

CS² Pittsfield Helps Launch Alternative High School Program

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In its first full year of operation, Pittsfield CS² has helped to successfully launch an off-site high school alternative learning program. The new program responds to a need identified by educational and community leaders in Pittsfield, and it reflects CS²'s statewide emphasis on programming for underachieving youth.

Pittsfield CS² was established in 2003 as a response to issues raised

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Key Features of CS² - Communities and Schools for Success

CS² is an education reform strategy focused on raising students' academic performance while providing access to engaging experiences and real-world activities. In each CS² site, the school district benefits from a team of school-community "entrepreneurs" who implement specific strategies in collaboration with their local partners (school districts, workforce investment boards, local government) that address the CS² goals—academic enrichment, career and youth development, and systemic change. Entrepreneurs advance these strategies by leveraging resources, initiating new programs and services for youth, and engaging the community in a range of school activities. The newest CS² sites are focused on serving at-risk youth and providing alternative learning options at the high school level. The nine CS² sites include Amherst, Barnstable, Boston, Brockton, Lawrence, New Bedford, Pittsfield, Smith Vocational, and Springfield.

A Conversation with Pat Spradley of the Springfield Public Schools

Pat Spradley has been a CS² Entrepreneur in the Springfield Public Schools since 1994. Along with other members of the Springfield CS² team, Pat has played a pivotal role for the district – building partnerships with community based organizations, local government and employers to create programs and opportunities that build academic proficiency and career skills for Springfield’s youth. Currently, she serves as the district’s Chief Administrator for Career and Workforce Development, which includes managing a team of three other CS² entrepreneurs.

Q: How has CS² been a driver in school reform efforts in the Springfield Public Schools in recent years?

PS: CS²’s role in the district has definitely expanded into school reform. My area now extends beyond school-to-work to the community and into higher levels of academic discussion within the district. Initially this was met with some hesitancy, but over time the academic directors have come to really value what CS² can contribute.

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Brockton’s Vacation Week Science and Math Camp

Creating a fun and academically enriching experience, while solving many a parent’s vacation week child care dilemma, was the idea behind Brockton CS²’s “Vacation Science and Math Camp.”

Using local 21st Century and Brockton school district funds, the Vacation Camp was offered for the first time during this past February’s winter break. Designed for 4th, 5th, and 6th graders, the camp’s program featured a math and science curriculum tied to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, plus art and physical exercise.

The camp, which ran from 8 am-3 pm for four days of vacation week, clearly met a need. Because of high demand, the 180 children who attended had to be chosen by lottery.

Students participated in projects and workshops with a hands-on focus: They included:

- Creating artistic replicas of the solar system, guided by teachers working with local artists through a partnership with the Fuller Art Museum;
- A mini-engineering project, constructing a hovercraft using a leaf blower and plywood, led by staff-person from the local 4H Club;
- Workshops on physical education and science; and
- Field trips to the local high school planetarium.

The first Vacation Camp was so successful that Brockton CS² offered one again in April, which 225 students attended.

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Banknorth Supports Barnstable Afterschool Program

With funding from the Banknorth Charitable Foundation, an exciting afterschool program ran this spring at Barnstable Middle School. The Renaissance Afterschool Program (RAP) provided enrichment activities for 225 middle school students in the 7th and 8th grades.

Designed and implemented by Barnstable CS², RAP addressed the needs of youth who are struggling academically and socially, as well as provided enrichment for students who have developed special interests.

The \$18,000 Banknorth grant paid for staffing, transportation, materials and supplies for fifteen

“Interest Clubs” that link enrichment activities to academics. RAP clubs include Robotics Plus, Banknorth Entrepreneurs, Club Espanol del Drama, Quick Quilting, Hyannis Walk of Fame, Peer Mediation and School Safety, and Art Express. During a typical day at RAP, students took attendance, got healthy snacks for their club members, settled in for homework time and then immersed themselves in their creative club activities.

Activities ranged from working on projects to interacting with guest speakers or performers who shared their talents, interests and career paths. For example, a recent guest workshop for RAP’s Hip Hop

Dance team demonstrated how dance can be used to deal proactively with community issues of discrimination, violence and abuse.

RAP builds upon the school’s successful “Renaissance” initiative, also a CS² project, which recognizes students for academic achievement and citizenship through in-school programming.

RAP is one of many CS²-connected efforts at Barnstable Middle School designed to create a climate in which all students feel safe, get encouragement, develop special interests, and find it “cool to be in school”—during regular school hours AND after school.

