

**ELLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
DISTRICT AREAS OF FOCUS  
MONTHLY REPORT  
MARCH 2015**

**1.0 Status of Initiatives**

**Kindergarten Inventory**

	<b>Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard</b>
phonemic awareness (24/35)	87%
letter identification (48/54)	95%
sound recognition (20/26)	95%
K sight words (18/35)	79%
able to count to 50 or beyond	81%
able to reverse count form 20	73%

**Dolch Sight Word Assessment**

	<b>Trimester 1</b>	<b>Trimester 2</b>
<b>Grade One</b>	<b>Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard</b>	<b>Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard</b>
<b>District</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>76%</b>

	<b>Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard</b>	<b>Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard</b>
<b>Grade Two</b>	<b>Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard</b>	<b>Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard</b>
<b>District</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>91%</b>

**Kristy LaPorte** and **Melissa Haberern** attended a Legal Forum workshop presented by the State Department of Education Special Education. New Federal and State Guidance on Bullying, Incarcerated Students, ELL, Charter Schools and Dyslexia were provided. In addition the district's obligation for children with mental health issues was presented. Finally, there was a review of hearings and mediations from 2013-2014 and a review on restraint and seclusion.

**Melissa Haberern, Sue VanWyck, Christin Buxton** and **Michele Glassner** attended a meeting with a representative from IEP Direct. They learned about the capabilities of this system in comparison to SEMS Tracker. IEP Direct has many functions that SEMs, our current special education software, does not include. While IEP Direct has the capacity to interlock with other systems we use to gather data in the district, SEMs does not provide the same ability. IEP Direct appears to be a more efficient system that would assist with IEPs being completed with compliance. Thus, more discussion will occur including any impact on the budget as well as the process of changing over if a decision to change is necessary.

**Kristy LaPorte** and **Aimee Boehm** attended a conference on Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO). This workshop presented instruction on the new assessments required for preschool teachers to administer to students entering and exiting public school preschool programs.

**Kristy LaPorte** met with both the local Montessori School director as well as the Preschool of the Arts director to review Ellington Public Schools' process of assisting in Child Find and supports for students who may have a disability. Under IDEA, local school districts must assess and service students who attend local preschools that have kindergarten programming.

**Kristy LaPorte, Stephen Cullinan, Carin Faraci, Christina Saccoccio, Megan Glunt, and Catherine Lebron** met with Community Health Resources (CHR) staff Amy Evison and Care Coordinator, Mary Birch. CHR staff reviewed Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) offered to schools, parents and guardians in support of students. This agency can be reached by using the 211 number which will access a support person to come to the home or school within 45 minutes to help a student in crisis or mental health need.

In the month of March, EMS spent a substantial amount of time in classrooms practicing numeracy and literacy skills for upcoming SBAC testing (April 22 - May 15). Language arts, mathematics, and social studies teachers integrated CCSS type activities into daily instruction. Beyond preparing for the upcoming testing period, students in language arts spent substantial time writing literary essays at both grade levels. These impressive complex essays were based on detailed analytical analysis of two novels with similar themes. The writing process (using new Chromebooks) provided students with multiple opportunities to digitally edit and revise their work frequently using newly developed writing rubrics and checklist. In the area of social studies, eighth grade students completed historical fiction book clubs. In science, eighth grade students took both the standard and on-line pilot CMT test. Towards the end of the month, several teachers from EMS (with colleagues from EHS) attended the New England Secondary School Consortium annual conference attending presentations on topics like digital portfolios, proficiency based learning, developing a growth mindset in classrooms, and standards based feedback.

Curriculum supervisors, **Liz Cole** and **Michele Cirillo**, recently met with teachers to begin to revise the academic expectations school-wide rubrics. Recently the "Reads Effectively" and "Writes Effectively" academic expectations rubrics were revised to align with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This group will now work on aligning the remaining four remaining school-wide rubrics to the CCSS.

The high school staff members continue to implement practices to create empowering and engaging learning experiences for students by infusing the use of the Chromebooks in their classrooms. Mr. Rinaldi reports that in some cases teacher requests for Chromebook carts outnumber the units that are available.

