

# East Lyme Public Schools

December 2011

## East Lyme Students Benefit From Professional Development



### From the Superintendent of Schools

Starting in 2010, the East Lyme Public Schools calendar has included four half-days for teacher and staff professional development. In an effort to reduce the impact of these early dismissals for students and parents, we have provided free child care for students during the afternoon. We also work hard to make certain that we make good use of these training days to provide our teachers and staff with regular and important learning opportunities throughout the school year. Our December newsletter highlights some of the ways we have used these half days to improve the skills and strategies used by our teachers and staff to help children learn.

Over the past year, we have used these half days to create true professional learning communities in each of our schools. Through this model, our teachers work together to identify individual student needs and to develop learning activities that ensure that each student is receiving the opportunity to learn and progress. This goal requires that

we not only assist children who need some intervention, but also that we provide enrichment and growth opportunities for students who have mastered the intended learning goals. Moreover, this approach encourages all teachers in a grade level or subject area to work together to help all children in that grade or subject to learn. You will read about many examples of these practices in the accompanying articles.

This newsletter also features many photographs of the Veterans Day activities in which our students participate each year on November 11. As the son of a World War II veteran, I continue to be inspired and moved by the many interactions our students have with our veterans during this memorable day.

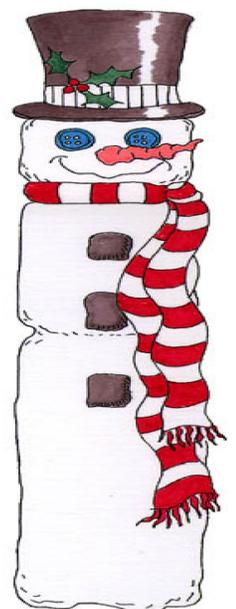
*Have a safe and restful holiday break  
with families and friends.*

*Dr. James Lombardo*

### From the Assistant Superintendent of Schools

Professional development is a major focus of the improvement process in our special education programs. The Special Education Steering Committee prioritized the professional development needs of teachers and service providers for the district. East Lyme's three year plan supports our staff in providing the best education for our students with special needs. This plan ranges from the use of assistive technology to legal updates.

Assistive technology is the term used when we use low tech or high tech devices to support a student to be more independent. A common example is the sticky note that many people use to remember what they were planning to do. While our staff are extremely qualified and skilled, they continue to tell us that more strategies and information are wanted. In a recent half day presentation, the Special Education Department discussed ways to build coherence in the district's programs. This very successful presentation included information



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East Lyme Public Schools will inspire, engage and educate each student to become a contributing citizen and a responsible, independent, and critical thinker.

*Thank you to our staff who contributed articles for this edition.*



## Professional Learning Communities and Professional Development at Flanders

Flanders staff development, with our goal of high expectations for learning, requires a form of professional learning quite different from the workshop-driven approach. We feel that the most powerful form of staff development the past two years has occurred in our grade level and special area team meetings that collectively focus on learning, goal setting, collaborative lesson planning and problem solving. Our teams are referred to as *Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)*, in which we are committed to continuous improvement for student achievement.

The PLC process focuses on three “Big Ideas” that Flanders has adopted. They are:

### **Big Idea #1: Ensuring That Students Learn**

The professional learning community model is not to ensure that students are *taught*, but to ensure that they *learn*. The change in thinking is from a focus on *teaching* to a focus on *learning*. There are four crucial questions that must be answered within our PLCs: What do we want each student to learn? How will we know when each student has learned it? How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning? How will we respond when a student already knows the information?

### **Big Idea #2: A Culture of Collaboration**

In our PLCs we work together to analyze and improve our classroom practices that will lead to better results for our students, our team and for Flanders. We develop goals, share strategies, lesson ideas and resources, ask questions, discuss concerns, and look at results. These discussions give every teacher an opportunity to improve classroom practice, individually, and collectively.

### **Big Idea #3: A Focus on Results**

We judge our effectiveness on the basis of student results. Data is an indicator of student *progress*. Each PLC team identifies the current level of student achievement, establishes a goal (*SMART goal*) to improve the current level, and works together to achieve that goal with evidence of progress. Most of our goals have focused on reading comprehension, writing, and math.

The success of Flanders as a PLC school depends on the commitment and hard work necessary to implement the three “Big Ideas.” Our PLC meetings meet regularly and we also use professional development opportunities to sustain this process of school change and student achievement.

