Executive Director’s Message
Bruce E. Douglas, Ph.D.

“Courage is like a muscle. The more we exercise it, the stronger it gets. I sometimes worry that our collective courage is growing weaker from disuse. We don’t demand it from our leaders, and our leaders don’t demand it from us. The courage deficit is both our problem and our fault. As a result, too many leaders in the public and private sectors lack the courage necessary to honor their obligations to others and to uphold the essential values of leadership. Often, they display a startling lack of accountability for their mistakes and a desire to put their own self-interest above the common good.

“That means trouble for us all, because courage is the enforcing virtue, the one that makes possible all the other virtues common to exceptional leaders: honesty, integrity, confidence, compassion, and humility. In short, leaders who lack courage aren’t leaders.

“Without courage, all virtue is fragile: admired, sought after, professed, but held cheaply and surrendered without a fight. Winston Churchill called courage ‘the first of human qualities . . . because it guarantees all the others.’ That’s what we mean by the courage of our convictions. If we lack the courage to hold on to our beliefs in the moment of their testing, not just when they accord with those of others but also when they go against threatening opposition, then they’re superficial, vain things that add nothing to our self-respect or our society’s respect for the virtues we profess. We can admire virtue and abhor corruption sincerely, but without courage we are corruptible.”

Source: “Fast Company” article by John McCain published in September 2004
Avon Students Collect, Donate Sweatshirts to the Needy

AVON — A drive by students at Avon Middle School has collected 1,091 sweatshirts to be distributed to the needy.

The drive, which exceeded its goal, concluded in late February and the sweatshirts have been distributed to social service agencies.

One of the recipients was Gifts of Love, the town-based organization that provides food and clothing to the needy and other programs.

“Avon gets a bad reputation for spoiled kids, but the flip side of that is kids like this,” Gifts of Love Director Diana Goode said Wednesday.

Lori Flaks, whose son Justin was one of the students involved in the effort, said the two of them donated 226 sweatshirts to Gifts of Love. Goode said many of them have already been distributed to clients.

Goode said the students’ donation is welcome and that clothing is an important part of what Gifts of Love provides. She said the agency gave away 2,865 bags of clothing in 2014.

“Being able to provide people with winter clothes really helps,” she said. “It can take off some pressure for people who are trying to make ends meet.’

The 11 students involved in the collection are seventh-graders. They formed a committee they called One for Everyone and asked family and friends to donate. The project got a big boost from a collection event Feb. 7 at the Helen & Harry Gray Cancer Center.

Flaks said that the project got started after she and her family cleaned out 12 unused sweatshirts from their closets and concluded that there were more in Avon that could be collected and donated.

The students’ goal was 1,000 sweatshirts. Flaks said sweatshirts were also donated to Shiloh Baptist Church in Hartford; the Boys and Girls Club of Meriden; Grace Academy in Hartford; South Park Inn, a Hartford-based agency that works with the homeless; Friends in Service to Humanity in Torrington; The Village for Families and Children in Hartford; West Bristol School; and the Salvation Army Rehabilitation Services.

Source — The Hartford Courant article by Ken Byron published on March 4, 2015

Opening Knight Players Win State Award, Take ‘Deadbeats’ Play to New England Festival

Ellington High School’s Opening Knight Players recently returned from the 79th annual Connecticut Drama Festival during the weekend of March 14, at Joel Barlow High School in Redding, Conn., where they took home the award for First Place, as well as the People’s Choice Award and the Ensemble Award, which are the two other “big” awards at the festival.

OKP’s competition play, “Deadbeats,” is a comedy/drama written by advisor William Prenetta, and involves a group of high school students who take refuge in an auditorium to hide from a zombie apocalypse.

OKP President Ashley Kuehn said the group relished the moment they received the award. “We felt absolutely amazing that all of the work we put into it these past couple of months really paid off,” she said.

Kuehn said the group wanted to change the whole concept of a play, in that it’s not just on stage.

“We have the actors running through the audience, running outdoors, running back in,” she said. “We wanted to make it very interactive.”

Kuehn said the show is both funny and scary. “It’s funny at first, but then when the zombies come through the doors, you realize you’re probably not supposed to be laughing.”

The OKP also netted four acting prizes – one for Olivia Gionet for Best Actress. Two other Ellington actors – Aaron Reynolds and Nick Cantin - were named to the All-Connecticut Cast. Megan Sack also earned an honorable mention.

The group also won the award for Best Use of Voice and Makeup.

Because of their First Place honors, the group was invited to take part in the New England Drama Festival in Maine, April 23-25. That festival is not a competition, but more of a showcase of the best that New England drama students have to offer.

