



Community Connections

21st Century Community Learning Centers

Berlin, Calais, East Montpelier, Middlesex, Montpelier, Worcester

Mid Term Report

January 2003 marked the midpoint of the 3-year 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant that funds Community Connections. This report looks at the first year and a half of programming.

After the bell rings, where do the children go? More and more, they go to Community Connections after school. Some play chess in the afternoon, some work on their homework, and some participate in Readers Theatre, dramatizing books they are reading.

Others take the opportunity to try Hip Hop dance, study photography, or learn about the natural science of the surrounding schoolyard. Skateboarding, astronomy, snowboarding, LEGO's, cooking, sailing – the list goes on. Over 1470 youth and adults have participated in Community Connections programs in Washington Central and Montpelier schools during the first year. Funding for

these programs comes from a U.S. Department of Education 21st

Century Community Learning Center grant. Since it began in September 2001, Community Connections has helped to open

the schools as community resource centers.

Community Connections offers students a balance

of educational, enrichment, and life-skill building opportunities as well as a safe, supervised place to have fun. Attendance in the afterschool programs has exceeded 50% of overall school population in several schools, and is nearly 70% at one school. Community

Connections also offers camps during in-service days and school vacations.

Last summer over 500 children attended Community Connections camps in all of the two districts' schools, including 77 preschool age children who took part in the Summer Sprouts preschool program and in summer playgroups. Berlin, Calais, Middlesex, East Montpelier, Worcester and

Montpelier learning centers supported programs for swimming, sailing, rock climbing, horseback riding and computer skills. Throughout the summer, all of the schools sent groups to work on a

woodcarving of the Peace Monument that now stands outside the Kellogg-Hubbard Library.



Rumney Community Connections Nature Club.

"Community Connections has certainly fulfilled one of our main goals - to enrich the lives of children, and to provide the school as a learning center. I think our community sees it as an important part of the school." - School Principal

Bringing School and Community Together

In addition, there is a Youth Outreach program, working with out-of-school youth and those who are at risk of dropping out of school. The youth are recommended by school guidance counselors, administrators, law enforcement, and others in the schools and community. The outreach worker spends time with each of them exploring alternative education options and other healthy life choices.

Girls/Boyz First!! Mentoring Program – a collaboration of Community Connections, Woman Centered and Central Vermont New Directions Coalition – matches community volunteers with youth to make a positive change in their lives.

Mentors and youth meet weekly over the course of a year and spend their time getting to know one another while participating in activities that are low or no cost. Mentors receive training and ongoing support and are carefully matched with youth. Last year, Girls/Boyz First!! increased its matches from 16 to 20 pairs. The children, ages 10-14, included 3 from Worcester, 1 from Middlesex, 1 from East Montpelier, 1 from Calais, 7 from Montpelier, and 5 from Barre (previously matched pairs). Mentor pairs gathered together as a large group five times for a meal and an event or activity (Marko the Magician,

mask-making, Jon Gailmor, a Vt. Expos Game, and roller blading/biking in Stowe).

For many, Community Connections programs have provided a life-changing experience. As one East Montpelier resident and mother of two elementary school age children says, “I just had to write to praise

the Community Connections program. My children participated in the after school programs which ranged from yoga and American Sign Language to cross-country skiing and computer skill-building. This enrichment opportunity has been an incredible gift to our children. The chess club built self-esteem in my son; the yoga class built physical agility in my daughter. We feel so privileged to have these

offered to our children. We also participated in the Community Connections summer camp and it surpassed all expectations! My children loved every day and have stated that this was the best summer of their lives!”

But Community Connections programs are not just for kids. All of the schools provide Community Education programs as

well. Many adults have joined evening classes in yoga, photography, foreign language, dance, furniture-making and knitting. Plans are underway for classes in pottery, financial planning, cultural explorations and political awareness.

