASC also spearheaded the use of social media and continued to update the CAS website to launch all of its programs this year! This is a work in progress and targeted for more revisions in 2016-17.

Two summer leadership conferences are planned for July 2016. The first will offer CT student-leaders a chance to improve their leadership skills at Stonehill College, MA. A second, national student leadership event sponsored by NFHS at the headquarters in Indiana, will conclude our expanded summer programs. CSAC will utilize participants in these events as ambassadors to assist with planning CAS-CIAC events for 2016-17.

The Elementary Student Leadership conferences were held for the 23rd consecutive year at four college sites: Sacred Heart University, Asnuntuck, Three Rivers, and Naugatuck Community Colleges. In total, the four conferences enrolled more than 975 students, which was an excellent response and very close to our all-time high! Co-Chairs Karen Brimecombe, Bob Garry, Mary Giard, and Eileen Roxbee coordinated the programs that featured teacher volunteers from across the state providing highly interactive leadership activities for students in grades four through six. The breakout sessions developed productive thinking, communication, problem solving and decision making skills.

Future student leadership initiatives and conferences will be aligned to the curricular modules of service, ethics, decision-making, diversity, team building, and communication that are part of the newly developed and approved four-year student leadership curriculum.

- **A Diversity Focus**

CSAC continued with its focused effort to develop leadership skills with diversity initiatives. We developed three well-attended programs. The first, "Diversity In Action," was hosted by the Diversity Team at North Haven High School in October. Organized for and run by students, the day featured a series of breakout sessions with the overarching goal of helping students develop a better understanding and acceptance of others. The day was also an "open house" for participants to visit North Haven's Diversity Day program! The second event, planned by Karissa Niehoff, Dave Maloney and Jenn Buckley, in collaboration with the ADL, CAPSS and CABE staff, was a workshop that expanded our awareness, knowledge and understanding of the Muslim community.

The *Summit 2015 For Young Men Of Color* conference (mentioned earlier) was held at Goodwin College on December 17th. Over 200 middle school-aged young men of color were in attendance to hear from A'ric Jackson and a panel of CAS administrators reflect upon positive ways to improve their leadership skills. Finally, CSAC sponsored *Converge 2016: A Conference For Young Women of Color* on January 11th at Quinnipiac University. The event featured a keynote presentation by Janice Castle, a rising star performer in the greater Hartford corporate community, and a panel discussion by three, talented teacher leaders. Over 225 high school women attended the conference that also received excellent coverage from the press / media.

- **B.O.T.F. Competition**

BOFT stands for Battle of the Fans, a video-based school spirit competition designed to find the CT high school with the very best examples of spirit and sportsmanship. Modeled after the Michigan program, CSAC launched our version for 2015-16 at the CIAC Sportsmanship Conference in November. One school, an entry from Cheshire High School, stood out above the others. A news release, featuring a video of the Cheshire production team, was prepared by CIAC staff member, Joel Cookson, and posted on our site during the state basketball tourney. The BOFT Award was presented to Cheshire High at the Mohegan Sun Arena before a huge crowd during the state basketball championship weekend.

- **KiDSMARATHON**

Working with the Rod Dixon Foundation in Los Angeles, CSAC sponsored KiDSMARATHON for the seventh consecutive year. KiDSMARATHON is an amazing life fitness program for students ages 7-12 that features an 8-10 week program of running with nutritional guidelines. Final celebrations were expanded to *nine sites* for 2016, including Cheshire, Waterbury, Litchfield, Danbury, EO Smith, Trumbull, South Windsor, Glastonbury and Waterford. Over 4,500 runners completed the last mile of their marathon before cheering family and friends. To help advertise and market the program, KiDSMARATHON has produced two, three-minute documentary videos that provide prospective schools with an overview of the program. The prospects for KiDSMARATHON, aligned with First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move Campaign" and Governor Malloy's Child Obesity Program, continue to be a source of pride for the Connecticut Association of Schools.

- **Dance Championships**

The 10th annual state dance championship was held at Hamden High School on February 27th. A record number of dance team entries – 52 - competed in the event witnessed by a standing room only crowd. The choreography, costumes, music and synchronization delighted all in attendance at this popular event. Teams were crowned champs in the hip hop, jazz, kick and pom categories. Most impressive was the display of cheering and sportsmanship by all the teams for one another. CT dance teams were well represented at the New England Regional Competition on March 5th at Braintree High School, MA. Dance coaches were treated to a clinic last fall which provided excellent background information on the NFHS spirit rules. Tournament chair, Kathy Swillinger, did a superb job with the arrangements.

- **Cheerleading**

Kudos to the Cheer Committee, chaired by Glenn Lungarini, Principal of Pomperaug High School, for another outstanding year of regional competitions leading up to the state championship at the New Haven Athletic Center on March 5 and 6. More than 100 schools participated in the competition which drew large, spirited crowds on both dates. Champions were crowned in the small, medium, large and co-ed school divisions. A unified cheerleading exhibition was added to the competition which proved to be very "special." Connecticut High School Cheerleading

also represented the state in fine fashion at the New England championships held at Lawrence High School, Lawrence, MA, on March 19th. Tournament chair Sherrie Zembruzski and a large cadre of cheer coaches did their usual excellent job with the planning and organization.