*By Linda Anania, Principal*

Flanders  
Veterans Day  
Celebration  
November 11, 2011



## *Spring and Fall Professional Development Days at Flanders*

Last May, we had the wonderful opportunity to invite Dr. Nancy Boyles to Flanders School to provide professional development to our staff. Dr. Boyles is an author, former classroom teacher of 25 years, associate professor, and the Graduate Reading Program Coordinator at Southern Connecticut State University. The focus of her visit was meeting the challenges of Response to Intervention (RtI) and building on what we know about comprehension through the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The session provided an overview of the CCSS and the major shifts taking place in the crossover from the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) to the new national initiatives of CCSS. Suggestions were offered about specific ways to use the CCSS to enhance students thinking including tips for teaching components of critical thinking and how to add rigor to our classroom comprehension curriculum. She also focused on high quality graphic organizers, a bibliography of texts matched to different standards, and an overview of her *Launching RTI Comprehension Instruction with Shared Reading* book.

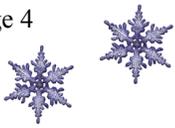
In October, following a *Components of Literacy Survey*, we decided to set up a “Choose Your Own PD” day. The topics were based around teachers’ interests and participants were able to choose their top three choices and ultimately attended two workshops. Facilitators included Linda Anania, Karen Costello, Patrice Romeo, and Jessica Acosta. In the “Centers” group, teachers shared what centers they use in their classrooms and how they organize and manage them. In the “Boyles’ Book Investigation” group, participants explored Nancy Boyles’ teacher-friendly books and had rich discussions regarding grade appropriate materials such as model lesson plans, comprehension strategy posters, graphic organizers, and genre lists. Some teachers and tutors were trained in quick screenings and diagnostic assessments that improve learning from the Consortium of Reading Excellence (CORE) book. Subtests in the areas of phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary were shared. Others revisited the framework of a Directed Reading Lesson (DRL) and discussed each step in depth. Following the overview, model lessons and graphic organizers were distributed. The final group focused on Tier I differentiation. Members of this group read about differentiation and were provided with ready-to-use ideas and lesson plans to meet the needs of a variety of learners. These Professional Development days were extremely beneficial to all of us at Flanders School and we look forward to learning more together this year.

*By Jessica Acosta*  
*Reading/Language Arts Consultant*



**Flanders Veterans Day  
Celebration  
November 11, 2011**





## Lillie B. Haynes Elementary School Supporting the Whole Child



The primary beneficiary of our school's professional development training is the student. For the past year and one-half, we have dedicated several days during the school year to provide our teachers and staff with the requisite knowledge and skills to address the needs of the individual learner in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At Lillie B. Haynes Elementary School, our training has been focused on all aspects of teaching and learning which support the development of the "whole child."

Via professional development training, our teachers have learned how to work as *Professional Learning Communities* (PLCs) to examine student data, determine each student's present level of functioning, differentiate instruction, develop

common formative assessments, share effective instructional strategies, monitor individual student progress, and work together in teams. Further, by learning how to use technology such as SMARTboards, iPads, and document cameras, teachers have been able to create exciting interactive learning communities. Teachers can then teach students how to collaborate while taking responsibility for their own learning.

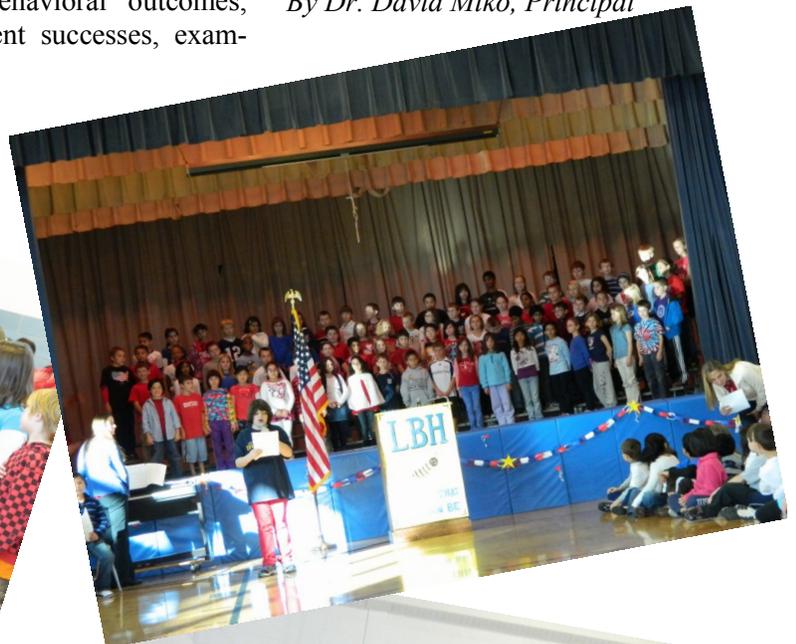
Our Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) training has provided staff with a systematic approach to improve the entire school culture by accentuating the positive, providing students with clear expectations, creating lessons focused on specific positive behavioral outcomes, celebrating student successes, exam-

ining pertinent data, and fostering teamwork.