Community Connections fosters collaboration between the schools and communities of WCSU and Montpelier to work in partnership with organizations and community members to:

- ◆ Provide expanded learning enrichment opportunities for all children and adults
- ◆ Increase healthy behaviors
- ◆ Expand the schools' role as a community resource



Community Connections students learn teamwork skills.

Community members are invited to participate in Community Connections by joining the local Council, volunteering at a program, chaperoning a field trip, or taking a class. Community Connections is bringing school and community together.

Look for our brochures in *The World*, at schools, local businesses and town clerk's offices, or visit our website for more information.

Community Connections is my reward for being in school all day. - Calais student



Calais students build a quinzhee at Lotus Lake Nature Center during February break Community Connections Camp.

Community Connections Staff:

- Ginny Burley, Director
- Loona Brogan, Administrative Assistant
- Deb Bloom, Youth Outreach Coordinator
- Deb Bogart, Service Learning
- Nicole Bourassa, Sustainability Coordinator
- Wendy Farber, Mentor Coordinator
- Kimberly Hagen, Math, Science, Technology
- Laura Mahan, Literacy, Arts
- Deb Wolf, Lead Contact



Dedication of the Peace Monument, at the Kellogg-Hubbard Library. Over 250 Central Vermont elementary to high school-aged youth participated in designing and carving the peace monument at Hubbard Park this summer. Sponsored by Community Connections, this student-driven project culminated in the celebration, September 21.

"The broad range of activities that go way beyond the learning opportunities of the regular school day is what is so important."
- School Principal

Coordinators:

- Berlin Elementary**
Patty Amones - 223-4088
- Calais Elementary**
Kim McKellar - 229-0553, ext. 317
- Doty Memorial - Worcester**
Kim Bolduc - 223-5656, ext. 134
- East Montpelier Elementary**
Guy Viens - 229-0553, ext. 318
- Main Street Middle School**
Jill McDermott - 225-8678
- Montpelier High School**
Karen Gerdel - 225-8070
- Rumney Memorial - Middlesex**
John Puleio - 223-5429, ext. 322
- Union Elementary - Montpelier**
Michiko Oishi - 225-8309
- U-32** - Mel Cambel - 229-0321, ext. 5322

The grades of Community Connections students improved slightly over the course of the 2001-2002 school year.

The table below shows the number of students whose grades went up from the beginning to the end of the 2001-2002 school year. This table includes all students for whom we have grades and covers mathematics, science, language arts, and social studies. Each school decided which graded subject area or combination of graded skills best represents each of these academic areas.

Academic area	Percent of students whose grades increased	Total number of students with grade data
Mathematics	40	656
Science	33	591
Language Arts	47	766
Social Studies	24	490

“Community Connections has become a very valuable part – an extension, because it has reached kids who have not been successful in school. They are able to establish positive friendships and able to be successful in the program. A lot of activities in school are based in reading or writing or using a computer. Community Connections has a broader range and lets kids shine in ways that they can’t during school. It has developed in some kids a positive attitude where they didn’t have it before.” - School Principal

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM FACTS

Studies show that students involved in after-school programs get better grades, attend school more and have improved behavior. They express greater hopes for the future and more interest in school. (“Extra Benefits Tied to Extracurriculars,” Education Week, October 2000)

Two-thirds of Americans say that it is difficult to find [afterschool] programs in their communities and that not enough programs are available. (Afterschool Alliance, Mott/JCPenney Afterschool Poll, July 2001)

Children and youth who regularly attend high-quality afterschool programs have better grades and conduct in school; more academic and enrichment opportunities; better peer relations and emotional adjustment and lower incidences of drug-use, violence and pregnancy. (U.S. Department of Education. 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Providing Quality Afterschool Learning Opportunities for America’s Families, September 2000)

“I wish someone would drop a treasure chest. It’s so fabulous to see the energy in summer and vacations, the connections with children from other schools.” -School Principal



Calais community members at a recent Media Literacy presentation sponsored by Community Connections.

Community Connections: 15 State Street, 3rd Floor, Montpelier, VT 05602
tel: 802-223-3456; fax: 223-1957
www.communityconnections.us