The high school curriculum assistants report that the use of collaborative time during PLGs has focused on analyzing student data based on common formative assessments. The high school departments have also recently completed their tuning protocols on all midterm examinations and have identified instructional strategies to support and address areas of concern as a result of the assessment and exam analysis.

**Mrs. Haberern** met with each building to help staff learn the TIDE system for Smarter Balanced assessment. This will help to ensure that each student in need of accommodations receives appropriate support during the assessment administration.

The high school English and social studies staff recently participated in a webinar with Chris Lehman as part of their ongoing professional development on developing close reading strategies and implementation. Mr. Lehman will visit the high school on April 21 and 22 as part of the high school's ongoing professional development program.

The high school conducted its Little Kids Big Kids open house on March 3. Little Kids Big Kids is the high school preschool program that is linked in conjunction with the child development classes at Ellington High School.

On March 9, The Ellington High School Music Department performed at each district elementary school. The repertoire included a choral work from the hit movie, "Frozen" and an instrumental piece that featured various instruments re-creating the theme of an atmosphere of being at a circus. Their performances were well received by students, staff and school administrators who all complemented the high school students and directors on a job well done.

The high school hosted their annual eighth grade parent orientation program on March 11 that was postponed from an originally-scheduled January meeting. Mr. Rinaldi presented an overview of the programs and policies at the high school and then parents attended breakout sessions hosted by the school counselors. The breakout sessions covered important factual information such as course selection process, activities, sports, credits, graduation requirements and school rules and regulations.

On March 18 the EHS school counselors traveled to EMS to schedule 8th grade students for their freshman year. Counselors talked to the EMS students in small groups and then met individually with them to discuss course selections and recommendations.

On March 26 and 27, a group of district teachers and administrators attended NESSC conference and League of Innovative Schools meeting. The conference theme was on empowering the next generation of citizens, workers and leaders. Most of the breakout sessions focused on practical applications for planning for proficiency-based learning at the high school level. The attending staff members attended workshops on student directed senior projects, developing a culture based around a growth mindset, using student portfolios as evidence of proficiency and ways to maximize professional learning groups. High school staff members felt that this is one of the most empowering and beneficial conferences that they have attended.

At the March Crystal Lake School faculty meeting grades three and four teachers completed Smarter Balanced Assessment proctor training with John Collins. Grades K-2 teachers continued their book study conversation of Reading Wellness by Jan Burkins.

The Crystal Lake School Climate Committee met in March to plan for the CARES groups session held March 20. The CARES groups are one component of our school's Responsive Classroom initiative. The focus of the session was on Respect. Each CARES group discussed different ways to show respect for others, show respect for themselves and show respect for school materials. Students worked in pairs to generate different ideas. Each day on the morning announcements one of the ideas is shared, and that becomes the Respect Challenge of the Day. The groups culminated with a whole school read aloud of Do Unto Otters by Laurie Keller, a book about manners and respect.

Parent Conferences at Center School were highly successful. We had an excellent turnout clearly signifying a shared value of communication and collaboration centered on the achievement of the students. Parents had the opportunity to complete our annual Parent Feedback Survey while they were in the building for conferences.

Thanks to **Maureen Armstrong** and her many volunteers for organizing Bingo Night, a fantastic family night at Center School. The event chair took caution to be in compliance with all Bingo regulations, having filed all completed paperwork and passing an onsite visit from state regulators. Over 250 adults and children attended the event, with a bus arranged for transporting families enrolled through the Open Choice program.

The Reading for Fun Store honored students who read independently at home and filled out their reading logs. Students selected from a variety of books in celebration of their reading habit. Thanks to **Carol Feindel** for organizing this program.

Early spring field trips have been arranged. First grade students visited the Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford and made a trip to the Lincoln Theater at the University of Hartford for a variety of mini-musical performances. Fourth graders visited the Bushnell Theater in Hartford to see a production of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad.

