

Community Notes

Greenwich Alliance for Education Supports Public School Children

by Nancy Kail

Preschoolers captivated by a story read to them in English and Spanish;

Elementary school students beaming with pride after performing in their first music recital;

Middle school students immersed in after-school marine biology research; and

High school students about to begin their freshman year well prepared and confident.

These are just a few children who will have benefited from programs sponsored by the Greenwich Alliance for Education.

The Alliance was formed in 2006 by a group of educators, parents and town leaders who believe that the community has a shared responsibility for ensuring that all of our students achieve educational success. Members feel that more could and should be done to provide enrichment so that more public school children achieve at acceptable levels, and those who are achieving are inspired to attain greater levels of excellence.

Even in a town like Greenwich, there are areas of need. The town has changing diversity and achievement gaps persist. Twenty percent of students in primary grades and at least 24% in secondary grades perform below the Goal Standard set by the Connecticut State Department of Education on assessments of core reading, writing and mathematics skills. Over 17% of all students are non-native English speakers. Approximately 625 Greenwich public school students are eligible for federally subsidized free and reduced-priced lunch programs because of low family incomes.

Greenwich has a strong and

committed Board of Education and central school administration, and a long history of PTA and parent involvement in our schools. Yet, as many parents know, education goes beyond the classroom. And, individual PTA's are restricted in the amounts of money they can spend, and must use funds for their own schools only.

The Greenwich Alliance for Education is our town's first local education foundation. The group is an independent, not for profit, local organization, whose mission is: *to provide opportunities and services that foster educational success for all Greenwich public school students, birth to graduation.*

The Alliance joins thousands of local education foundations nationwide and over 75 local education foundations in Connecticut. Members of the Alliance Steering Committee spent a year researching local education foundation best practices; establishing close working relationships with the education, public and private sector town leaders; identifying specific areas of need and developing programs to address those needs; recruiting a broad-based, diverse Board of Directors, and affiliating with the Connecticut Consortium of Education Foundations. Through careful laying of this groundwork, it was able to introduce three programs:

Tuning in to Music provides private music lessons for elementary school students who are otherwise unable to afford them. This past year, 37 elementary school students took weekly music lessons from professional music instructors. These young musicians capped off their semester of lessons with a formal music recital. This coming year the Alliance will expand Tuning in to

Music to include at least 50 students.

Going Places with Books is an early childhood literacy program which uses a Storymobile to bring enjoyable, interactive bilingual literacy experiences to preschool age children where they live, learn and play. This year the Storymobile gets rolling on a full time basis, with regular visits to numerous town preschools and day care programs, as well as our public housing facilities and other sites.

Reaching Out Grants provides significant grants to community partners to develop inventive, sustainable programs that address identified areas of need among public school students. This past year the Alliance provided nearly \$90,000 in grants to the following programs:

- ♦ *Greenwich High School Skills for Success*, a summer school and adult to student mentoring program for approximately 30 entering freshmen requiring support transitioning into high school.
- ♦ *EMS/WMS Adventure Racing Program*, providing academic and physical challenges for diverse teams of students entering middle school.
- ♦ *Soundwaters Coastal Investigation*, a hands-on marine biology after school program that engages a mix of middle school students.
- ♦ *Greenwich Arts Council Minds in Motion*, a pilot enrichment program linking dance and math for 3rd and 4th grade students at Hamilton Avenue and Glenville elementary schools.

The Alliance plans to expand existing initiatives and develop additional programs. It will collaborate with town groups and individuals, evaluate its efforts and produce measurable indicators of success for each undertaking.

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For more information or to volunteer please call 698-7730 or visit www.greenwichalliance.org