

THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS



PERSONALIZED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN CT HIGH SCHOOLS



Published by the CT Association of High School Principals' Professional Studies Committee

STUDY

OF

PERSONALIZATION

PROGRAMS

IN

CONNECTICUT HIGH SCHOOLS

Sponsored by
The High School Professional Studies Committee
The Connecticut Association of Schools
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Cheshire, Connecticut 06410

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Personalization Programs in CT High Schools

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTIONS

1	.....By Art Arpin, Chair
2	.....By Nick Anderson, Student

SECTION 1: FEATURED PROGRAMS

4	.....Branford High School / <i>Cultural Diversity Club</i>
5	.....Bunnell High School / <i>Unlearn Assemblies</i>
6	.....Granby Memorial High School / <i>Choice Mentoring Program</i>
7	.....Masuk High School / <i>Fun Faculty Meetings</i>
8	.....Newtown High School / <i>Small Town Meeting</i>
10	.....Terryville High School / <i>Mentor Program</i>
11	.....Wilbur Cross High School / <i>Los Amigos</i>

SECTION II: HIGHLIGHTED PROGRAMS

14	.....Danbury High School / <i>Peer Teaching</i>
15	.....Derby High School / <i>DHS Live</i>
16	.....Granby Memorial High School / <i>Mentor Program</i>
17	.....Killingly High School / <i>Freshman Academy</i>
18	.....New Fairfield High School / <i>Connections</i>
19	.....Parish Hill Middle-Senior High School / <i>Peer Tutoring</i>
20Rocky Hill High School / <i>Freshmen Transitions</i>

Pages 22-33 SECTION III: NOTEWORTHY PROGRAMS
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CHAIRPERSON INTRODUCTION

“High schools in America in the 21st Century looks remarkably like their antecedents from the 20th. Many are large (some more so than others) and offer a wide variety of course to educate the majority of their students. But if you were to survey high school graduates, you would find that many of them never felt a connection to their school. While they may say that they enjoyed high school, they would probably also say that they left there with few personal connections with teachers or other students.

A number of studies have picked up on this lack of personalization, and research has found that this issue is one that must be addressed to fully educate the students of today and in the future. In fact, any schools in Connecticut that have recently undergone a NEASC evaluation can attest to the need for schools to focus on creating a more personalized experience for all the members of the school community.

To that end, the 2005 monograph of the CAS High School Professional Studies Committee focuses on the topic of personalizing the school environment. The programs featured in this document offer ideas that we hope will help our readers to create an environment where students and staff alike can feel a sense of belonging.

The initiatives explained here are those that go beyond individual classrooms. We fully understand that individual teachers do much to personalize their instruction and that what occurs within classrooms is critical to engaging students and connecting them to their school. Strategies for personalizing classroom instruction have been and will be the topic for additional publications.

We feature programs that cover a variety of situations. We are highlighting programs in large and small schools, rural and urban settings, and programs that benefit students and staff. We hope that you will take advantage of the information provided here; these schools are ready and willing to share their knowledge and expertise with fellow school leaders at any time.

Congratulations to all the schools featured in this monograph, and our deepest appreciation to the administrators and teachers who took the time to provide thoughtful, in-depth responses to our questionnaire. Without their efforts, this monograph could not be produced.

- Arthur C. Arpin, Chairperson, Professional Studies Committee



STUDENT INTRODUCTION

“Square pegs slide into square slots with relative ease, but when the round pegs come along things get tricky. To say that all students at any given school are one shape and one shape only cannot be done, and therefore to expect that a school can satisfy the interests and passions of an entire student body with one static program is impossible.

Students come in a plethora of different shapes, there is no one set mold. So schools cannot provide a beneficial experience for students by offering only one program with which all students must conform.

Over the past four years I have had the good fortune to attend a high school that consciously understands this challenge. Weston High School is a far cry from institutions where all students must conform to one pattern. Students at Weston have the opportunity to develop a path of their own liking, tailoring the offerings of the high school to their own interests. But there is no formal program for personalizing the curricular offerings. That is to say, the school does not mandate personalization. Rather, the unique nature of Weston High School is its own adjustability. The strength of Weston’s personalized learning environment is that there is no formal program for it.

When I was a freshman, I was in an enrichment program called Talented And Gifted (TAG) wherein advanced students could explore broad societal themes and pursue personal academic interests. The class was individualized to the students enrolled. The required curriculum included a unit on archetypal themes which I fulfilled, but more appealing to me was the opportunity offered to explore something I could not otherwise explore in high school. I wanted to pursue journalism for high school students, so my teacher connected me with a faculty member willing to be my advisor on that endeavor.

My exploration of high school journalism, a topic uniquely appealing to me, was labeled an Independent Study project and the school awarded me academic credit for it. My mission was to start a school newspaper. The project—and the fledgling newspaper—was successful. The next year I wanted to bring the school newspaper to the next level, to raise it from a personal project to a school-wide operation. The school activities coordinators approved the newspaper to become a school-sanctioned club. After that second year of consistently producing high-quality publications at monthly intervals, the school offered funding to expand from a Xeroxed pamphlet to a publication professionally printed on newsprint.

