



# Developing Futures™ Develops Teachers

**I**n the first issue of *Developing Futures™*, the focus was on understanding the changes in curriculum happening in the Stamford Public Schools (SPS). But curriculum alone can't affect change—teachers have to be trained in new ways to bring the course work to life, to identify student strengths and weaknesses, and to leverage all the resources at their disposal. Administrators need to be more supportive of system wide change.

In Stamford, those changes are happening. Professional development is a critical component of the GE Foundation Developing Futures™ in Education grant and has been integrated into the rollout of the new math and science curricula. But there are other aspects devoted to helping our teachers grow in the art of teaching, both personally and professionally.

While students were enjoying their summer off, many Stamford teachers and administrators took part in further education. Two conferences were hosted by GE Foundation: the NASA conference at Cape Canaveral was for science teachers and the Developing Futures conference in Orlando was for teachers, administrators and central office staff from the six US school districts which have received GE Foundation grants. Turn the page to read about how these gatherings of educators are impacting your child's classroom today.

One of the most impactful elements of professional development has been the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that exist in every Stamford school. PLCs meet every week so teachers can review student work and assessment data in order to develop instructional plans that will ensure student success.

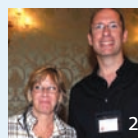
Of course, one way to measure progress is through standardized testing. The most recent CMT results, from Spring 2009, show that Stamford is making good progress toward the goal of having every student be college-ready. Get a deeper look at the results and what they mean by reading the story on page 3.

*Turn the page to read highlights of the exciting changes taking place in your schools.*

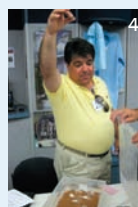


Science teacher Peter Sepe tries on a spacesuit during the NASA conference at Cape Canaveral.

IN THIS ISSUE



**How Stamford Teachers Spent their Summer Vacation.....** page 2



**Professional Learning Communities Flourish in Stamford Schools.....** page 2

**Preparing Teachers to Aim for the Stars .....** page 3

**CMT Scores Continue to Improve .....** page 3

**Learning About Literacy: Q&A with Dr. Linda Bruno .....** page 4

**A Note from Joshua P. Starr, Ed.D.....** page 4

# How Stamford Teachers Spent their Vacation



While summer vacation may have been months ago, the lingering effect of how 40 Stamford teachers, administrators, Board of Education members and community partners spent their time is being felt everyday in the classroom. They joined 300 other teachers for the GE Foundation Developing Futures Summer Conference held in Orlando, FL.

Each year the conference brings GE staff together with teachers and administrators from the six schools receiving GE Foundation education grants to delve into issues impacting student success.

“This conference was one of the most powerful and empowering experiences I had all year,” said Miriam Arango, Newfield Elementary School principal. “These conferences are always excellent because the content is so rich, and I always make sure that my school is represented. But this year was probably the best one I’ve been to because we had so much opportunity to network and learn from each other.”

This year, the program broke the attendees into a variety of groups: for example at times, Ms. Arango was only with other principals, while teachers met with teachers, and central office administrators were together. At other times, each school district united. This created many opportunities for sharing concerns and successes with peers and colleagues, and to brainstorm effective strategies to address local issues.

“The various school districts are all at different points in their evolution,” explained Doreen O’Leary, Developing Futures Program Manager, and former elementary school teacher. “So if one district was in



Arne Duncan, US secretary of Education, addresses the conference.

year two of implementing its new math curriculum, and another was in year five, there was a lot that could be shared and learned. And the entire event pivoted on this idea of collaboration and sharing.”

There was ample time for personal reflection, as well. The conference facilitator, Mike Rutherford, was praised as being an engaging speaker who has a wealth of knowledge about education change and culture. He talked about the importance of rituals, and how you can measure what you value by the rituals you create each day. For example, beginning every meeting with a celebration of what has been successful that week, recognizing that there is always something to celebrate.

“The conference this year was really terrific,” added Lori Rossomando, Stamford Education Association president. “The planners took input from previous

sessions and made sure that sessions were designed to address issues facing the various districts, and gave us the time to talk through them with colleagues and peers. Bringing all the different people together to problem solve was invaluable.”

## Professional Learning Communities Flourish in Stamford Schools

When doctors have a challenging case, they consult their peers and decide the best way to have a positive outcome. The same is true for engineers, and just about every other profession—the consultation and discussion with others helps to develop a robust and informed way to achieve success. This is the same idea behind Professional Learning Communities, PLCs, and their increasingly important role in Stamford Public School classrooms.

“Before PLCs, teachers didn’t have a formal community with whom they could share best practices and consult in order to meet the various needs of all the learners in their classrooms,” explained Amy Beldotti,

Individual Learning Needs Coach at Stillmeadow Elementary School and member of the PLC Steering Committee.