Students also have benefited by the professional development training received by the special area teachers. In physical education, health curricular objectives are being incorporated into the physical education program and our PE teacher analyzed students' fitness scores to design individual student fitness programs. All elementary music teachers met to share classroom topics, monthly themes, and concert ideas. Additionally, students have benefited from the advanced instruction that our art teacher received in painting, sculpture, and pottery.

*By Dr. David Miko, Principal*

**Lillie B. Haynes  
Veterans Day**



## *Niantic Center Students Benefit from the Half Days Used for Professional Development*

Students at Niantic Center School are benefiting greatly from the professional development opportunities that are being held during the half days. First and foremost, the teachers are receiving more uninterrupted professional development within the school day. The training is whole group and is a “learn and apply to your classroom” approach. Last year our principal, Melissa DeLoreto, gave multiple workshops on differentiated instruction, and during each session teachers had time to discuss how they differentiate lessons in their classrooms. All teachers have great ideas; it is sharing those great ideas with co-workers that make good teachers even better.

This school year, the Niantic Center School staff has implemented professional learning community (PLC) teams. During our half professional development days, PLC teams have ample amount of time to analyze student work samples and develop lessons to meet the needs of each student. The PLC model holds all teachers accountable for the entire grade, rather than just their students. Having the extended amount of time to collaborate is essential in advancing student learning.

Learning should be an ongoing process for children and people of all ages. It is essential that teachers continue to receive common professional development time. Professional development advances our knowledge and understanding of the learning process and the end result is that students are learning more because we are delivering instruction that is specific to their individual needs.

*By Kari Wiseman  
Grade 1 Teacher*



### **Niantic Center Veterans Day**





## East Lyme Middle School Professional Learning Community: A Shared Commitment to Helping All Students Learn at High Levels



The 2010-2011 professional development days focused on the use of effective teaching strategies to differentiate instruction and meet the needs of all learners.

ELMS has a long history of teachers working collaboratively in teams. Over the course of implementing our School Improvement Plan, ELMS teachers have worked hard to increase the ability to share collective responsibility for student learning. The evidence of our shared accountability is growing. We have implemented a new team structure which includes a special education teacher on every team. We have worked to develop our co-teaching skills to reach *all* learners. A school-wide data team has been established to lead and support teachers in the effective use of data to support higher achievement for all learners. The use of common assessments in math and language arts provides information on student mastery of curriculum learning goals.

The next step of our work was to collectively answer the questions of: *What will we do when students have not learned or, what will we do if they already know?* The professional development was designed to increase teacher knowledge in effective teaching strategies and how to differentiate those strategies to address the learning needs of *all* students. Continuous focus on student learning and the best instructional practices strengthens the core of teaching and learning at ELMS while developing more intensive instructional interventions that match student learning needs. A synthesis of research on high performing school systems indicates that the most successful schools maintain a relentless focus on providing high quality, equitable daily instruction

in the classroom. Teachers reviewed research, identified high yield strategies, and had the opportunity to apply the strategies to current lesson planning. Students continue to benefit from teachers' implementation of teaching strategies that engage them in their own learning, lead to more rigorous instruction, and increase achievement.

In 2011-2012, the work of the professional learning community will be related to the new Common Core State Standards. On July 7, 2010, the State Board of Education adopted new national academic standards, known as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical subjects that will establish what Connecticut's public school students should know and be able to do as they progress through Grades K-12. *The CCSS were designed to consist of fewer, clearer and higher-level standards; to be aligned with college and work expectations; to include rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher order thinking skills; to build upon the strengths and lessons of current state standards; to be internationally benchmarked so that all students will be prepared to succeed in our global economy; and to be based on evidence and research.*

*By Judy DeLeeuw, Principal*



*Assistant Superintendent—Continued from Page 1*

from the research on *Professional Learning Communities* (PLCs) as well as work completed by 'The Big Picture Learning Program.'