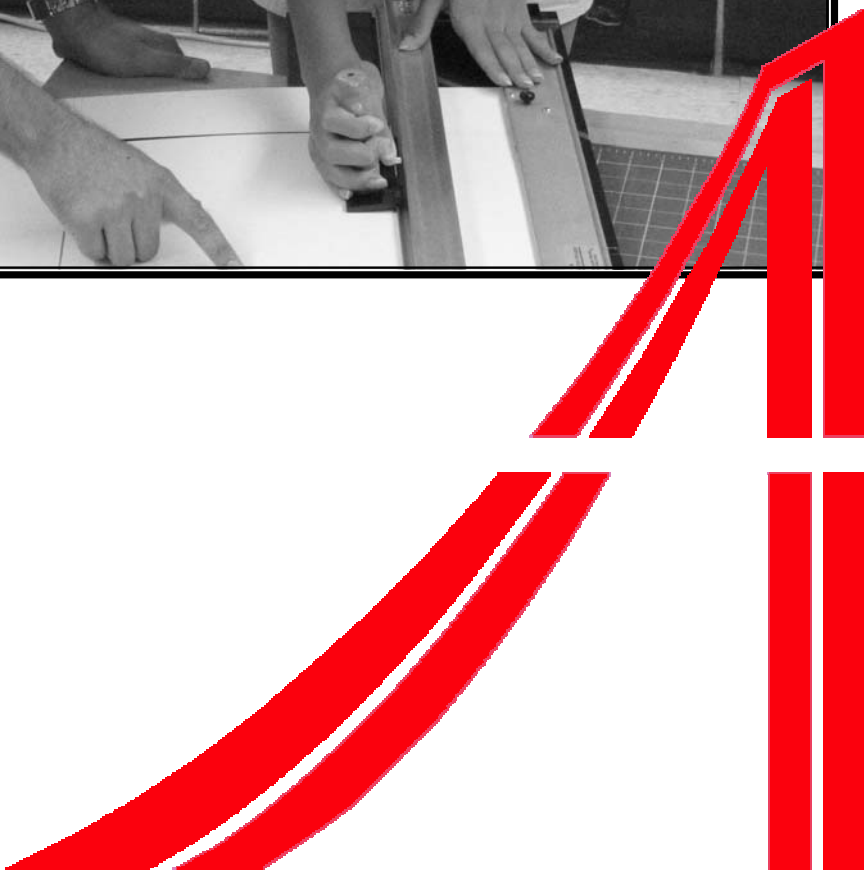
My point is this: rather than imposing limits and guidelines, Weston High School and its faculty and administrators offered support and allowed for self-determination. I was given the freedom to take my project as far as I could. Now *The Weston High School Journal* has a website, nearly 100 staff members and a student editorial board.

Weston High School is personalized to the students by the students. The school offers students the choice to participate in programs like Talented and Gifted, the flexibility to tailor and pursue Independent Studies of our own choosing, and support, in my case in the form of faculty advisors and funding. The entire experience has been, for me, extremely gratifying and rewarding.”

- Nick Anderson, Senior, Weston High School



photo courtesy of Josh Berman, Rocky Hill H.S.



FEATURED PROGRAMS



Branford High School

The Cultural Diversity Club

The BHS Cultural Diversity Club’s mantra may be summarized in one sentence: “to create a community of learners, the celebration of diversity and the insistence on inclusiveness must suffuse the daily life at Branford High.”

The CDC raises the level of awareness of the many dimensions of diversity in our school by providing:

- School-wide assemblies
- In-school seminars for faculty and students
- Outreach programs to other schools in the district
- “Awareness Week” focuses on this topic
- Activities in weekly advisory board meetings

At the beginning of the year, the CDC presents the annual “Parade of Nations”. This event takes place on the first Friday of the school year, and focuses on the school’s mission. There are speeches, musical selections, and then a parade in which faculty members march into the student center carrying the flag that represents their country of ethnic origin.

There are other events, which take place throughout the year – programs on bullying, name-calling, and acceptance of other cultures. Students and parents are the focus of these seminars.

The Cultural Diversity Club at BHS has been in existence for 15 years. It is currently one of the school’s largest clubs with a membership of close to 60 students. These students meet at night twice each month, as well as being involved in a variety of subcommittees. The club has more than established its presence within the school and community – it has drastically improved the climate in our school.

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Bunnell High School, Stratford

Unlearn Assemblies

Bunnell High School in Stratford, CT, initiated its *Unlearn Assemblies* in order to increase awareness in the school community of student issues and to provide students with advice and resources in getting assistance in dealing with issues and problems. During the *Unlearn Assemblies*, guest speakers present inspirational stories focusing on their struggles and successes in dealing with problems and issues that many students also struggle with. Speakers address issues such as sexual abuse, drug abuse, depression, the loss of a child to an alcohol or prescription drug overdose and inspirational stories from individuals who have faced adversity and turned their lives around. Speakers from *Project Reach* discuss how poor decisions changed the course of their lives. *Project Reach* is a program that provides prison inmates with the opportunity to speak to young people about their consequences of the choices they have made. Each assembly concludes with a member of Stratford Community Services who provide students with options and resources they can take advantage of in dealing with their own problems. These speakers encourage students to seek help and assistance before their problems become insurmountable. They also describe the family and individual counseling services provided by the community services. Students are also provided with pamphlets containing community services program descriptions and phone numbers.

Many of the stories shared with students at the *Unlearn Assemblies* appear in the publication, [Unlearn](#). [Unlearn](#) is written and published by Stratford High School's creative writing class. [Unlearn](#) compliments and supports the assembly programs.

The [Unlearn](#) publication and assemblies have had positive impacts on the Bunnell High School's climate and culture. Students discuss the assembly topics and issues in English classes. There has been an increase in student contributions to [Unlearn](#) as a result of the successful assemblies and the coordination of the program with English classes.

The *Unlearn* program, which is open to the entire student body and has been in operation for ten years, has helped to increase students' awareness of teen issues and avenues for getting assistance in dealing with these issues. The program has proven to be valuable to many of the high school's 1350 students who demonstrate a great deal of respect for the *Unlearn* program, for the publication, and for the speakers in the assemblies. Students have continually commented that this program has given them a greater appreciation for what their peers may be dealing with and has given many of them the encouragement they have needed to confront their own issues.

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Granby Memorial High School

Choice Mentoring Program

Granby High School has established a mentorship program for all 6th-12th grade Project Choice students through Granby host families who take on the role of educational partners as well as supportive hosts for students matched with them at the beginning of the school year. The Choice Program features Hartford students who attend suburban schools. There are 15-20 Choice students per year in Granby. All Granby families who have children the same age as Choice students are asked to participate as mentors. Parents of the Hartford students have to give permission for students to participate with mentor families. The administration matches students with the eligible host families. During the school year, the school sponsors an initial dinner for participants and another dinner during the school year for student and host families to interact with fun activities as well as to gather feedback on how the program is going. Choice students often spend an overnight on a weekend following a Friday night school event. A culminating dinner in the spring is held as a final event to celebrate the communications and relationships that have been fostered. Students maintain their host families throughout their high school years.