Legislative Event Highlights CS²’s Impact

CS² adds significant value to local educational programming, according to an array of local legislators, school officials, community members and current students who spoke at a regional legislative breakfast held in February on behalf of the Amherst and Northampton (Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School) CS² sites.

The legislative breakfast was hosted in connection with a CS² network-wide effort this budget season to restore CS²’s state appropriation to prior levels. Event participants included Representatives Ellen Story and John Scibak, staff from Representative Peter Kocot’s and Senator Stanley Rosenberg’s offices, Northampton Mayor Marie Claire Higgins, school committee and board of trustee members, superintendents, principals, teachers

and students. The breakfast featured remarks by school administrators and area legislators about the impact of CS² programming. The stars of the morning, however, were the three student speakers from Amherst and Smith Vocational high schools.

All three described how CS²-initiated programs have made a difference in their lives. Julie Boucher, a junior specializing in carpentry at Smith Vocational, talked highly about the Skills/USA-VICA curriculum, recently adopted school-wide, which prepares her for

competitive excellence in her vocational field.

Sabina Dhakal, a 9th grader at Amherst, described how the Prep Academy, a program to support students struggling to make the transition from middle school to high school, has helped her adjust and succeed academically.

Andrea Newman, a senior at Amherst, discussed the impact of the high school’s mentorship program that matched her with a college-level academic mentor. The program helped her improve her study skills and academic scores, and it was a major factor in her decision to stay in school. For those in attendance, the students’ experiences underscored the importance of continued (and ideally increased) state support for the CS² teams that develop such programs.



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during an earlier Youth Roundtable Summit sponsored by the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board (BCREB), the Pittsfield Public Schools, and other community partners. The Summit gathered community input on strategies that would address the needs of at-risk youth and reduce the high school's drop-out rate.

One strategy that emerged was the establishment of an off-site program for students at-risk of dropping-out or youth already out-of-school. Its design would enable young people to complete their high school academic requirements in an alternative setting, as well as participate in work-based learning experiences that provide links to careers and post-secondary educational opportunities. By the summer of 2004, resource commitments were secured in order to serve an initial class of 15 youth, and recruitment began in the fall.

All three of Pittsfield's high schools (Taconic, Pittsfield High, and Hibbard) were able to refer students.

The program is housed at BerkshireWorks, the regional One-Stop Career Center, making a variety of career and support services readily available to program participants. The BCREB, the Pittsfield Public Schools, and CS² state funds provide financial support. These combined resources pay for a full time teacher, teaching materials and resources, and a CS² entrepreneur, Al Marden, who assists with career and internship connections in the community.

Eight students were enrolled by January, and that number grew to a total of 14 by the end of March. Jenet Tempone, the program's teacher, confirms that the program has made a critical difference for these students. "They tell me on a

daily basis that the reason they're still in school is because they have an alternative program to go to. We recognized that many of these students need jobs and work experience, including pay, because they have to contribute to the family finances. This program helps them do that and also continue in school."

Most students are below grade level in Math and English. With each student, Tempone works on a combination of academic and job-related skills. Says Tempone, "The combination of work and learning, in a more flexible and less school-like setting, with more programmatic elements geared specifically to their needs, seems to be a very effective combination."

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Q: Your CS² team has been involved in linking the schools to the community for years. Can you describe the newest initiative that's underway in the city – Step Up Springfield (SUS)?

PS: SUS is a citywide initiative to bring together all those entities that deal with students and young people in order to create a citywide system of support for young people. We're all working to emphasize and support SUS's two components—academic proficiency and character development. The goal is to create a "culture of achievement" and include all our young people in it.

Q: What role has CS² played with Step Up Springfield?

PS: Dr. Burke, our superintendent, designated that the character development component would be managed out of my office, making CS² a key player in SUS, along with MassMutual, the Davis Foundation, and others. Now, Step Up Springfield is THE driving initiative in the district. CS² has increased SUS's capacity by bringing technical expertise, shaping the dialogue with school and community members, and helping set strategy.

Q: What's been CYDE's role in Step Up Springfield?

PS: CYDE is providing key technical assistance to SUS, using firsthand experience from grassroots youth development, and shaping dialogue and asking good questions. How do we better do this? What do we know? How do we measure? How do we work more effectively and creatively around youth development? What are new innovative strategies? SUS, and CS² Springfield within it, benefit because CYDE has state-wide and nationwide access to new ideas and youth development strategies.