For the third time this year, Center School students have earned a full-school reward for earning 10,000 tickets. This means our students have made 30,000 PAWS-itive Choices throughout our school to date. Teachers asked students to create a design on a 6-inch square. Without students knowledge, the teachers arranged all the squares, over 400 of them, into a mural that is on display in the long hallway by the gym. The mural represents the importance of each child to our whole school. For our 10,000 Ticket Celebration, we had a parade past the mural so each student could see how their individual square added to the larger picture of our community.

Windermere's fifth grade students took the CMT Science Test on Friday, March 20. Our sixth grade students are in the middle of their Smarter Balanced testing window which began on March 23 and goes through April 10. Students began with ELA and will finish with Mathematics. Our sixth graders have been successful testing in their classrooms using the Chromebooks.

Windermere held its fourth round of BIT (Behavioral Intervention Team) this year on March 31, 2015. Students with 5 or more office referrals in the 6 week window are discussed at the BIT meetings. The February round of BIT reviewed and discussed 18 students. This round, we had 20 students that were discussed and plans were put in place to help them increase positive behavior and decrease office referrals. Interventions discussed at BIT include individual behavior plans, CICO, and school based counseling.

**Ms. Jeri St. John** has continued to revise the health education curriculum which she is in the middle of teaching for the fourth year. Mrs. St. John has taken much time to modernize the program and update it accordingly.

The Windermere PTO ran a very successful spring book fair. The book fair was held in conjunction with the spring parent conferences and was open for parents to visit during conference nights. In addition, two separate Doughnuts for Dads events were held for our Intermediate School fathers. Over 100 dads attended.

On March 19, our fifth and sixth graders experienced a video conference with representatives from scientists at NASA. Dr. John C. Mather, Senior Astrophysicist and Senior Project Scientist for the James Webb Space Telescope at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, MD, talked to our students about this billion dollar initiative. Students interacted with the scientist about the new telescope with its futuristic technology.

**Ms. Jenna Dhandapani** continues to collaborate with several grade 5 teachers (Mrs. McKeegan, Mrs. Stroly, Miss Korona, Mrs. Satagaj) to implement a weekly Genius Hour in the classroom during intervention block. Students are creating short videos on a topic of choice and learning important research, publishing, and video editing skills.

Our Intermediate School Counselors began the process of creating individual academic success goals with students. Each class was guided through a series of classes to prepare the process of writing a

SMART Goal. As part of Students' Success Plans each student will create their academic goal and input the information into the Naviance web-based program. Also, **Mrs. Marshall** and **Mrs. Toback-Reveley** are currently involved in presenting our Conflict Resolution/Bullying Prevention workshop to all sixth grade students. This consists of four lessons in each room during social studies classes. In addition, they initiated the Friends of Rachel Clubs, including thirteen clubs which take place either during recess or after school. Over 200 students signed up to participate in a club. Ms. Marshall and Ms. Toback-Reveley are designated leaders for four different clubs taking place during recess.

The 6<sup>th</sup> grade got a feel for some possible future occupations during Career Day. Career Day caps off a month long career awareness program run by Mrs. Jessica Marshall and Mrs. Marilyn Toback-Reveley. The students were provided with a list of 20 different professionals and signed up for those they were most interested. The results were tallied and the professionals volunteered their time to speak with the students regarding what it is they do for a living and what schooling was necessary to qualify. Each professional gave two 30-minute long presentations to students who attended four different presentations in total. Students were asked to evaluate each presentation and the results are used to plan for the following year. The school would like to thank **Marilyn Toback-Reveley**, **Mary Temple**, **Lisa Schumacher**, and **Jessica Marshall** for their efforts in coordinating the event.

## 2.0 Next Steps

Third and fourth graders will participate in the Smarter Balanced Practice Test in April in preparation for administration in May of the actual test.

Grade level teachers, special educators, reading and math support teachers at Center School will meet in collaborative teams to review student assessment data to plan for instruction in the third Data Cycle.