The program has been in existence for two years and involves approximately fifty individuals each year. Participant groups include Choice Students, Granby families, Granby administration, Granby teachers, Hartford families, CREC administration.

The program affirms the diversity of population that Choice offers and further helps Choice students adjust to being in school in a different community than where they live. The educationally and emotionally supportive environment that has been created for Choice students and Granby families is the biggest indicator of success of this program. The mentor families also help with the educational support for their mentor students.

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Masuk High School, Monroe

Fun Faculty Meetings

Once or twice a year, instead of a typical faculty meeting business agenda, we split up into small groups to do fun activities that are of interest to the faculty members. This year the teachers have selected the following activities: Book Club, Improve Workshop, Walk through Nature, Rock and Roll Jeopardy, Use of Masuk Weight Room, Yoga 101, Putting Pictures on the Web Page, Photography 101, 60's Tie Dye, What's for Dinner Cooking Lesson, Shelf or Birdhouse Construction, and Watercolor Wonders. A teacher who has expertise in the area directs each activity. Each faculty member signs up ahead of time. Regular faculty meetings are not run by the principal or an administrator. An elected member of the faculty assembly, which is composed of all certified staff members, runs them. There is a raffle at the start of each meeting. Teachers must be there to be eligible to win. The prize is usually a Masuk golf shirt, sweatshirt, or some other article of clothing.

These activities have improved staff morale by providing staff members with an opportunity to interact and bond in a relaxed atmosphere. Teachers have really enjoyed these activities since it has allowed them to expand their horizons and to grow.

Fun Faculty Meetings have been in place at Masuk for three years.

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Newtown High School

Small Town Meeting

Facilitated by Lorrie Rodrigue, Assistant Principal in Newtown, a grass-roots initiative was started in the spring of 2004. Teachers were invited to develop a common vision for the future of a growing high school (over 1600 students) that would impact positive change in the school climate and in student learning. Using *Breaking Ranks II* as a guiding resource, the staff's work centered around a single theme: "Creating a Small Town Feel in a Large School". The teachers used their own experience, research, and student data to develop three common goals: Building a Climate of Respect and Collaboration, Engaging Disenfranchised Students, and Creating a Safe and Caring Environment. Small Town Meetings were held and an initial strategic plan was created for developing and implementing ideas. With these three goals in mind, teacher action planning groups were formed and teachers worked with their colleagues throughout the year and over the summer to build a structure for the changes. A school lock-down and reception area was created for student safety and accountability; monthly advisory meetings were established with students and teachers/counselors; an Adopt-A-Hallway program was started to ensure a stronger teacher presence and respect for school property; a plan for upperclassmen to mentor underclassmen was designed; and a pilot program was created for future freshman teams.

Advisory

The goal of the advisory program is to enhance school and student communication and to cultivate stronger student-staff relationships. Advisory groups have two teachers for each one. They meet for twenty minutes each month. The advisory becomes the perfect vehicle by which students could have a voice in the school. Advisory themes for the year have included:

December	“Getting a Grip” Discussing tips on time management, de-stressing, balancing the schedule and staying focused.
January	“Getting Ready for Exams” Reviewing how grades are calculated; generating ideas on how to study; learning how to form study groups; and discovering ways to reduce test anxiety.
April	“Getting Serious” Recognizing behavioral patterns that lead to students’ destructive decisions; brainstorming resources and strategies that can help students avoid making poor choices.

Adopt-A-Hallway

The goal of this program is to increase staff visibility in the building in order to cultivate a safe and welcoming school environment. Adopt-A-Hallway promotes community by encouraging staff to take responsibility for hallways in and around their department’s classrooms. For example, teachers in the English and social studies departments would be aware of any loitering, trash, inappropriate behaviors and either directly confront or report these incidents to administration or security. As classroom

teachers supervise their designated hallways, they would also be expected to welcome students into their rooms at on the onset of each class. While this is NOT a teacher duty, this “awareness” program simply demonstrates to students that the adults care about the safety and cleanliness of the school while role modeling appropriate behaviors as well.

Freshman Partnerships

The goal of this initiative is to promote collegiality, a deeper understanding of student progress, and the development of interdisciplinary teaching. Teachers of freshman students will voluntarily “partner” with another (e.g., English and social studies; math with science) and share a common group of students in two or more classes. The intention of this program is not team teaching, rather the teacher partners will focus on creating individualized learning for students as well as interdisciplinary units, common vocabulary, or integrated themes. Teachers can also plan team approaches to parent conferences and develop a unified plan for engaging students who struggle academically.

The Small Town Meetings have succeeded in improving the school community on many levels. They have helped to foster a culture of respect, collaboration, academic engagement, and safety. Teachers feel they are part of a shared-decision making effort to improve the culture of their school. Students also feel they have a voice in the school through the advisory meetings held monthly. The number of class “cuts” and disciplinary referrals have dropped significantly due to a stronger student accountability initiative. Furthermore, there has been a marked increase in achievement among the lower ability level/disenfranchised student population

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Terryville High School

T.H.S. Mentor Program

The T.H.S. Mentoring Program has been in existence for one year and involves all high school students and all staff (approximately fifty staff members and 550 students). All students are assigned a staff member as their mentor for their high school career. Each staff has 15-18 students. Students are assigned to a mentor group by alphabetical order and cannot change groups. Staff keeps the 9th and 10th graders for two years. Each grade is assigned a focus:

- 9th grade: Study Skills
- 10th grade: Math and Science in Real Life
- 11th grade: Career/Post high school planning
- 12th grade: Life after high school

Students meet with their mentors six times a year for ½ hour during the school day. The entire school has the same mentor time and staff are assigned planning time for activities to address their focus area. These meetings provide a unique opportunity for students to interact with and seek support from a caring, concerned adult. These regular staff-student exchanges create a caring school environment where every student has a sense of belonging and no one gets “lost” in the crowd. Students already enjoy it!

While the program is only in its first year, there is already an improved staff and student morale and a greater appreciation and respect for others. Our high school is a more friendly, welcoming place where more students can get an additional sense of support. The long-range benefits of the program are that students will make more informed decisions upon graduation and they will be better prepared for the work force.