PLCs are exactly what the name describes: communities made up of teachers who learn from and support each other. Teachers meet weekly to analyze data and put together plans that enable them to meet the needs of every child.

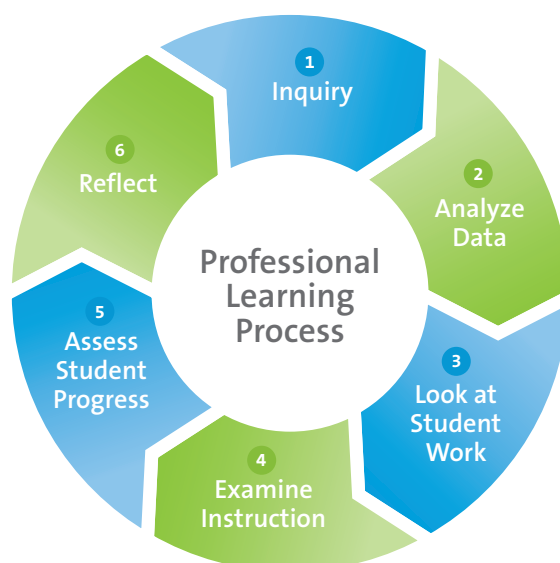
In elementary school, the PLCs are organized by grade level; in middle and high school, by department, like science or math. The PLC process has six steps: research (inquiry), analyze data, look at student work, examine instruction, assess student progress, and reflect. For data, in addition to a student’s own work, the teachers are looking at CMTs, DRAs, CAPT, and grade level common formative assessments.

“The PLCs place an emphasis on assessment and accountability,” Amy said, “and they provide teachers

with the tools they need to have a real impact on student achievement. They have raised the quality of instruction at every grade level.”

For example, if a teacher is struggling with a particular lesson, observing others and discussing how they have handled it will provide additional insight and teaching options. Teachers can observe each other, or ask to be observed by their peers. And if a student is struggling, the teachers can try a variety of different strategies to ensure that the child is understanding and learning what he or she needs to know.

The PLCs were launched in 2006, with the beginning of the GE Foundation Developing Futures™ grant. The funding pays for ongoing teacher training to ensure the development and nurturing of the PLC environment within a school district.



### TEACHER spotlight



#### Angela Schumann

Rippowam Middle School E.L.A. teacher

##### How long have you been teaching?

I have twenty-five years of experience teaching and leading in elementary and middle school. I was a 1st and 2nd grade teacher and staff developer at Toquam Magnet School.

##### Where did you go to school?

I earned my B.A. in Intermediate/Upper Education at Southern CT State University, my M.A. in education from Sacred Heart University and my Sixth Year in Administration and Supervision at the University of Bridgeport.

##### What’s your favorite hobby?

I enjoy cooking, especially Italian food. I like reading and keeping current with issues that are on the cutting edge of reform in schools. I also walk and jog at the Rippowam Middle School track and watch the school’s various sports teams practice, especially the football team.

##### What do you like best about your job?

I enjoy the social interaction with students. Everyday at least one child makes me smile or laugh. There is such a deep value in having children be a part of my life. I also like the challenge of working as an instructional leader at the middle school level. I love the booming vibrant pulse of middle school!

##### How has the GE Foundation grant impacted your school?

Professional development in the area of mathematics is helping teachers and, in turn, students think about mathematics in a more realistic way. Understanding that math is an interconnected set of ideas helps people to build bridges between the world of textbooks and the world of real life. The GE Foundation grant has enhanced our ability to teach the Connected Math program and it has helped to provide more technology in the classroom. That to me is GE Foundation at work in the schools!

## CMT Scores Continue to Improve

After the pencils are put down, the test sheets handed in and the students share a collective sigh of relief, parents and Stamford Public Schools (SPS) teachers and administrators wait to see the results of the Connecticut Mastery Tests. While not the only way to measure student achievement, the CMTs—like every state’s mandated exams—provide a broad view across student subgroups, cities and the state to determine if standards are being met in grades 3 – 8.

“The results this year provided good news for all SPS students,” said Amy Karwan, Executive Director of Performance Management and Accountability for SPS. “We saw gains among many student subgroups. And the really exciting news is that in grades 5 and 8—key transition years as students prepare to move to the next school level— not only did we make great gains in math and literacy achievement, in many cases we exceeded the performance of students statewide. The incredibly hard work of our students, teachers and school leaders is paying off.” The state measures progress “at or above proficient,” Levels 3, 4 and 5, while SPS measures progress at a higher standard, “at or above goal,” Levels 4 and 5.