Students from **Dave Helmin's** early childhood classes at the high school will intern in Center School classrooms in April and May, gaining practice and experience with elementary age students. We are appreciative of those teachers volunteering to share their expertise with teacher hopefuls.

The Center School staff will honor over 100 dedicated parents who have volunteered their time to support the learning in our school during National Volunteer Week in April.

Center School's Academic Fair is coming up next month with a new date and new design. This is a delightful evening, set aside for our families to learn more about our Bridges Math Program. On this evening families will be able experience hands-on learning in the children's classrooms and gain an overview of the program in media center. Families are encouraged to invite their special persons to come tour the school. The PTO will also provide their beautiful plant sale that evening.

Crystal Lake looks forward to welcoming Teachers College Primary Grades staff developer Rachel Rothman on April 7. Rachel will work with K-2 teachers in their classrooms to support the on-going work of Readers and Writers Workshop.

In the month of April, EMS will welcome back Katy Wischow from Teachers College for a full day of professional development. Focus of the professional development will be on implementing small group instruction in the general classroom, teaching strategies related to providing relevant text evidence to support one's opinion/position, and a throughout critical review of student work completed during the literary essay unit. During April, the middle school will also spend substantial time in teacher work groups on its planning for the 2015-16 implementation of student led conferences and digital portfolios. Finally, EMS will once again host a visiting school (New Fairfield Middle School) who look to replicate some of the middle school's practices related to mastery learning and standards-based reporting.

The high school has recently completed course selection signups and has developed the simple tally list. The curriculum assistants will now make recommendations for the number sections to be run and assign teachers to the appropriate classes. Mr. Wursthorn, Mr. Diamond and Mr. Rinaldi will collaborate over the April school break to develop a master schedule.

The high school will continue the development of common student learning outcomes, common assessments, analysis of student data, and the development of effective instructional prodded strategies and provide guidance and support to address the areas of concern.

Windermere School is currently immersed in the SBAC testing process. Much planning has been devoted to this mandated initiative. This year's spring curricular events for parents will vary by grade. We are looking for different venues to encourage greater parent participation and involvement. Grades K-3 and 5 are planning a Math Night. Grade 4 will produce an all-discipline Academic Fair. Grade 6 is in the throes of planning a Science Fair.

Windermere continues to develop a standardized protocol for our Grade Level Town Meetings. The format will include the assembly beginning with a whole group recitation of the Windermere Pledge. After this time, we will explore a character trait for the month. The class meeting will end with the R.I.S.E. song by all. During this meeting there will be student sharing of music, artwork, readings, etc.

Windermere is in the planning and organizational phases of our incoming fifth grade orientation process with Crystal Lake School and Center School. This requires updated information to highlight new programs which began at Windermere this year.

Lastly, the Windermere Scheduling Committee is searching for ways to improve upon the existing master schedule for the 2015-16 school year. Ideas such as recess before lunch and changes in the intervention block (providing more time for intensive instruction) is being explored.

### **3.0 Recognitions**

Crystal Lake School celebrated Read Across America on March 2 with special classroom guest readers and a whole school period of independent reading.

Crystal Lake School students were treated to a concert on March 9 by music groups from Ellington High School under the direction of Mr. Diamond and Mr. DeLassus. It was a wonderful opportunity for our students to get a glimpse into some of the opportunities they will have in high school to showcase and expand their musical talents. It was especially fun to see many Crystal Lake graduates amongst the musicians!

The Crystal Lake School PTO sponsored two cultural arts events in March. On March 10 students attended a Funance Assembly, a fun presentation about managing money. On March 31 author Katie Davis visited Crystal Lake School. Ms. Davis did presentations on her writing process with students in K-2 and did poetry workshops with students in grades 3-4. PTO Cultural Arts Chair **Melinda Stimac** organized both events.

On March 30 Crystal Lake School students celebrated Dress Like a Story Book Character Day. Fern Arable, Hermione Granger, Harry Potter and Waldo were all spotted roaming the halls on this fun day! Each month a spirit day is held at Crystal Lake School. Ideas for the theme of the day are voted on by all students.