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Wilbur Cross High School, New Haven

Los Amigos

The “Los Amigos” program has been in effect for two years at Cross. The purpose of the program is to give Hispanic male students at the high school an opportunity to mentor with college-age Latino male students, in an effort to demonstrate to the high school students that they have opportunities for higher education, in spite of the long-held stereotypes about minority students not meeting with success in higher education

Students from Yale University meet weekly with the Hispanic young men at Cross. Both in a group format and individually, the goal of these meetings is to form partnerships between the high school students and their university counterparts. The discussions center on academics and the importance of continuing education beyond the secondary level in order to be more successful professionally, personally and financially. In addition, the Cross students are taken on tours of local colleges, focusing on their particular needs and interests.

Many of these high school students commonly exhibit poor attitudes toward school, have low grades and are discipline problems in the school. The administration identifies students who would likely benefit from the mentoring offered through “Los Amigos” and invites them to join the group. The group numbers about 20 males each from the high school and the university.

The school reports that students who are involved in “Los Amigos” demonstrate improved attitudes toward school, better effort in class and better behavior. One of the goals for this year was to offer, in conjunction with the larger Hispanic group “La Casa”, an Open House night at the school similar to a College Fair. The target audience for this event is the parents of the member students, many of whom do not speak English. The presentations will be made in Spanish.

Contact Person: Tom Sugrue, Youth Liaison Worker / 946-8728



Terryville High School Principal Andrea Lavery (right) engages students as part of the T.H.S. Mentor Program.



photo courtesy of Josh Berman, Rocky Hill H.S.

The Rocky Hill High School *Freshmen Transitions Program* helps students become more connected to the school.



photo courtesy of Josh Berman, Rocky Hill H.S.



HIGHLIGHTED PROGRAMS



Danbury High School

Peer Teaching

Peer teaching began nine years ago as an outgrowth of the Peer Leadership Program at Danbury High School. Forty senior peer teachers are selected from a group of over 100 juniors who apply. The selection process is rigorous and multi-tiered. Peer teachers are trained and required to develop units (which are thoroughly reviewed) from a template of the CCI. Peer teachers engage students (15 students-2 teachers) in discussions on issues of adolescent interest. As lessons are given, dialogue between teachers and students result in substantive conversation and consequent sound decision making from the participants. Activities include simulations, role playing, and small group work. Students complete an evaluation at the end of the quarter. Peer teachers work with over 400 freshmen on the 9th grade teams.

The benefits of this program are many. Peer teaching gives a forum for students to speak freely and learn from each other. Freshmen also form bonds with their peer leaders, so a large school of nearly 3,000 becomes smaller. Some freshmen have been referred to counselors within the building and often freshmen refer themselves or their friends for crisis intervention. Developing relationships between seniors and freshmen improves the 9th grade transition. Freshmen see model students of diverse backgrounds who have made sound decisions and articulate them to 9th graders.

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Derby High School

DHS Live/Cable News Show

DHS Live was created for our student body to have a chance to broadcast our announcements and activities through a student-generated news program. The students create, produce, edit and choreograph the announcements and reporting requirements for their segments. The segments are also edited and compiled into a one half-hour news program that is distributed to our local cable network for community viewing during the week.

Not only does DHS Live provide students with an opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the field of broadcast media, it helps to improve communication between the school and community. The news show is an important vehicle for keeping all stakeholders -- students, faculty, administrators, parents, and community members – apprised of the day-to-day activities and operations of the school. The primary objective of the show is to spotlight all the positive programs and initiatives in which DHS students and staff are engaged.

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Granby Memorial High School

Vocational Mentor Program

The Granby High School Mentor Program, which has been in existence for seven years, is a work-site program organized in partnership with local businesses and organizations. All G.H.S. students are eligible to participate in the program. Students from grade nine to grade twelve travel off-campus once a week for about one hour and fifteen minutes and observe at a job site that has career and/or academic interest to the student. While at the site, whether a business, a school, or a civic agency, these students are able to meet and interact with people in a particular occupation. The students are provided with a real life work experience that will hopefully encourage them to be successful in school. The students are also offered an adult mentor and role model. Students are expected to participate consistently, to behave and dress appropriately, and to maintain their grades.

Based on feedback from parents, teachers, administrators and mentors, the program has helped to foster a positive school attitude and to improve students' grades and behavior. Mentoring offers students a positive school experience that they look forward to and seek out. It offers the community at large an opportunity to appreciate and participate in the education and learning experience for our students. Students are given the chance to experience the world of work and make a connection with an adult mentor that can have positive effects on the future career or academic goals.

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Killingly High School

Freshman Academy

The Ninth Grade Freshman Academy is a program that ensures all freshmen have a successful transitional year as Killingly High School students. Program staff is dedicated to a team model utilizing common planning time for designing rigorous and engaging units of study, analysis of student learning strategies, and shared evaluation of student performance data. The success of each student's transition will be determined by measurable data on his/her performance including attendance, behavior, course work, and daily observations. Students will receive support through a prescribed series of interventions that involve various school support resources including parents, to ensure students' academic and emotional growth and that all academy students achieve higher levels of learning.

The program is designed to personalize the educational experience for freshman students. It is a cooperative effort involving 250 freshman students, academic teachers, support personnel, junior/senior mentors, administrators, and parents. Character development as well as academic proficiency are expected outcomes supported by the teams using a holistic educational philosophy, clinical data collection and analysis, and constant communication with all parties. Student outcomes center on the ABC's of attendance, behavior, character, and course work.

The program models intervention strategies, the practice of effective data collection and analysis, and the continued development of a personalized holistic learning experience. Although the program has only been in existence for one year, the school is already seeing benefits such as reductions in dropout rate, better attendance statistics, fewer discipline referrals, increased student achievement, and demonstrated character development.

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New Fairfield High School

Connections

Through a two-month process in September and October, twelve students are matched with a teacher with whom they meet one time per month, an hour per month. The program offers a chance for students to connect with a staff member; to interact with students in other grades; to enhance their college applications; to be an active member of the school; and to start exploring a range of possible career. To assist in creating connections, students are placed in one of eight clusters based on possible areas of career interests: arts and media; business and finance; construction; technologies and design; environmental, natural resources and agriculture; government, education and human services; health and biosciences; retail, tourism, recreation and entrepreneurship; technologies; manufacturing, communications and repair. The school improvement team members plan activities every month for “Connections.”