- **Robotics**

CSAC continued its partnership with CT *FIRST*, an organization that sponsors robotics tournaments for elementary, middle and high school teams. CT *FIRST*'s goal is to inspire in students an appreciation of science, technology, engineering and mathematics and to show them how an understanding of these fields can enrich their lives. The vision we have for this partnership is limitless as students build not only science and technology skills, but also self-confidence, leadership, and life skills. The CT High School Robotics Championship was held on May 14th at Pomperaug High School. Almost 30 teams competed for the coveted title of state robotics champion.

- **Debate**

Under the direction of chair Everett Rutan, the Connecticut Debate Association had a record year as far as participation in tournaments! Kicking off the year for CDA was a special program for novice teams in September. Seven regional extemporaneous debates were held in 2015-16 leading up to the state championships on April 2nd. Each regional tournament averaged over 27 schools and 300 students participating in each tournament! This represents an all-time record number of debaters! Of all the student activities in our schools debating remains the "highest of the higher order thinking skill" activity!

In its second year of operation, the Middle Level Debate League, led by Jen Posner, hosted three very successful tournaments. Over 13 schools and 115 debaters participated in each event. The prospects for debating at the middle level are very promising!

- **Thomas Flanagan / CAS-CIAC Endowment Grant Awards**

Through generous sponsorships from many corporate partners, the CAS-CIAC Flanagan/Endowment Awards disbursed approximately \$20,000 to member school applicants this spring. The RFP provides funding to new or existing programs that are educationally sound initiatives in support of high levels of learning. The CSAC board screens, selects, and announces the winners at the annual meeting and/or at on-site celebrations. We annually receive approximately 40 applications for this program.

- **State Student Advisory Council on Education (SSACE)**

The 2015-16 edition of the State Student Advisory Council on Education (SSACE) consisted of twenty five high school students who met regularly with Dr. Dianna Wentzell, Commissioner of Education. The SSACE's number one project this year was to produce a presentation for the state board of education which centered on three topics: what should the 12th grade experience be?; how might health and wellness programs be improved?; is there equity across extra-curricular activities throughout CT high schools? SSACE also selected the recipients of the Governor's Challenge to Citizenship Awards that are an annual recognition of school / community service projects.

- **The Governor's Scholars Committee**

Chaired by Deirda Preis, assistant principal at Fairfield Warde High School, the committee annually designates Connecticut's finest junior year students as *Governor's Scholars*. Formed seventeen years ago at the urging of then Commissioner of Education Ted Sergi, the program is a first-class recognition for the top junior scholars in our member schools. Each nominated student receives a Governor's Scholars certificate from CAS and, of the pool of nominees, approximately thirty finalists are selected and celebrated in May at the Governor's Scholars Luncheon. Finalists receive a plaque and the opportunity to take free courses at thirty-three Connecticut colleges and universities. The University of Connecticut offers each scholar who matriculates there a scholarship valued at half tuition for four years.

- **The Arts Committee**

Chaired by Maureen Berescik, recently retired Director of Arts for the Bethel Public Schools, this committee annually plans the high school arts banquet recognizing two outstanding arts students from each high school. Over one hundred and thirty high schools were represented this year. An added announcement was the recipient of the "Heart of the Arts" award given to a student who exemplifies the ideals of the positive heart of the arts that represent the core mission of the fine and practical arts. Sylvana Gonzalez-Torres, a senior from E.C. Goodwin Technical High School, was the 2016 recipient. Once again, the arts committee was very pleased to have Jostens as its corporate sponsor.

- **Look for the Good Project**

CSAC offered a new workshop for elementary and middle level schools in December entitled “The Look For The Good Project.” The presenter was Anne Kubitsky, CEO and founder of the program. The “Look For The Good Project” is a research backed program built around the core belief that gratitude changes everything – especially in schools. The workshop revealed how to transform a classroom and / or school or district into a gratitude community of practice. Participants received a “toolkit” of concrete ideas, strategies, and hands-on techniques that could be immediately implemented in virtually any classroom setting. Gratitude-based practices can support character education initiatives, instructional pedagogy, and can be linked to school climate plans. The feedback that CSAC has received from offering “The Look For The Good Project” has been sensational. We hope to offer more workshops on a regional basis for sure.