## Student Accomplishments

Six AP Environmental Science students attended a wildlife workshop on Saturday March 7 at Session Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington, CT. Students interacted with professional soil scientists and wetland ecologists, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) personnel, wildlife specialists, and avian population analysts. The focus of the session was about successful wildlife habitat conservation techniques and strategies to restore and protect habitat quality and quantity. There was a special focus on wildlife conservation challenges in Connecticut. Students were able to observe and have hands – on experiences with skulls, furs and trapping and banding local birds. It was a wonderful educational experience for the students.

In late February, ten students from the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) club visited the Ellington Senior Center for an inter-generational game day. It was an afternoon of fun and laughs as students and seniors teamed up to play "Heads Up," a modern-day version of charades. Students who participated were **Jonathan Bailey-Francois, Dan Joy, Kayla Lagan, Melanie Makula, Melina Mashayekhi, Ariana Mason, Randy Philavong, Twisha Shah, and Alyssa Thibodeau-Grivois.** Mrs. Lori Greenberg and Mrs. Kim LaDuke, FBLA Advisors, accompanied the students and approximately 18 senior center members. A fun and rewarding experience was had by all!

The Ellington High School Music Department would like to recognize **Jeremy Baouche, Erin Breen, Nick Cantin, Basudha Chaudhuri, Michael Gionet, Katie Hany, Tommy Kindall, Rebecca Lindblom, Thomas Mackintosh, Ryan Michaud, Colby Villeneuve, Emily Walder, and Kate Walder** for their participation in the Connecticut Music Educators Association Eastern Region Festival in January and/or the New England Music Festival Association Concert Festival in March. Their preparation, as well as how they represented the Department and the High School at these select music festivals, should be applauded. Congratulations!

The Ellington High School Music Department has collected and donated goods and funds to a variety of groups and organizations through its annual benefit concert, aka The Good Music, Good Cause Concert. This year was no exception as we collected our largest set of donations ever! Over 30 bags filled with household items as well as substantial cash donations were collected and brought to KIDSAFE CT.

On Monday, March 30, eight members of Ellington High School's FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) attended the annual State Leadership Conference in Cromwell, Connecticut. At the day-long event, in their professional business attire, students had the opportunity to participate in competitive events, attend business-related workshops, and meet and network with other business students from across the state. The following students placed in their respective events: **Kayla Lagan**, 4th place, Marketing - **Chris Brawley** and **Nick Bennett**, 4th place, Digital Video Production - **Dan Joy**, 3rd place, Public Speaking - **McKenzie Kozma**, 1st place, Business Calculations. **Dan Joy** and **McKenzie Kozma** have qualified to compete at the National Leadership Conference in Chicago this summer. Also at the conference, elections for the new state leadership team for 2015-2016 took place. Ellington High School's **Tim Ross** ran a fierce campaign for State Secretary and won the election! Tim will proudly serve on the Connecticut FBLA officer team in the new school year. Congratulations to these future business leaders!

**Daniel Hayes** and **Benjamin Kloter** were chosen as a scholar athletes by the National Football Foundation. Dan and Ben are the second and third student athletes in Ellington High School history to earn this recognition. This is a major award and it's a credit to the type of student we have at EHS. The award winners will have a dinner in their honor later in the spring and their names will be enshrined at the National College Football Hall of Fame in Atlanta. First bestowed in 1991, the NFF National High School Scholar-Athlete Awards have become one of the most prestigious and competitive high school

academic honors in the country. Criteria for the award include but are not limited to academic achievement, athletic accomplishments and community leadership.

The **Opening Knight Players** show, *Deadbeats*, was named top in the state at the 79<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Drama Festival. They won the Best Play, Best Ensemble, and People's Choice Award. In addition, **Olivia Gionet** was named one of the top four actors in the state and **Aaron Reynolds** and **Nick Cantin** were named to the All-Connecticut Cast (the next level) of seven actors. Finally, **Megan Sack** earned an Honorable Mention for her performance. Finally, we earned Best Makeup and Best Use Of Voice, among other awards.