The program is in its second year of operation and involves the entire student body (989 students). Many connections are expected to be made through this program, including the following: connections between the students and the mission statement; the students and their future plans; the students and a teacher; the student and other students; the school and our goals; the classes and the curriculum; the students and the community. Every year every student will be assessed through a Performance Assessment based on the school’s mission statement and expectations for student learning.

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Parish Hill Middle-Senior High School

Peer Tutoring

The Peer Tutoring Program has been in operation for five years and currently involves three supervising teachers, twelve tutors, and fifty participating students. On the three days a week that we have a late bus, a supervising teacher and three juniors and seniors keep the library open. These older students tutor younger students, primarily seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students. The tutors receive training and are scheduled in a systematic manner. Over a five year period, the tutor sessions are held an average of ninety times per year with an average of eight students per session being tutored and twelve students using the library resources.

The program serves to raise the academic achievement of younger students while at the same providing a service opportunity for older students. The resources of the library are made available after school when there is a late bus, without increasing the workload of the librarian.

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Rocky Hill High School

Freshmen Transitions

While no part of our freshman transition program is particularly unique, we have combined several different elements for a very thorough and effective outcome. We begin freshman transition with the parents of 8th graders in the fall, hosting a series of informal morning coffee klatches where parents meet the administrative team, get an overview of student life at the high school, and hear from a representative group of students about their RHHS experience. This informal introduction is followed in February with the (traditional) 8th grade parent orientation, where the parents hear from each academic department and guidance, toward orienting them to our curricular program and assisting parents to work with their student to choose classes.

Freshman transition for students begins in summer, where we have redesigned freshman orientation to be student-directed by a group of carefully selected student leaders, the Freshman Leadership Advisory Group (FLAG). FLAG team members follow-up the summer orientation program with several social activities (i.e., freshman breakfast, pizza party and football game, etc.) with freshman in the fall, to maintain alliances and friendships born in the summer.

Several support structures complete the freshman transition program and ensure the success of the new students. Our advisor/advisee program pairs an adult in the building with every freshman (and sophomore.) Our Early Intervention Program acts quickly when a student's grades begin to slip to identify the issue and take appropriate action. In addition, we have a mentoring program, which is continued for some students from the middle school and pairs an adult in the greater Rocky Hill community with the student in need.

The benefits of the program are myriad. Students become more connected to the school and experience a smoother transition, resulting in improved academic performance. Discipline and dropout rates have decreased given the personalized attention students receive. The program has also helped to foster a more positive school climate and build better relationships between freshmen and upperclassmen. Furthermore, parents report feeling more connected and at ease in transitioning their students to the high school.

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photo courtesy of Josh Berman, Rocky Hill H.S.



NOTEWORTHY PROGRAMS



STUDENT EXHIBITIONS

BRANFORD HIGH SCHOOL ***Senior Graduation Exhibition***

Description: All graduating seniors are required to successfully complete the Senior Graduation Exhibition. Each senior selects a topic for an in-depth research, identifies new learning goals, develops a comprehensive plan to achieve the goals, and secures the assistance of a content consultant. During a four to six month period of research and development, each senior works towards achieving the goals, following a prescribed protocol and maintaining a comprehensive portfolio, including a detailed learning journal. About one third of seniors elect the Early Start Program that begins in April of their junior year. They present their projects in December of their senior year and participate in a Community Exhibition in an open house forum in February. The rest of the class participates in the Regular Senior Exhibition that begins in September and concludes in April of the senior year. A panel consisting of a senior advisor, an assessor from the community, and a student assessor evaluates all presentations. The assessment criteria used are the learner outcome that is part of the overall Branford High School graduation requirements.

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ADVISORY/MENTORING

BRANFORD HIGH SCHOOL ***Advisory Program***

The Branford High School Advisory Program has been in existence for 8 years and involves all students in the school who are grouped with an adult advisor. The Advisory Program has been instrumental in building a learning community that supports the high expectations that the school has for students to meet the performance graduation requirements. Assistant Principal Dave Maloney has developed a Power Point presentation that explains the history, purposes, and administration of the program. He has been a resource to many Connecticut high schools that have started advisory programs or plan to.

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STUDENT ASSISTANCE

BRANFORD HIGH SCHOOL ***SAM Teams***

Helping students involves identifying them through behavior concerns, assessing their skills and needs and developing an action plan. It is the school's function to provide opportunities and resources for students to develop life skills and support. It is the students' function to take advantage of these opportunities. About 130-150 students are involved in the SAM teams and are referred for student assistance by staff members or family members, making it difficult for students to "fall between the cracks." Goals are improved school performance, attendance and grades, leading to graduation.

Contact: Lenny Bonn, Student Assistance Coordinator, 203-315-6729; email: lbonn@branford.k12.ct.us.



GREENWICH HIGH SCHOOL

ABC Peer Power

ABC Peer Power is a program designed to give underclass students who have had a history of underachieving . . . a better chance! ABC Peer Power offers underclass students nominated by teachers, counselors or parents the following services:

- Scheduled Tutorials three hours a week with Peer Tutors nominated by the faculty to help with organization, notetaking, homework and be supportive role models;
- Goal Setting Sessions that occurs at the beginning of each quarter at which time students work with Peer Tutors and ABC advisors to set academic and personal goals;
- Bi-Weekly Progress Reports that teachers of ABC students complete to be used by Peer Tutors and Advisors to structure tutorials;
- Quarter Awards Luncheons that are held at the end of each quarter to recognize improvement, achievement, and goal accomplishments;
- Quarter Field Trips that are held for ABC students and Peer Tutors for fun and bonding relationships; College/Career Trip that is held in April to encourage ABC students to think about their future by visiting a college or career training program;
- End of Year Evening and Celebration that is held in June for students, parents, ABC Advisors and Peer Tutors to review accomplishments and award achievements.

The program has been in existence for six years and has enjoyed great success for the ABC students, as well as giving Peer Tutors satisfaction and enrichment in their work with younger students.