In addition, the Special Education Department received information regarding legal processes and practices. While this tends to be a tedious subject, it is an important element for teachers to have as they safeguard the rights of our students with special needs. Coming in January will be a presentation on social skill instruction. Professional development is a very important part of what we do for our students, and as I read the articles in this newsletter, I am excited about the opportunities our students will have as a result.

*By Brian Reas, Assistant Superintendent*



## Professional Development at East Lyme High School Teachers Learning from Teachers



Throughout the recent years, professional development at the high school has mainly been individualized for teachers or departments. This year the high school is focusing its professional development time and effort towards improving student learning collectively as one staff. During our professional development time, the high school faculty is dedicating its energies to going beyond individual instructional practices and working together to identify specific themes and issues our students struggle with as they progress through our high school program.

The process of improving student learning comes in many forms. We are developing a professional learning community with a single focus: improving student learning. We brought in an expert, Dr. Barbara Blackburn, to work with us on improving rigor in the classroom. A committee of teachers met during the summer for a conference call with Dr. Blackburn to target professional development topics and to develop a workshop for our staff. She provided us with theory, researched-based best practices, and solid practical application activities. During that workshop, as

well as subsequent professional development times, we have had the opportunity to collaborate in small teams as well as a full faculty.

In addition to Dr. Blackburn's efforts, we sent a team to a conference with nationally renowned speakers, Rick and Becky DuFour, that focused on establishing a well-functioning *Professional Learning Community* (PLC). The DuFours are leading experts in creating PLCs that have a dramatic positive effect on improving student learning. That team brought their new learning back to the faculty and shared the content with other faculty members. Discussions have been on-going in department meetings as well as informal meetings among teachers about how we can have that same positive impact on student learning. Teachers are excited about the possibilities for creating PLCs in our high school and improving our practice.

Our time spent working together as a faculty has provided us with many benefits. In a large school setting, sometimes people get isolated and only focus on their specific subject area. By increasing our collaboration time, we are now able

to widen our knowledge base and learn from each other. We have a wealth of knowledge and expertise right in our own school, and we are taking steps to tap into that resource. We have been able to have those discussions about common issues that we encounter with our student population and share successful instructional practices with each other. Moreover, by working together we are able to become more efficient and effective both individually and as an educational organization.

Our focus of improving student learning supports the district goals and state initiatives. The high school is not alone in taking this step to support our district's goals. Other schools in East Lyme have adopted the PLC philosophy as well. Next year, in response to the State's initiative, student success plans will be created for each student at the middle and high school level. This is an exciting time for our school and the teachers who have the responsibility of preparing our students for future success.

*By Michael Susi, Principal*



## East Lyme High School Coastal Connection Students Celebrate Veterans Day at Crescent Point in Niantic





## EAST LYME MIDDLE SCHOOL HONORING OUR HEROES



Veterans Day at East Lyme Middle School was truly an "All Hands on Deck" event organized by our Social Studies and Coast Guard Reservist Commander Richelle Johnson. The faculty and staff contributed in making this a special day for our school. Through our Veterans Day celebrations each year, our students have learned to understand the significance of what it means to serve our country and the importance of this day. Our guests included a Pearl Harbor survivor, personnel from all branches of the military that served in Vietnam, Desert Storm, and most recently, Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition students' Skyped with active military personnel who serve our country overseas. Our connection to the Coast Guard Academy was evident by the number of cadets that interacted with our students throughout the day.

Students and veterans participated in a bell ringing with a moment of silence at 11:00 a.m. and lunch in our cafeteria. Some students visited the Old Stone Cemetery where they learned the personal stories of the veterans and placed flowers at their graves. Our music students performed at Niantic Center School, Crescent Point Nursing Home, and Lillie B. Haynes.

During the afternoon ceremony Alex Wise welcomed our visitors, and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Cooper Ramos, Madi Lillie, and Theresa Legein. Annaliese Lapides, Michael Stevens, Gretchen Stelter, Kathryn VanWart, and Ariel Plantz showed their appreciation of the sacrifices our military service men and women have made by reading their essays and poems to the veterans and the entire school. Taps was played by two middle school students. The band and chorus performed patriotic songs. Mrs. DeLeeuw, Principal, was honored with the Patriotic Employer Award for her support of the U.S. Coast Guard and Reserve by the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Captain David M. Gardner, U.S. Coast Guard Reserve Chief of Staff, First Coast Guard District presented Mrs. DeLeeuw with this honor during the ceremony.

*By Richelle Johnson, Social Studies Teacher*

