

THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS

The Fifty-Seventh Annual Meeting

May 22, 2009

2008-2009 Annual Report

MIDDLE LEVEL BOARD OF CONTROL

Submitted by Joseph Scheideler, Chair

The CAS delegation to the **NELMS New England Symposium** is continuing the important work begun last year. After reviewing Commissioner McQuillan's report on secondary educational reform, and recognizing that Governor Rell has indicated that there will be no funding for the reform, the Connecticut delegation brainstormed various ways to keep the reform momentum going forward. Among the ideas discussed were involving schools in the implementation of best practices in the current economic climate; insuring an inclusive audience of educators, legislators, parents and the public in discussion of reform; establishing forums at various schools around the state; disseminating the CAS position paper, "Talking Points," which supports the reform agenda; establishing cohort "study groups" that bring together neighboring communities including diverse districts; highlighting existing practices that are already happening in middle schools across the state and nation; and, most importantly, recognizing that funding is not necessary for every aspect of the reform package.

Upon returning from the symposium, the committee has met to continue the logistical planning of the cohort study groups. The goals and materials to be used as well as the format for the study groups are in the planning stage. Specific reform topics such as student success plans, advisories, transition programs, flexible scheduling, capstone projects, professional development and model curricula will set the framework for the agendas. Leadership facilitators will come from both middle and high school level practitioners. The culminating activity of each cohort/study group would be to develop an action plan for its own respective school districts.

Middle Level Leadership Conference – Over 400 students attended the annual Middle Level Leadership Conference at Quinnipiac University in January. Students attended a variety of workshops run by teachers, counselors, and students from around the state. The conference ended with a session held by school advisors where students and advisors brainstormed ideas on how to apply the lessons of the conference to their own schools. Two sessions were also held for advisors, including a roundtable to share ideas and issues common to all schools. A survey of students and advisors at the conclusion of the conference resulted in an overwhelmingly positive response.

The Honors and Awards Committee selected **Canton Middle School** as the *2008-2009 Middle School of the Year*. Among the reasons it was selected are: students consistently score at or near the top of their educational reference group in the Connecticut Mastery Tests, especially in the area of writing. There is a culture that promotes parent and faculty leadership in curriculum and instruction, school improvement and policy development. Students are active in promoting a climate of acceptance for all students regardless of their varied talents and skills, especially through the "Tolerance, Respect, Acceptance Kindness" (TRAK) program. Finally, literacy across the disciplines ensures that all students have the necessary reading, writing and speaking skill to be successful in all subjects.

The Committee honored Hamden Middle School teacher **Diane Marinaro** as *Middle Level Exemplary Educator of the Year*. A twenty-year veteran social studies teacher, Diane has taught every level of learner and challenges her students with innovative strategies and culturally responsive teaching and

learning. Diane is a highly prized colleague who shares her considerable abilities through co-teaching with special education teachers and reading specialists and as a leader in the HMS initiative for the National Urban Alliance.

Susan Homrok from the Henry James Memorial Middle School in Simsbury was named as the *William Cieslukowski Outstanding First Year Principal*. Among her first year initiatives were the creation of a new school mission statement; strengthening teacher leadership structures; revising curriculum, assessment and instructional practices; and creating new opportunities for engagement of all aspects of the Henry James community.

Middle Level Survey

The CAS Middle Level Board of Control and the Center for Early Adolescent Educators Advisory Board created a survey to ascertain the degree to which member school principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders and central office administrators value each of the middle level services provided by CAS. The fifty-item survey covers middle level student services, professional development, advocacy, recognition programs and other services. The resulting data will help CAS to better serve its membership in the future.

“Arts in the Middle” is grateful to the Horace Mann Insurance Group for becoming a corporate partner. Its support will ensure financial stability for the program and allow the artistic offerings to expand. New workshops this year will include Native American weaving, printmaking and “Stuck On You” duct tape art.

Sage Park Middle School was the recipient of the *Arthur Director Leadership Award* in part for its work in the Best Buddies Program, which promotes accepting differences and helping others; the Homework Club, which pairs older and younger students in learning strategies to be successful in specific subjects; and the Very Important Person (V.I.P.) program which extends a positive school climate to the cafeteria, halls, buses, athletic fields and neighborhoods.

The **Middle Level Professional Studies Committee** has been involved in several initiatives during the 2008-2009 school year. The first has been a concerted effort to increase membership on the committee due to the nature of its work regarding exemplary practices. Committee members have reviewed and visited two new applicant schools, as well as six schools for re-certification purposes. Schools have applied for recognition as an exemplary practices school in the areas of "school climate" and or "teaming practices." The balance of the committee's time has been devoted to developing a rubric for use in establishing an exemplary practice in the area of "curriculum, instruction and assessment." This activity has provided a rich source of discussion for committee members and an activity which requires reflection on their own schools in the light of best practice. The self-assessment process that is part of an exemplary practice program is a great way to promote school self reflection and foster school improvement.