Many members of the **Unified Basketball** Team finished out their season on Saturday, with a plunge into the ice cold waters of Crystal Lake. A total of seventeen brave EHS students and adults raised \$1875 for Ellington High's Unified Basketball team and Special Olympics of Connecticut. Former Unified Coach, and now, Floridian resident, **Mrs. Arnone** joined the charge alongside the EHS Knights of Ice. The 2015 Knights of Ice include **Brando Bogrette, Arben Gjonbolaj Emilie Judge, Melanie Keroack, Danielle Markowski, Jessica Mocadlo, Jeremy Owens, Marko Portuondo, Katheryn Sisco, Nick Topor, Erin Wardrop, Alyssa Thibodeau, Rae Grzyb** and **Coach Grzyb**.

**Carin Faraci** is currently working with University of Connecticut professors to tighten up the guidelines for psychology interns. Ellington Public Schools support UCONN interns by providing them with hands on learning with supervision from our school psychologists. While Carin has been working to ensure EPS has guidelines around the UCONN interns to work directly in the schools, UCONN faculty have invited her to assist in redesigning their own guidelines to ensure all districts follow protocols and procedures.

Center School is now a "School of Distinction" as a result of **Pam Whiting's** involvement and leadership in the Connecticut Invention Convention. Mrs. Whiting has been working with a group of 20 students after school (and weekends to make up Mondays missed due to inclement weather). Over 15,000 students and 217 schools are participating across the state. There will be an Ellington Invention Convention in later April with State Finals held at Storrs on May 2. Two of our very own students will be asked to participate at the state level. A School of Distinction Plaque is on display in our main foyer.

Schools in the state interested in seeing the Bridges Math program in action came to observe in Center classrooms. Representatives from CREC observed in **Tom Raver's** and **Katelyn Moule's** classrooms. **Abby Hoffman** and **Katie Gelsomino** hosted visitors from Region 15 district.

**Sharon Riggs** registered 47 incoming students to date during Kindergarten Registration at Center School. **Aimee Boehm, Esther Boucher, Carol Connolly, and Jodi Smith** along with **Valerie Baigert, Jen Ryan** and **Laura Barnhart** hosted four playgroups in March to select typically developing children from the community to integrate into the Early Childhood Special Education Program. There was, as always, tremendous interest and support from the community. Selection choices are based on children who display good language and social skills, enrolling a range of 3 and 4 year old children to help balance the classes for the coming year.

Thanks to **Becky Wentworth** for leading the recognition of Read Across America, Dr. Seuss's Birthday on March 2. Daily announcements honored and recognized his stories. Around the school, classrooms decorated their door or created bulletin boards with themes from popular Dr. Seuss books. Guest readers were on hand to read Dr. Seuss books in classrooms.

**Trudie Luck Roberts** attended an Open Choice Breakfast meeting at the CREC in Hartford to review program progress and problems and consider next steps. **Valerie Baigert** and **Trudie Luck Roberts**

attended a Dine and Discuss event at the CREC to learn more about The Effects of Trauma on Academic and Behavioral Achievement in School. **Steve Bernard** and **Trudie Luck Roberts** attended the Fireman's Poster Contest Award Luncheon in honor of first place winner fourth grade student **Joe Weidl**.

**Becky Wentworth** and the Center School library media center hosted our annual Spring Bookfair. Students and their families visited as the fair was open during the school day and parent conference sessions. **Beth Fidanza** and many parent volunteers assisted in the organization, volunteer coordination and sales. Scholastic rewards and bonuses will be going toward the acquisition of library materials.

**Amy Borio, Cristine DiVenere, Sheila Byrne, Allison Morris, Deb Hillemeir, Pam Whiting, Becky Wentworth, and Trudie Luck Roberts** are participating in a book study around Leaders of Their own Learning by Ron Berger.

**Cristin Millen, Jessica Warner, Amy Borio, Sheila Byrne and Trudie Luck Roberts** attended the 88<sup>th</sup> Saturday Reunion at the Teachers College in New York City, a day of professional learning from a host of staff developers and project leaders.