Contact: Claude Frank, Sheldon Housemaster, 203-625-8067; email: claud-frank@greenwich.k12.ct.us.

HAMDEN HIGH SCHOOL

Mentor Program

The House Leadership Council sponsors The Mentor Program. The purpose is to provide support to students who have a difficult time with the rigors of adjusting to life in a large diverse high school. The mentees are freshmen in high school, transfer students and/or are student recommended by staff members. The ratio is approximately 1/8. This program is in its fourth year and has established a closer school community. Upper-class students are eager to assist the freshmen with academics and personal issues. Mentors are juniors and seniors. They receive training at the leadership seminar held before school starts.

Contact: Dr. Clydette Messiah, Assistant Principal / 203-407-2040, ext. 5030



MONTVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

Peer Mediation

Two faculty advisors—a school psychologist and a school counselor—trained a group of carefully selected recruited student volunteers who met the criteria for peer mediators. The criteria did not require academic excellence or unblemished behavior records. They were selected as a “representative” group of students, diverse enough for students having a dispute to feel comfortable talking to them. The program has demonstrated to students and staff that students are capable of taking responsibility for their own actions and helping others in a mature manner. Mediators have helped reduced the need for administrators to deal with minor conflicts that mediators can manage with supervision from advisors. School climate has improved, potential violent incidents have been reduced, and the annual diversity program has been reinforced.

Contact: Richard Douglas, 860-848-1255; email: rdouglas@montvilleschools.org.

TOLLAND HIGH SCHOOL

LINKS

LINKS is a credit-granting class for students (primarily in grade 9 and 10) who have had academic difficulties or who have been determined to be at risk. The curriculum of the class includes study skills, organization, time management and conflict resolution. Teachers assist students in work completion and stay in regular (weekly) contact with parents and teachers. About 20 students annually participate and class sizes are kept small, no more than six, if possible. During the four years of the program, we have seen improvement in students while involved in LINKS with improved academic performance and behaviors.

Contact: Corinne Lorenzet, Guidance Director, 860-875-7777; email: clorenzet@tolland.k12.ct.us.

TOLLAND HIGH SCHOOL

Tolland Alternative Learning Center (TALC)

TALC is an alternative program designed to meet the needs of students who are not having a successful experience in a traditional high school environment. Enrollment requires a commitment from students to attend regularly, do the work and to be cooperative with other students. A key component is constant communications between the director and parents. About 15 students are enrolled in TALC with the goal of staying in a school program, achieving academic success, and graduating from high school.

Contact: Donna Newman, TALC Director, 860-870-6860



WEST HAVEN HIGH SCHOOL

Peer Advocacy Program

Peer Advocates are 20-25 seniors who provide support, guidance and friendship for the entire student body. They are involved in mentoring individual students helping new students get adjusted to WHHS, providing academic assistance to peers, teaching health classes six times a year to 10th graders. They receive training in peer mediation. The Peer Advocate program promotes a sense of community and gives students a great resource when they are in need of academic or social “success.” The peer advocates act as role models and mentors to other students to decrease behavioral problems, increase academic success, and promote school involvement.

Contact: Jeanne Palmer and Emily Grosshuesch, Teachers/Peer Advisors; 818-937-4360;
email: jmp0731@netzero.com.

WEST HAVEN HIGH SCHOOL

Stiles Humane Club

Stiles is a small alternative program that is a component of West Haven High School involving students who present with a variety of social/emotional/truancy issues. In its first year, the club was formed to engage students who have not been connected to the school with an extra-curricular activity. The club is based on research that shows the relationship between violence directed at animals and violence committed against humans. The club seeks to raise awareness of issues related to human interactions and to foster attitudes of compassion, empathy, stewardship and responsibility toward non-human sentient beings that will untimely be transferred to human relationships. The students have participated in a variety of projects with community groups and outside agencies.

Contact: Rogina N. Milano, Science Teacher/Alternate I Program, 203-731-6860;
email: yardconifer@sbcglobal.net

WESTON HIGH SCHOOL

CASE

The Center for Academic Success Enhancement (CASE) provides support for 40 to 50 Weston High School students annually who are at risk. A guidance counselor teaches the program. In its five years in existence, the program focuses on students who would ordinarily “fall through the cracks.” Students continue in CASE until their academic success is improved enough for them to leave it.

Contact: Claudine Dimantava, Guidance and CASE Counselor, 203-291-1600



STUDENT LEADERSHIP

BRANFORD HIGH SCHOOL ***Student Council***

Student Council is composed of eight representatives elected by each of the four classes plus representatives elected in Community Room. The entire student body elects the president and vice-president. A student may be on the Student Council by Merit Membership. Attending five meetings and four activities during an eight-week period does this. Having successfully completed this requirement a student then gains voting privileges at conch meetings. Student Council is a club that helps students learn and develop many important skills that will help them be better students and better citizens in their community. Time management skills, unselfish effort, creative problem solving, and cooperative working experiences are skills that will be quickly learned and practiced. These same skills can then be applied to both classroom work as well as personal challenges outside of school. Students help organize and run each of the council activities: three blood drives per year, veterans' luncheons, Secret Santa for a local family in need, homecoming, Salapalooza, field trips, bonfire, homecoming, all school picnic and dress up days.

Contact: Salvatore Zarra, Student Council Advisor, 203-488-7291, ext. 2589;
email: szarra@iwon.com.

FAIRFIELD LUDLOWE HIGH SCHOOL ***Ludlowe Student Leaders***

We have trained a group of 90 juniors who work with the guidance counselors to mentor our incoming ninth graders. The Ludlowe Student Leaders meet with their assigned freshmen (between three and seven per junior.) to orient them to FLHS and answer questions they may have. In our first year, the Ludlowe Student Leaders have enjoyed taking on the big brother/big sister role and the freshmen really appreciated the program. The superintendent was so impressed with the work that she held a thank you breakfast for the Student Leaders.

Contact: Jennifer McVeigh, Counselor, 203-255-7225; email: jmcveigh@fairfield.k12.ct.us.