Source — The Reminder News article by Steve Smith published on March 19, 2015
Hartford Public High School Students Donate Blood

HARTFORD — After giving blood for the first time, 17-year-old Sita Nyame sat on a floor mat Wednesday as her temporary handler followed protocol down to the second.

“All right, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1,” said Monique Bennett, a Nursing Academy junior who helped organize Hartford Public High School’s blood drive. She escorted Nyame to a chair a few feet away for another 10 minutes of timed rest.

Nyame, a senior at the high school’s Academy of Engineering and Green Technology, was among dozens of students to donate blood. A close friend recently needed a transfusion, she said, and it “took a toll on me. Doing this, I felt it could help somebody else.”

Hartford Public hosts three blood drives a year with the American Red Cross, but Wednesday’s turnout was especially needed after harsh winter weather led to canceled blood drives throughout the Northeast, Red Cross spokesman Peter Boucher said.

Since February, the Red Cross has lost nearly 30,000 opportunities to collect blood nationwide, he said.

“We do have an urgent need for donors. ... Hopefully, they’ll help us replenish what has been lost through the winter storms this year,” Boucher said in the school’s field house, which became a makeshift donation center with medical tables, booths and snacks.

More than 90 people signed up for the student-led blood drive that had an overall goal of securing 47 units of blood, Nursing Academy administrator Deborah Blazys said. Not everyone shows up when needles are involved, and students must be at least 17 years old and meet various criteria to be donors — one teenager with cold symptoms was downcast after being turned away.

Students are told that donating a unit of blood can save three lives, Blazys said. Nikiea McClairen, a Nursing Academy junior who turned 17 in January, said that she “couldn’t wait.” One of her friends received a transfusion after she lost too much blood during a Caesarean section last year, she said, but donating has been on her mind since ninth grade.

“I thought it would hurt ... but it didn’t,” McClairen said in the recovery area. She plans to give blood again in May.

Hartford’s Bulkeley High School and Classical Magnet School also organize blood drives during the year, Boucher said.

But at the Nursing Academy, a health care-themed academic program in which students wear blue scrubs, the good deeds can tie into their schoolwork. Some seniors use the topic of blood donations for their capstone research project, a requirement for graduation, said Blazys, who gives a red commencement cord to graduating seniors who have given blood three times.

Last September, Bennett and some classmates gave a presentation on running blood drives to other Connecticut high schoolers at the Red Cross’ state headquarters in Farmington.

“Students pretty much do the entire process,” starting with marketing and recruiting their classmates to be donors, Blazys said. “It really builds community, and the Red Cross loves coming.”

Nursing Academy senior Alex Velazquez, 18, said he listened to a hip-hop song called “Blessings” on his headphones while giving blood Wednesday. If he ever needs blood, he said, he figures there will be enough supply from people like him who hadn’t “chickened out.”

“It was fast, painless and I really didn’t feel a thing,” Velazquez said, “besides sitting there and feel yourself, like, drain a little bit.”

Source — The Hartford Courant article by Vanessa de la Torre published on March 18, 2015

Photo Credit: The Hartford Courant
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT – April 2015

Recalculation and Honors

CREC Schools Honored by Magnet Schools of America

Three CREC schools were recently named 2015 Schools of Excellence by Magnet Schools of America, and 10 CREC schools were named 2015 Schools of Distinction.

Magnet Schools of America is a national association for magnet and theme-based schools, and it gives out annual merit awards to schools that commit to high academic standards. Schools are also recognized for their curriculum innovation, school diversity and integration, specialized teaching staffs, and parent and community engagement.

This year, 319 schools applied for merit awards; 208 schools were recognized. Winning schools receive merit award plaques during an awards ceremony later this month.

The highest ranked magnet schools in the “Excellence” category are eligible to receive monetary awards. At the ceremony, they could also be named the top elementary, secondary, or new and emerging magnet school in the United States.

One school of excellence will also win $5,000 for the Dr. Ronald P. Simpson Distinguished Merit Award—Magnet Schools of America’s most prestigious award. The CREC Museum Academy is a finalist for this award.

CREC’s Academy of Aerospace and Engineering, the CREC Museum Academy, and CREC’s Discovery Academy were named Schools of Excellence.

The following schools were named Schools of Distinction: CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering Elementary School; CREC Ana Grace Academy of the Arts Elementary School; CREC Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts; CREC Metropolitan Learning Center for Global and International Studies; CREC Montessori Magnet School; Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School; CREC International Magnet School for Global Citizenship; CREC Reggio Magnet School of the Arts; CREC Two Rivers Magnet High School; and CREC University of Hartford Magnet School.

Rioux Honored by Connecticut Occupational Therapy Association

Joyce Rioux, assistant director of therapies for CREC River Street School’s Integrated Program Model, was honored at the Connecticut Occupational Therapy Association’s annual conference.