In our ongoing efforts to recognize and thank staff members for their relentless and consistent assistance to students, staff, and parents at Windermere, a new award has been created: the *Prize Para Award*. Each month, Principal Welch recognizes a paraprofessional in the building with a certificate and lapel pin as a way to say "Thank you, for all you do!" Our recipient this past month was **Caryn Vale** who assists our kindergarten students. Our aides, paraprofessionals, and tutors are vital to the success which epitomizes Windermere School!

The *Tireless Teacher Awards* for the month of March were awarded to **Ms. Cheryl Warriner**, Grade 2 teacher and **Ms. Michelle Bashaw**, Grade 6 teacher. Although both work tirelessly with our PBIS program at Windermere, Ms. Warriner has contributed to the positive esprit in the building as well as provided academic ideas to her colleagues in the elementary wing. Ms. Bashaw brought NASA to our students through a Skype process and assisted with the important dialogue of standards-based assessment to colleagues and parents. Both teachers also go above and beyond their teaching expectations to promote positive staff morale and assist with grade level town meetings and faculty meetings as well.

The Patriots Pen essay contest, conducted nationwide, is a VFW sponsored youth essay competition that gives students an opportunity to write essays expressing their views on democracy. This year the topic was, "Why I Appreciate America's Veterans." Windermere had 9 students participate in the contest. Bruce Warkentin from the local VFW came to thank the students for their hard work and great ideas. He presented certificates to the students who wrote the top 3 essays from Windermere. Top Essay Certificates went to:

- 1<sup>st</sup> place – **Noah Madore**
- 2<sup>nd</sup> place – **Shreesai Katiki**
- 3<sup>rd</sup> place – **Madison Vale**

On Wednesday, March 18 the EHS School Counselors and EMS School Counselors met with each eighth grader individually to choose their ninth grade courses. Parents and students were asked to review the Course Selection Sheet as well as the EHS Program of Studies 2015-2016. Students were encouraged to have conversations with parents, teachers and our school guidance counselors with any questions or concerns they may have had.

Approximately 50 students from the Peer Mediators, College Power, and Positive Leader groups at EMS attended the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual PAWS (Peers Are Wonderful Support) Conference at Manchester Community College. On March 20 they attended presentations, and participated in workshops and activities with students from nearby towns, to develop positive decision making and leadership skills.

On Friday, March 27 our 'Music All Night' – the EMS band and chorus charity event - was a huge success! One hundred and twenty three musicians rehearsed, ate pizza, played dodge ball, watched a movie and then, at midnight, settled down for a night of "restful sleep." Students woke at 6:30 a.m. and enjoyed doughnuts and juice before heading home. Mrs. Angelica and Miss Pruden would like to extend a thank you to all our parent volunteers, and a very special thank you to the parents who stayed from midnight to 7:00 a.m. Our dedicated music students had a great time, and were very excited to announce that they raised \$791 for the Austin P. Tautkus Memorial Scholarship Fund.

On Tuesday, March 31 Ellington Middle School and the Ellington Community Scholarship Association (ECSA) hosted an evening for EMS students and their parents/guardians to join together and talk about college. Speakers Suzanne Hanlon (from the UConn Admissions Office) and Frank Resnick (Chief Financial Officer from the Jewish Community Center and previous CFO at Central CT State University) discussed the world of higher education from both a student and parent/guardian point of view. The goal of the evening was to help students and families talk about, explore, and plan for college.

Last fall 8<sup>th</sup> graders at Ellington Middle School participated in the annual Patriot Pen's Essay contest. This essay contest is organized by the VFW, and each year the organization rewards three middle school students prizes for writing winning essays. This year, the contest winners were **Elizabeth Gerlach** (1<sup>st</sup> place), **Dan Johnson** (2<sup>nd</sup> place), and **Grace Hurlburt** (3<sup>rd</sup> place). On Friday, March 6 students had the opportunity to visit with veteran Bruce Warkentin, and in the upcoming months will also interview local veterans as preparations are made for the town Memorial Day services.