HAMDEN HIGH SCHOOL ***House Leadership Council (HLC)***

The House Leadership Council represents all of the four houses of Hamden High School. The various house teams and/or staff members nominate the members. They develop and implement the following programs: Freshmen Orientation Mentor Program; Leader Seminar; SCC Student Leadership Conference. In addition, they present team building and leadership development activities to various Hamden High School clubs, organizations and classes. Under this program, more students are involved with student centered programs. They volunteer for and follow through with leadership roles.

Contact: Dr. Clydette Messiah, Assistant Principal / 203-407-2040, ext. 5030

WILBUR CROSS HIGH SCHOOL

Peer Leadership

Seniors who are selected for the program, after interviews by staff and administrators, are assigned to one or more freshmen classes which they visit once a week during the school year. The Peer Leaders teach a different lesson each week. The lessons range from “Making the Transition from Middle School” to “Contraception,” “Abusive Relationships” and other serious topics. The unifying themes are school success and making wise decisions. The program develops a cadre of seniors who can be called upon for a variety of school functions outside the scope of their assigned roles, such as assisting with Parent Night or the school blood drive. The freshmen gain positive role models and learn face-saving ways to deal with authority and make positive changes. In the ten years of the program, many peer leaders apply out of a sense of “paying back” for the help they received as freshmen from their peer leaders. Peer Leaders also receive training from a group of Yale students who are community health educators and who work with the Peer Leaders on major health issues.

Contact: Tom Sugrue, Youth Liaison Worker, 203-946-8728

RESPECT

HAMDEN HIGH SCHOOL

Respect Me!

This program is in conjunction with CAS and Operation Respect. The House Leadership Council’s juniors and seniors make presentations to freshmen in their world history classes based on their training at the workshops held at CAS. The issues of bullying, treating others with respect, and potential violence are part of the presentations. By focusing on where in the school bullying occurs and where it does not occur, where students find respect and where respect does not happen, the topics of bullying prevention and how to increase respect in the school community are developed. As a result, over the five years of the program, there has been a decrease in confrontational behavior among freshmen, an increase in requests for peer mediation, and how to deal with bullying.

Contact: Dr. Clydette Messiah, Assistant Principal / 203-407-2040, ext. 5030

RHAM HIGH SCHOOL

“Names Can Really Hurt Us”

Description: Each year the sophomore class participates in a full day “Names Can Really Hurt Us” training. Approximately 30 students and 15 faculty members receive training prior to the full day and serve as panelists and facilitators. After four years, 75% of our student body has participated in the training. We also devote one professional day each year to train and update the faculty in the “Names” program. Student feedback indicates that the school is more accepting and nurturing for all students. Faculty sensitivity to student needs has been enhanced, as well as their ability to personalize each student’s school experience.

Contact: Bevin Perry, Social Worker, 860-228-9474; email: Perrybev@reg8.k12.ct.us.



FRESHMEN PROGRAMS

THE GILBERT SCHOOL

Freshmen-Parent Picnic

Description: During the second week of school, freshmen and the parents are invited to an evening at the school, which includes a picnic dinner, followed by information for both parents and students. All faculty attend and facilitate with different information sessions. Parents become more comfortable with the school and faculty, as well as being informed about school policies and practices. Further, connections to the community become stronger as more adults see the school as accessible.

Contact: Cynthia Geiger, Teacher, 860-379-8521; email: geigerc@gilbertschool.org

HAMDEN HIGH SCHOOL

Freshmen Orientation

Description: Prior to the onset of the school year, freshmen orientation is offered during a two-hour program. At this time the incoming freshmen and their families come to the school for an evening of events. The band plays, cheerleaders cheer, dance team performs and introductions are made. The freshmen meet their mentors in homerooms, tour the school, attend a student activities fair of the seventy clubs, teams and organizations in the school, view a video of school life, and participate in a question and answer session. Their parents/guardians attend a course in Parenting 101. This event creates an environment that is positive, welcoming and exciting for the freshmen and the community. It has established in its four years of existence an enhancing rapport with everyone involved.

Contact: Dr. Clydette Messiah, Assistant Principal / 203-407-2040, ext. 5030

MASUK HIGH SCHOOL

FreshFest

Description: Beyond the normal freshman orientation program where students become acquainted with the school, learn their locker combinations, and meet their teachers, the FreshFest program is run by trained upperclassmen and facilitated by volunteer teachers. Sophomores and juniors lead freshmen through team building strategies and stress reducing techniques. In addition, the upperclassmen answer incoming freshmen questions to allay fears and dispel myths about high school. The day culminates with the student bands performing during lunch.

Contact: Joe Kobza, Dean of Students, 203-452-5823m ext. 2004; email: kobzaj@monroeps.org.



NORTH BRANFORD HIGH SCHOOL

FAST

FAST is Freshmen Achieving Successful Transition. This is a mentoring program for all freshmen students. Teachers, as well as some secretaries and aides in the school serve as the mentors for 9th grade students. The program has resulted in good progress reports and report cards, fewer disciplinary referrals for 9th graders, and better teacher/parent communications in the school.

Contact: David Perry, Principal

WESTON HIGH SCHOOL

Big Brother/Big Sister

Upper-class students at Weston High School are matched with each freshman student entering the school for orientation purposes. The relationships developed have made the 9th grade students feel more comfortable entering high school and have improved their transition in adjusting. The increased number of positive relationships between older and younger students has improved the school environment.

Contact: Rose Marie Cipriano, Principal, 203-291-1643

WESTON HIGH SCHOOL

Freshmen Study Night

The National Honor Society sponsors this opportunity for freshmen to be tutored by NHS students one night before mid-term exams and one night before final exams. Typically about 50 students take advantage of the program, which helps to alleviate anxiety among 9th graders when facing exam periods. Pairing upperclassmen with 9th graders provides relationship building and supports the freshmen.

Contact: Rose Marie Cipriano, Principal, 203-291-1643

NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRAMS

KOLBE CATHEDRAL HIGH SCHOOL

Just-K Ministry

Just-K Ministry is a group of students and faculty at Kolbe Cathedral Catholic High School that promotes spiritual growth and community life. Just-K strives to sponsor different projects during the year to accomplish its mission. Just-K stands for “Jesus Unites Students and Teachers at Kolbe.” In its four years of existence, the program has increased communication through the creation of a monthly newsletter, increased respect for peers through activities such as a welcome party for transfer students, locker decoration, get to know someone outside your circle of friends, mix it up at lunch and increased participation in religious activities of the school.