- **DISCOVER, LEAD! 2015 Conference for Young Men of Color**

DISCOVER, LEAD! 2015, A Conference for Young Men of Color (Goodwin College, East Hartford) challenged 6th, 7th and 8th grade boys to step into their leadership abilities and apply them to all aspects of their lives. Keynoted by A’Ric Jackson, students were asked to think hard and take action, not to just settle for that which comes naturally or easily. Through A’Ric’s presentation, student-led workshops and a dynamic panel presentation, students were challenged to set and work towards difficult goals. They were also encouraged to define themselves rather than to let stereotypes or other people’s expectations limit their potential. Culminating in a powerful pledge, students left ready to take on new challenges and create new programs in their schools. There have been some exciting outcomes of the conference at a couple of area middle schools. Sage Park Middle School in Windsor has embarked on a program (Sage Park Leaders) for young men of color to increase the likelihood of their achievement and also to create a culture shift in how this population is viewed. MD Fox Elementary School in Hartford is loosely following what Sage Park has done to support the young men of color in their building.

- **CONVERGE 2016 Conference for Young Women of Color**

Janice Castle, CT’s own mover and shaker in the Capitol City, electrified the conference with her pull-no-punches story of determination, effort and triumph as a young professional making her way through academia, corporate culture and now public policy work in Hartford. Students also were riveted by the stories of three panelists, each with her own unique life experience and road to success. The backdrop for this standing room only conference was the beautiful, newly renovated center for law at Quinnipiac University. In a welcome addition to the conference, Channel 8 news and the New Haven Register both covered the event.

- **Middle Level Leadership Conference**

New Year, New Skills!, a program to jump start the new year for middle school leaders, drew more than 400 middle school students from across the state to Trinity College for an intensive day of training, inspiration and leadership development. Student-led workshops focused on building a climate of acceptance, making a difference at school, taking risks, rising to the occasion and social networking. A highlight of the day was an energetic, challenging workshop designed and led by the Pack from New Fairfield Middle School who presented their new initiative with Dylan’s Wings of Change: *Wingman*. The day culminated with a high-energy presentation by A’Ric Jackson, pushing students to break down their box, be a 3 percenter and get to making a difference.

- **Salam Neighbor, February 10, 2016**

The CASC Student Board brought Chris Temple back to CT (Goodwin College) for a showing of his documentary, *Salam Neighbor*, about living in a Syrian refugee camp in Jordan. Students and staff were riveted by this powerful and illuminating work that strives to create understanding by personalizing the experiences that are so often discussed in broad strokes and without the day-to-day human impact of policies and politics. Chris Temple, film maker and founder of Living on One, introduced the film and entertained questions after the showing. Since this event, one school (North Branford High School) has organized a showing of the film at their school and are using it as a fundraiser for a refugee organization in New Haven that works with Chris and Living on One. CAS is gathering a group of educators this summer to create a complementary curriculum to be used by schools viewing the film.

- **Arts in the Middle**

CSAC hosted the annual Arts in the Middle Conference at the University of Hartford in May. This sold out conference featured area artists conducting hands-on, intensive workshops in a variety of mediums including ceramics, mask making, charcoal drawing, digital photography and much more. Students also participated in an interactive group workshop introducing Unified Arts to students and staff. Utilizing the state of the art studios and facilities of the Art School at the university, students got a taste of what it would be like to be an art student at a world class institution.

- **CT Association of National Honor Societies Spring Conference**

CANHS teamed up with Herff Jones to present a packed leadership day featuring Keith Nord on May 24th at the Aqua Turf Club in Southington. Having been in leadership positions throughout his life in athletics and at service organizations, Keith Nord has lived the experiences he talks about. A former NFL player with the Minnesota Vikings for seven years, Keith was one of the team's captains for several years. During his *Believe in You* workshop, Keith took participants through a variety of leadership exercises based on real life situations. Students left better able to fulfill the expectations others have for them as leaders as well as those they have set for themselves. Service, character, integrity and passion are fundamental components of National Honor Society. This workshop helped students to explore these aspects of their own leadership and to gain understanding of how to put them into practice in effective ways in their schools and communities.

- **Generation Leadership**

Working with A'Ric Jackson, the Morgan School in Clinton and other partners, CSAC is helping to develop a comprehensive curricular program for student leadership development that features student voice. The pilot program will be offered to schools in CT during the 2016-2017 academic year. Enfield High School and Kaynor Technical High School have already agreed to participate and hope to provide a model for other schools to follow. Generation Leadership is a training program designed to teach and empower students to discover their leadership style; create their leadership legacy and philosophy; impact their school through meaningful dialogue; and, learn how to have an active voice in their academic career, personal life, community and globally. Through various guided discussions, workshops and seminars, Generation Leadership will incorporate assessments, activities, and role playing. In addition, student leaders will learn a multitude of leadership theories and concepts in order to become an effective leader.

Generation Leadership is committed to providing leadership training, seminars and workshops that are personally engaging, thought-provoking and geared towards empowering students. Students will be given skills, tools and strategies to be effective leaders for their generation and beyond. Through the program, students will build self-confidence and a strong sense of self, embrace diversity, understand how to be culturally sensitive to others, become advocates in their community and practice effective leadership principles. The program, potentially, shows great promise for 2016-17 and beyond!