Rioux, a registered and licensed occupational therapist, received the association’s award of service. The award recognizes individuals who make significant contributions in advancing the Connecticut Occupational Therapy Association’s mission and strategic goals, and it recognizes those who make significant contributions in the practice of occupational therapy in the state through community leadership or advocacy.

Rioux has practiced occupational therapy in both pediatric and school-based settings for more than 30 years. Through her work at CREC’s River Street School, she’s shared her forward-thinking leadership and mentoring skills, encouraging her peers to engage in best practices in occupational therapy, and she frequently participates in research and shares evidence-based practice interventions.

Rioux is also a presenter at local, state, and national events, and she is an active member of several organizations.

Teen Nominated for Hartford Boys and Girls Club Youth of the Year

CREC photo: Sam Galarza-Ortiz, a senior at the CREC Metropolitan Learning Center for Global and International Studies, was nominated for the Boys and Girls Club of Hartford’s Youth of the Year award. Because of the honor, Galarza-Ortiz was also recently recognized by the CREC Council.
**Events and Updates**

**Abolitionist Fair Teaches Metropolitan Learning Center Students About the Struggle for Freedom**

The CREC Metropolitan Learning Center for Global and International Studies held its 10th annual Abolitionist Fair: Struggle for Freedom on March 18. More than 100 students prepared multimedia displays, interactive games, dramatic presentations, and other projects for the Abolitionist Fair. These activities helped educate students and community members about the horrors of modern-day slavery and what they can do to end it. Activists and students from anti-slavery groups, such as the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, Love146, and Free the Slaves, spoke to CREC Metropolitan Learning Center students at the Abolitionist Fair. The event included a discussion about trafficking in Connecticut and throughout the world. The Abolitionist Fair began in 2006 when ninth-grade U.S. history students were studying slavery in the 1800s. The students were outraged to learn that slavery was still happening, and they formed a group called Student Abolitionists Stopping Slavery. The fair is a way that the group can actively fight injustice.

**RISE to Help Seniors Prepare for Employment**

Re-Investment in Senior Employment (RISE), a project coordinated by CREC, is a new program funded by a grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

Through the program, CREC, the Jewish Family Services, Capital Workforce Partners, and Career Resources, Inc., will offer skills assessment, job readiness training, job search assistance, and personal supports to participants who are 50 or older and unemployed.

The four weeks of training and coaching sessions will be followed by a four-week unpaid internship with cooperating businesses and agencies. Each worker will have a dedicated job coach who will be the liaison between the worker and the participating company for the length of the internship.

At the conclusion of the program, RISE participants will be well trained in current office skills. Those skills combined with their past work experiences will make them valuable assets to any company, and the four-week internship will offer them a structured transition back into the working world. It will also provide area companies with reliable, experienced workers.

For more information, contact RISE project coordinator Mary Lou Molloy at 860-509-3649 or mmolloy@crec.org.
Aerospace Elementary Holds “Lift-OFF! So You Want to Be An Astronaut?”

On March 12, CREC’s Academy of Aerospace and Engineering Elementary School held “Lift-OFF! So you want to be an Astronaut?”

This was a themed event for students and families, and it featured hands-on activities that allowed participants to plan, design, launch, and record data about rocket performance. Each grade level worked on mission patches, science journals, and rocket construction. Preschool students made 3-2-1 puff rockets; kindergarten students built balloon rockets; and first-grade students made pop rockets.

Prior to the event, students from CREC’s Academy of Aerospace and Engineering High School visited the elementary school to demonstrate Estes solid fuel rockets, rockets that use more advanced technology.

CREC Students Participate in Future Health Professionals Event

Nine students from CREC’s Medical Professions and Teacher Preparation Academy recently participated in the Connecticut HOSA State Leadership Conference and won several awards in the National Competitive Events Program, which took place during the conference. HOSA is a national organization for future health professionals, and this year’s state conference was held March 13 at Gateway Community College in New Haven. It featured guest speaker Stephanie Beaton, an executive at Yale-New Haven Hospital.

The National Competitive Events Program consisted of several competition categories, including health science events; health professions events; emergency preparedness events; leadership events; teamwork events; and recognition events. Two hundred and six students from Connecticut competed.

The HOSA chapter at the CREC Medical Professions and Teacher Preparation Academy was founded in 2013. CREC students participating in this year’s conference and competition were Wesia Malik; Kathryn Meyers; Bailee Nardi; Tahjana Lewis; Sarah Kavernos; Arielle Reyes; Vandan Patel; Samantha Sochan; and Makayla Murphy. Malik serves as treasurer of the Connecticut chapter.

Open Choice Workshop Focuses on Reading

On March 24, Open Choice Early Beginnings hosted a workshop for parents called “Unlocking Your Child’s Super Reading Powers!”