Contact: Fr. Herman Bohorquez, Spiritual Director, 203-335-2554; email: Frhernan@KolbeCath.



SACRED HEART ACADEMY

Peer Connection

Peer Connection is a community within our school which seeks to offer a caring, Christian outreach connection to peers through confidential listening, mediation techniques, intervention strategies, group presentations and support. This group of 40 students carry on a 25-year program that involves the students in writing letters to any member of the school community who suffers a loss. They lead the weekly Freshmen Seminar classes on topics of time management, conflict mediation, as well as give presentations to the freshmen class on topics such as friendship, cliques, substance abuse, and dating risks. They act as big sisters to any transfer student or late entering student.

Contact: Jane Reed, Director of Guidance, 203-288-2390; email: guidance@sha-excelsior.org.

TEACHER PROGRAMS

MASUK HIGH SCHOOL

Study Groups/School Improvement Plans

For three years we have decided to allow teachers to develop their own personal professional development plan by starting committees of one or more to study issues that teachers believed were impeding student learning. Some of the topics that were studied included the following: attendance, new course offerings, course weightings and rankings, Small Community of Learners, AP art course, Set Design course, 8-9 grade language arts, social studies, and science transition. The opportunity has gotten teachers involved and taken ownership of school improvement by opening up the lines of communication and having teachers feel empowered and energized in the betterment of the school.

Contact: Laura Ferrante Fernandes, Assistant Principal, 204-452-5823, ext. 2008; email fernal@monroeps.org.

MASUK HIGH SCHOOL

Faculty Assembly

The Masuk Faculty Assembly was originally designed as a separate meeting for staff members in addition to the regular administrative faculty meeting. The staff developed it because they felt they did not have a voice in the school. Four years ago, the current administration decided that two meetings serving the same purpose was not necessary. The Masuk Faculty Assembly became the vehicle for staff input and discussion. A staff member chairs it and another takes the minutes. The principal is a member of the MFA and participates as such. Roberts Rules of Order are followed with business items sent to the chair in advance. The MFA has improved staff morale because the administration and faculty are equal partners in the process and anyone can bring up concerns to be addressed at the assembly. Faculty involvement, shared leadership and faculty ownership are positive outcomes.

Contact: John Battista, Principal, 203-452-5823, email: battij@monroeps.org.



MASUK HIGH SCHOOL

First Year

In order to acclimate new first year teachers at Masuk to the school climate and routine, second or third year teachers volunteer to become “Buddies.” “Buddy” teachers are able to ease the new teachers through their transition at Masuk, in addition to the assigned mentors. The system instills a sense of community in the school system. It invites an open dialogue to occur between educators which ultimately affects the entire school community. By encouraging dialogue and reflection between colleagues, the Buddy System provides guidance, and it instills in educators a sense of purpose. It builds confidence and comfort of everyone involved in the school system, and it fosters high expectations and success of our students.

Contact: Michelle Caruso, English Teacher, 203-452-5823, ext. 3106; email: carusm@monroeps.org.

RIDGEFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

Fireside Conversations

Four books are selected by the principal to mirror change topics. The four books are scheduled for quarterly meetings at the home of the principal. The program is voluntary. Discussions and optional enrichment events that begin as a social and conclude as a two-hour relaxed conversation in the Great Books style. The program has stimulated more books being recommended and has begun conversations that carry on to school. It has increased knowledge about the ideas of new leaders, provided collegial feedback, and generated conversations about issues and ideas.

Contact: Dr. Diana Lindsay, Principal, 203-438-3785; email: dlindsay@ridgefield.org

WESTON HIGH SCHOOL

Project Adventure—Teacher Training

Weston High School teachers can volunteer to be trained in a ropes course that is available to students. Once trained, they assist as teacher volunteers during their free periods in the spring and fall. The option for non-PE teachers to participate has led to the promotion of positive relationships between teachers and students in a team building setting. Both teachers and students get to see each other in another setting besides the classroom.

Contact: Rose Marie Cipriano, Principal, 203-291-1643



CURRICULAR PROGRAMS

WILBUR CROSS HIGH SCHOOL ***ISSP***

The Independent Study and Seminar Program enables Wilbur Cross students to participate in seminars, ISSP courses and projects, take courses at Yale, SCSU, and Gateway Community College, as well as AP courses. In addition, students can take part in the Southern Connecticut Language and Culture Program at Yale, the New Haven Yale Saturday Seminar Program, the Choate Kennedy Institute of Government Studies Seminar as well as the Shafer Family Yale Summer School. Over two hundred students annually participate as ISSP students in this long-standing program that has been in existence for 37 years. Students are essential in preparing them for college view ISSP opportunities. They grow in self-awareness, in academic preparation and in practical responsibility as well as critical thinking.

Contact: Linda Powell, ISSP Coordinator, 203-946-5518; email: linda.Powell@new-haven.k12.ct.us.

WEST HAVEN HIGH SCHOOL ***Chess Theory Classes***

Recent education research indicates evidence of a strong positive correlation between chess and student academic performance. The practical application of the skills learned in this course will enhance good decision making, concentration, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, pattern recognition, strategic planning, analysis, synthesis, evaluation and good sportsmanship. Over 50 students participate annually, resulting in seven times state championships and the 2004 u1500 National High School Champions.

Contact: Jim Celone, Mathematics Teacher, 203-799-9997; email: jcel@aol.com.

WEST HAVEN HIGH SCHOOL ***Nursing Assistant Program***

This program provides a vocational education opportunity for students, leading to state certification as nursing assistants. The program is divided into a technical/theoretical component and a practical/clinical component. After receiving theoretical instruction, the students are taken into local nursing homes where they work with the residents while under the teacher's supervision. The students are given job skills, patient care experience, and a direct career path into a profession that is currently experiencing an acute shortage of qualified personnel.

Contact: Kathleen Murphy, 203-937-4360.