While some may say that the improvements result from “teaching to the test,” teachers and the experts

disagree. They acknowledge that teachers help to familiarize students with the types of questions they will see so they are more prepared to answer. There is also consensus that many factors contribute to the improved scores including the new math curriculum and teacher professional development, both made possible through the GE Foundation Developing Futures™ grant.

Part of that professional development is teacher participation in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs, see story, page 2). The CMTs are just some of the many data points that teachers review during their PLC meetings so they can get an accurate picture of students’ strengths and weaknesses, and collaborate on instructional strategy to help each and every child succeed.

“It’s the combination of common, high-level curriculum and excellent instruction that will accelerate our students’ achievement. We are beginning to focus more deeply on monitoring and collecting feedback from teachers and administrators to ensure the continued success and college readiness of all of our children,” added Amy.

While everyone acknowledges that there is still a lot of work to do, the results this year show that Stamford students are moving in the right direction.



## TEACHER spotlight



### Michele Sabia

Literacy Support Specialist, KT Murphy Elementary School

#### Where did you go to college?

I went to University of Maryland for my freshman and sophomore years. Then I joined Teacher Corp in conjunction with Stamford Public Schools and the University of Bridgeport for my junior and senior years. I earned a BS in Elementary Education. I received my MS and Sixth Year from University of Bridgeport as well.

#### How long have you been teaching?

This is my 34th year in the SPS.

#### What are your favorite hobbies?

I enjoy reading about teaching, spending time on the beach, bike riding, long walks downtown with my husband, and eating yummy dinners.

#### What’s the most exciting thing going on at your school because of the GE Foundation grant?

Independent reading and conferencing! It’s amazing to watch the students engaged in their own reading and being able to talk to them one on one about their reading. I enjoy giving them what they need on the spot to progress in their development as readers.

# Preparing Teachers to Aim for the Stars



SPS teachers Frank Aulenti (middle) and Jose Rivera (right)



Back row L-R: Frank Aulenti, Anthony Ramos, Joe Aibinder, Jose Rivera, Anthony Thompson; Front row L-R: Mark Goldsmith, Joan Flannery, Peter Sepe



For decades, the United States was considered to have one of the best educational systems in the world. But in the past twenty-five years, things have slowly shifted. Now many corporations are finding that they have to look outside the U.S. for engineers and those trained for other science and technology jobs.

This was the message that GE executives shared with science teachers at the annual NASA conference held at Cape Canaveral this summer. The reality check was to help science teachers realize how important their work is—to get more students interested and engaged in science and to learn to approach issues using an inquiry-based approach.

“This was my first conference, and it was an amazing experience,” said Joan Flannery, K–4 Science and Technology teacher at Rogers International School, and member of the Science curriculum committee. “There were over 80 science teachers from the different GE districts, and it provided us a great opportunity for sharing and learning from each other.

“Guest speakers included an astronaut, Barbara Morgan, who shared with us her unique experience in space aboard the shuttle and space station with astronauts from other countries. We also got to walk in classified sections, where the new Aris rocket is being built for the next space program, once the shuttle program is retired,” Joan added.

In addition to guest speakers and networking sessions, the teachers were also introduced to various aspects of the new Science curriculum.

“I absolutely loved the laboratory on impact craters,” commented Pete Sepe, 8th grade Earth Science teacher at Turn of River Middle School. “It was so timely to do this lab in conjunction with the October 9th launch by NASA of the missile into the moon’s surface. Students recreated the impact with a marble, cocoa, and flour. Students could actually understand how scientists study craters and what happens during an impact. It made the quest for water ice more relevant to the kids.”

A significant take-away for attendees was access to wiggio, an email and blog network that allows them to connect with each other, as well as with NASA and GE employees, to ask questions, get advice or share successes. Attendees also received a free annual membership to NSTA along with a microscope, books, literature, suggested teaching strategies, and how to teach “effective science note booking” to middle school students.

“My classroom is more “hands-on” because of this conference and I learned more strategies to teach kids how scientists think,” Pete added. “As science teachers, we are continually working the inquiry process with kids.”

“I’ve been teaching for 28 years and I still love every minute of it,” added Pete. “A conference like this helps me to reenergize and provide new insight into the classroom. I certainly hope I have the opportunity to go again.”



Barbara Morgan, astronaut

“My classroom is more “hands-on” because of this conference and I learned more strategies to teach kids how scientists think.”

— Pete Sepe, 8th grade Earth Science teacher at Turn of River middle school

# Learning About Literacy

Q&A with Dr. Linda Bruno, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction



In August, Dr. Linda Bruno joined Stamford Public Schools as Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. She has spent more than 35 years in education—as a teacher, principal, and superintendent. We asked her a few questions about the new literacy initiative and its goals for SPS.