More than 50 parents and children attended, and they learned about the services offered by the Hartford Public Library as they enjoyed dinner.

During the event, children made reading masks and capes, and the adults learned how to best support their emergent readers. For example, parents learned how to help their children practice sight words. They also learned how to apply early reading strategies when reading out loud.
CREC Family Resource Center Holds Nutrition Workshop

In March, the CREC Family Resource Center hosted a nutrition workshop at the Wilson-Gray YMCA in Hartford.

The workshop was facilitated by Christine Wanner, CREC’s co-coordinator of fitness and health education, and 30 families attended to learn more about a variety of topics, including food addiction and better eating habits. Families also learned how food impacts learning, how to eat healthy on a budget, and how to buy the right foods.

Each family received a folder filled with nutritional information and suggestions on healthy lifestyles. They also took home two bags of food—ingredients they will use to make the several healthy recipes they were also given. The groceries were donated by Whole Foods Market.

“I didn’t realize how important it was to eat healthy foods and how foods impact my child’s learning,” said Sarah Carter, a Windsor resident and a CREC Metropolitan Learning Center for Global and International Studies student. “I found it to be a good resource, and it is helpful to know how important it is to try different foods and be healthier.”

Helping to Fill Special Education Positions in Bridgeport

CREC is working with Bridgeport Public Schools to help develop and retain staff in key special education positions.

“By co-sponsoring a specialized, regional group of current Bridgeport teachers for the Advanced Alternate Route to Certification for Special Education Cross Endorsement, Bridgeport Public Schools is able to develop and retain staff that are dedicated to Bridgeport students and place dually certified teachers in key special education positions,” said Fran Rabinowitz, interim superintendent of Bridgeport Public Schools. “This is a priority.”

The group focuses on strategies for working with students with autism and students with significant behavioral issues. Students benefit from the academic experience brought to the classroom by general education teachers who have become special educators. Teachers benefit from both the expansion of their instructional repertoire and from the expanded career options that come with a second teaching endorsement.

Scholarships for the program are available through the RESC Alliance for qualifying minority candidates. There is also an opportunity to apply advanced route to certification coursework toward credits for a master’s degree from Albertus Magnus College in New Haven.

School districts looking to work with CREC to create a specialized regional group like the one in Bridgeport should contact Sonya Kunkel at skunkel@crec.org.

CREC Holds Read Across America Day Activities

CREC photos: Tom Brodnitzki (left), CREC’s social studies curriculum coordinator, celebrates Read Across America Day with students from Glastonbury-East Hartford Magnet School. CREC Medical Professions and Teacher Preparation Academy students (right) mark the day by working on reading activities in the school’s preschool classroom.
CREC Hosts Council of Language Teachers’ Rhyme Celebration in Hartford

About 200 students from throughout Connecticut participated in the 24th annual Connecticut Council of Language Teachers’ Rhyme Celebration on March 18. The event was held at the Theater of the Performing Arts located at the CREC Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts. The theme was “a feast of rhymes.”

At the event, students in kindergarten through grade six recited rhymes and sang songs in world languages to promote an early love for world languages. Several languages were featured, including Spanish, Mandarin, French, and Japanese. The rhymes, songs, poems, and tongue twisters were selected by world language teachers and were presented by students with costumes and props.

Student participants represented approximately 20 towns, 11 school districts, and 32 public and private schools. This year’s Rhyme Celebration was hosted by Kristen Tagg, a Spanish teacher at the CREC International Magnet School for Global Citizenship in South Windsor. For the first time in the event’s history, the organization asked participants and members of the audience to take part in a community outreach effort. Monetary and non-perishable food donations collected at the event were given to the food pantry at the CREC John J. Allison, Jr. Polaris Center in East Hartford.

Staff at CREC’s Polaris Center Learn About Racial Disparities

Workshops held at CREC’s John J. Allison, Jr. Polaris Center have made staff more aware of the racial disparities that exist regarding student suspensions, student expulsions, and student involvement in the juvenile justice system. In February, staff watched “The Color of Justice,” a documentary that uses personal anecdotes and Connecticut data to talk about racial disparities. A discussion followed.

In March, the CREC John J. Allison, Jr. Polaris Center held a workshop called “Effective School Staff Interactions with Students and Police,” which included presentations from members of the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee; Windsor police Sgt. Christopher McKee; and Melissa Tweedie, a school psychologist from H.C. Wilcox Technical High School in Meriden. The focus of the workshop was on building relationships with students, parents, and law enforcement personnel to reduce school-related arrests and utilize community resources.

Student Athletes Raise Money for Cancer Research

CREC photo: Students from CREC’s International Magnet School for Global Citizenship participated in the Council of Language Teachers’ Rhyme Celebration.