

THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS

The 63rd Annual Meeting

2014-2015 Annual Report

CSAC BOARD OF CONTROL

Submitted by Paul G. Cavaliere, Jr., Chair

For the sixth consecutive year, the Connecticut Student Activities Conference saw participation rates in its programs increase during 2014-15! In spite of the internal pressures on classrooms at all levels, and the difficult weather that impacted school schedules, this was, indeed, a pleasant surprise! CSAC has been focusing on building student activity program across the state. 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 2014-15 was to link activities to 21st century leadership skills and school climate initiatives. Thematically, our curriculum this year was built around the essential question: "I'm a leader, so now what do I do?"

The following is a brief summary of CSAC initiatives for 2014-15.

• **Student Leadership Conferences**

The Connecticut Association of Student Councils, led by Assistant Director of Student Activities, Jennifer Buckley, revised the 2014-15 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 by over 100% from last year, Buckley orchestrated a fall state-wide conference in November. Hosted by Pomperaug High School, the two-day event featured amazing speakers and break-outs that explored the themes of 21st century leadership skills. In conjunction with the state conference, CASC co-sponsored the CIAC Sportsmanship Seminar which featured an amazing presentation by A'ric Jackson. Rounding out the spring program were two new initiatives: The Summit 2015 For Young Men Of Color and Student Ambassador Mental Health Trainings. Both programs exceeded expectations in terms of participation and evaluation. CASC also spearheaded the use of social media, video, and the newly designed CAS website to launch all of its programs this year! This is a work in progress and targeted for more revisions in 2015-16.

Two summer leadership conferences are planned for 2015. The first will offer CT student leaders a chance to improve their leadership skills at Stonehill College, MA, this July. A second national student leadership event sponsored by NFHS in July at the headquarters in Indiana will conclude our expanded summer programs. CSAC will utilize participants in these events as ambassadors to assist with planning its events for 2015-16.

The elementary student leadership conferences were held for the 22nd consecutive year at Sacred Heart University, Asnuntuck, Three Rivers, and Naugatuck Community Colleges. In total, the four conferences enrolled more than 950 students, which was an excellent response given the challenges of the January weather patterns. 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 targeted 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 on October 30th. Organized for and run by students, the day featured a series of breakout sessions with the overarching goal of helping students to develop a better understanding of, and acceptance of, others. The day was also an "open house" for participants to visit North Haven's Diversity Day program! The second event, "Student Centered Approaches To Improving School Climate On and Offline" was hosted by Newington High School on December 11th. CASC student members worked with ADL and CAS staff targeting what students can do to build a more positive school climate. Technology initiatives and positive uses of social media were addressed by the

keynote, Eva Vega-Olds, director of research for the ADL office in Washington, DC. The final program, The Summit 2015 For Young Men Of Color, (mentioned earlier) was held at Trinity College on March 16th. Over 400 high school young men of color were in attendance to hear from A'ric Jackson and a panel of CAS Administrators reflecting upon positive ways to improve their leadership skills.

- **Mental Health Student Ambassador Training**

CSAC, in partnership with the Rushford Center, Middletown, trained teams of high school student leaders to recognize the signs and symptoms of peers who might be experiencing mental health challenges. The training featured an evidence-based curriculum developed by Youth Mental Health First Aid. The key training components were growth in knowledge of signs, symptoms, and risk factors of mental health illnesses and addictions as well as a five-step action plan to assist students in crisis and non-crisis situations. The trainings took place at Farmington and Trumbull High Schools. As far as we know, this training was a *first for CT and one of the very first across the country!*

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

BOTF 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 2014-15 at the CIAC Sportsmanship Conference in November. Three schools – Thomaston, Simsbury and Sacred Heart of Waterbury – were chosen as finalists. After a committee composed of students, athletic directors and CAS staff reviewed the three minute videos, site visits helped select the eventual winner – Sacred Heart High School. The BOFT Award was presented at the Mohegan Sun Arena before a huge crowd of nearly 7,000 fans during the state basketball championship weekend.

- **KiDSMARATHON**

Working with the Rod Dixon Foundation in Los Angeles, CSAC put together our Connecticut version of KiDSMARATHON, an amazing life fitness program for students ages 7-12 that features an 8-10 week program of running with nutritional guidelines. Final celebrations have been increased to *nine sites* for 2015! The line-up includes Cheshire, Waterbury, Litchfield, Danbury, EO Smith, Trumbull, South Windsor, Glastonbury and Waterford as over 5,000 runners are set to complete their last mile of a marathon before cheering family and friends. This represents a substantial increase in participants from previous years! To help advertise 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 O'Bama'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 9th annual state dance championship was held at Hamden High School on February 28th. A record number of dance teams 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. 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 6 and 7. 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 this year 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 22nd. Tournament chair, Sherrie Zembruski, and a large cadre of cheer coaches did their usual excellent job with the arrangements.

- **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 16th at Berlin High School with 40 teams competing for the coveted 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 on September 27th. Seven regional extemporaneous debates were held in 2014-15 leading up to the state championships at Wilton High School on March 21st. 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 skills” activity!

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

Through the generous contributions of many corporate partners, the CAS-CIAC / Flanagan Endowment Awards awarded just over \$37,000 to member school applicants this May. The grant program 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 received 58 applications for this program and fourteen received grants.

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

The 2014-15 edition of the State Student Advisory Council on Education (SSACE) consisted of twenty-five high school students who met regularly with Stephan Pryor and Dianna Roberge-Wentzell, Commissioners of Education. The SSACE number one project this year was to produce a presentation for the State Board of Education which centered on three topics: (1) the ideal *start time* for schools; (2) revisions to state *standardized testing* schedules; and, (3) community service hours as a *requirement* for high school graduation. 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 Rita McDougald-Campbell, assistant principal at Trumbull High School, the committee annually designates Connecticut’s finest junior year students as *Governor’s Scholars*. Formed sixteen 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 and every student selected by his/her school for recognition as a Governor’s Scholar receives a certificate from CAS; and, the thirty finalists are celebrated in May at the Governor’s Scholars Luncheon. Finalists receive a plaque and have 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 forty high schools were represented this year, an increase from the previous year. An addition to this year’s program was the presentation of the “Heart of the Arts” award given to an arts student who exemplifies the ideals of integrity, citizenship and good character. Justin Fargiano from Bethel High School was this year’s recipient. Once again, the arts committee was very pleased to have Josten’s as its corporate sponsor.

- **The Connecticut Association of National Honor Societies**

Under the direction of retiring executive director, Don Gates, CANHS continued with its main goal of developing and providing supportive initiatives for NHS chapter member schools. This year’s featured initiative was linked to what chapters might do in service to their communities by creating positive school climates. On May 22nd, CANHS hosted its annual spring conference for all middle and high school chapters of the National Honor Society. Honor Society Chapters that have exemplary service programs received special recognition at the conference. Additional conference activities included sharing of ‘best practices’ at roundtables which offer chapter members innovative ways to serve their greater school communities.