## Q What is the Literacy Initiative?

The literacy initiative has been evolving over the past few years. Each year, we'd get the results from CMTs and see that there continues to be a large achievement gap for certain subgroups like English Language Learners (ELL), Special Education students, and Economically Disadvantaged students. Whether it is the reading or math portion of the test, literacy is crucial to being able to succeed, so we dug a little deeper. Last year, thanks to the GE Foundation grant, we were able to do a literacy audit, which turned up surprising results, and confirmed some long held beliefs. The result was the creation of this initiative to address the literacy issues in our schools.

## Q Literacy is a huge undertaking; how do you decide where to start?

For us, the answer to this was obvious. We found that across the twelve elementary schools, there were 153 different curricula being used to teach literacy, which essentially means there is no curriculum. So we knew we needed to create a standard curriculum that lined up with state standards and to start it in kindergarten. This past summer, we brought teachers and reading specialists together with some consultants, and crafted a new K-2 reading curriculum, which is being rolled out in classrooms in four elementary schools right now.

## Q Why only four schools, and how were they chosen?

We did not have the financial resources to implement a new program in all twelve schools. We thought a lot about the approach and decided it would make sense to pilot the curriculum in a smaller subset of schools. Not only does it involve a new classroom curriculum, but also training for the school intervention specialists (reading teacher, individual learning coaches). So we took the four lowest performing schools from the Spring CMTs, and that's where we are focusing right now.

To prepare the K-2 teachers in those schools, we've also had a great deal of professional development, which is essential to the success of any curriculum.

## Q How do those teachers feel about having to learn a new curriculum?

There is a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm. When we first started talking to them about it, they were delighted and relieved. Many said they had been waiting for something like this, and couldn't wait to get started. And this first part of the year is focused only on the reading part of the curriculum. In the spring, we'll add the writing component as well.

It is hoped to use the implementation experiences in the four schools to develop a model to be replicated in the other schools.

In addition to professional development for the teachers, we also have been providing professional development for the principals, so they are familiar with what is happening in the classrooms, and can offer the support needed to make this program a success. We are involving other elementary school principals in this aspect, not just those at the four pilot schools.

## Q How will this be rolled out to other schools?

Literacy is an expensive curriculum to roll out because to be successful, every classroom has to have a complete set of leveled books. In essence, we are building mini libraries. And of course there is the professional development. To pay for this, it is our hope that we will be able to apply for grant money based on the success we hope to see at our four pilot schools.

## Q What has been the biggest surprise for you, coming to Stamford and this role?

I don't want to say surprise; I'd say delight. I go into the schools we are working with, and they request certain resources, whether it is training or materials, and we are able to provide them. This empowers the teachers because they get what they need to be successful. In addition, there is the sense that the whole system is working together to be successful. We have wonderful, committed teachers and administrators, who all have the students' best interests in mind. That makes this an incredibly exciting place to be.

## A Note from Joshua P. Starr, Ed.D. Superintendent of Schools



## Middle School Transformation – Off to a Promising Start

Our efforts to transform the middle school experience and increase academic rigor for all students have gotten off to a great start, with the GE Developing Futures™ grant funding more than 200 hours of efficacy training for teachers, administrators and parents. Efficacy refers to the notion that intellectual capacity is not fixed or given, but can be built by sustained and effective effort. Students now receive an additional 45 hours per year of instruction in each of the four content areas: math, science, english language arts, and social studies. The hour-long blocks of instruction are supplemented with a daily Academic Enrichment period and weekly advisories. Under our new, more flexible structure, students are placed in College Prep or Honors courses or a combination of both. For example, for the first time, it is now possible for a student to be in an Honors class for Math and Science and if appropriate, a College Prep class for English Language Arts and Social Studies. Students in all groups receive the same rigorous curriculum, but the pacing is adjusted as needed. The Middle School Transformation plan will be rolled out over three years and will be fully operational by 2011–2012.



College Prep class for English Language Arts and Social Studies. Students in all groups receive the same rigorous curriculum, but the pacing is adjusted as

While some growing pains are expected, I am extremely pleased with early feedback. This is due in no small part to the tremendous efforts by our teachers and administrators. We are in the process of collecting hard data on the success of the program's rollout and I will report the results to you in the next issue of DF. We are conducting focus groups with staff, students, and parents to find out what is going well and what we can do better. In the meantime, grade 6 teachers have expressed a great deal of support for the plan, which is designed to give all of our students the most challenging middle school education possible. Teachers say they are seeing positive changes and increased academic rigor. They also report that classroom behavior has improved and that students are responding well to new instructional strategies. As one teacher stated, "This year has been a wonderful experience. We are not only improving academic instruction for all students, but improving our school cultures as well."

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