



# THE DISCOVERY CENTER

A classroom without walls for a future without prejudice

## DISCOVERY CENTER ANNUAL REPORT July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010

### **Introduction:**

The Discovery Center continued to have strong student and school interest in FY 09 - 10 with 2,807 students from 27 different schools representing urban centers and suburban/rural communities in Central Connecticut participating in the residential portion of the program. There was also another 553 students who participated in the outreach program conducted in the schools that were lead by members of The Discovery Center Diversity Counselors for a total of 3,360 students participating in Discovery programs. Also, there was significant progress made on two of the most difficult and compelling challenges facing our society today – improving race relations & reducing the achievement gap in math, science, and language arts for participating students.

### **1. Describe organizational and/or programmatic changes achievements and setbacks; significant board and/or staff changes:**

The interest in The Discovery Center program continued to increase with strong school and student participation. For the spring 10 session 1,866 students attended the residential session setting an all time record for a spring session. The fall residential session had 941 students participate. There were 27 schools representing the urban centers of Hartford, Manchester, East Hartford, New Britain and the suburban/ rural communities of Glastonbury, Wethersfield, Franklin, Scotland, and East Windsor participating in the FY 09 -10 program.

Also, there has been interest expressed by new schools in the districts of Hartford, New Britain, Torrington & Manchester along with the suburban school districts of Granby to become involved in the program for FY 10-11.

In an effort to address the increasing student demand and interest for effective diversity and teambuilding exercises, The Discovery Center counselors conducted programs in the schools. This proved to be so successful that a special outreach effort and program was developed for FY 10 – 11 where a diversity team led by Todd Robinson will implement the programs in schools throughout the academic year. Additional staff will be hired and trained to teach the diversity and teambuilding exercises so not as to impact the quality of the residential component.

Evaluations of the academic and diversity/teambuilding exercises for FY 09 -10 indicated that 40% of the students treated others better and there was a 26% in student academic performance after participating in the program. There was also very positive teacher and principal evaluations of the academic curriculum and student behavior performance. The CT State Department of Education Bureau of Choice conducted a site visit in the spring 2010 session and cited the positive collaboration between the students from different schools as well as the diversity and enthusiasm of the staff.

The Discovery Center also made significant progress in building relationships between parents and students from two schools representing completely different racial and cultural backgrounds by

conducting a Language Arts Diversity Initiative in conjunction with the Hill Steady Museum which brought together over 160 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students for an intense language arts diversity program. The initiative included creating and writing poetry, exploring and responding to literature, communicating with others and reading and responding. Students also had a tour of the Hill Stead Museum and witnessed the Gee's Bend quilts and learned about their history. Over 120 parents from both schools attended a special reception and presentation of poetry and writing samples the students had created. A very special bonding occurred between the parents and the students.

There was also a special parent and student initiative sponsored by The Discovery Center and The Newman's Own Foundation which allowed students and parents from an urban center school attend the America East Women's Basketball Game at the University of Hartford. For most of the students and in this case some parents, it was the very first time they had been on a college campus. They enjoyed a wonderful evening and had an experience they would cherish for many months.

Another significant development was the addition of three individuals to the board of directors who will bring diverse opinions and backgrounds as well as fund raising capacity to The Discovery Center. A college president, a Hartford elementary school principal, and a financial analyst manager became board members in FY 09-10. The addition of these new board members increased the total number to 14 with nearly 45% of The Discovery Center's board representing diverse populations.

One of the most significant improvements was the revamping of the guidelines of the Advisory Council and the recruitment of new members. The Advisory Council has 16 members who support the mission and help provide expertise and guidance in legal and governance matters as well as help with fund raising. The Advisory Council had two meetings that focused on the importance of improving race relations and what steps that needs to be taken.

In a very difficult economy that has been described by many as the great recession, The Discovery Center continued to actively solicit funds and build a fund raising infrastructure. In the fall of 2009, The Discovery Center received a three year challenge grant of \$875,000 from The Newman's Own Foundation. The challenge grant provided vital funding to meet the increasing student interest and demand and also fund the building of a fund development infrastructure. The overall goal of the challenge grant is to make The Discovery Center sustainable for many years.

The first year of the challenge grant was concluded on June 30, 2010 with The Discovery Center meeting and surpassing the fund raising goal of \$1,025,000 and at the same time conserving expenses so the expense budget was below projection of \$925,000. Highlighting the fund raising effort for FY 09 -10 was The Discovery Center's first major event- the Multicultural Food and Wine Tasting held at the Hill Stead Museum. Over 200 hundred people attended the event and over \$25,000 was raised.

The Newman's Own Foundation challenge grant for the second year is more demanding and requires that The Discovery Center raise \$1,053,000 and keep expenses below \$931,000.

The most important and vital aspect of The Discovery Center has been the dedication and commitment of our talented staff. Over the course of the year, members of the staff continued to focus on executing the mission and serving the students. The Executive leadership of The Discovery Center remained the same and continued to be creative and motivated. The full time support staff remained the same with a 70% retention rate of camp counselors and teachers.

One of the most rewarding outcomes of the program was the creation of a book of poems written by 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. This collection of poems helped students understand who they are in regards to their ethnic and cultural background.

There was also a much improved effort for students to connect with each other during the school year through pen pal letters, field trips, joint educational projects and social gatherings. Students under the guidance of teachers and staff of The Discovery Center were truly making an effort to stay in touch and build relationships.

In an effort to improve public awareness and recognition, The Discovery Center with the assistance of a professional photographer developed and created a slide show highlighting the program and impact on changing student's attitudes and perceptions about race and differences. The slide show has been very well received and truly helped promote the mission and the effectiveness of the program.

The most significant challenge facing The Discovery Center is the dramatic negative change in the local, regional, and national economy. With job losses mounting every day, the downturn in corporate profits and the stock market, the economic conditions have had a negative effect on generating funds for all non profits. With the implementation of the Newman's Own Challenge grant, The Discovery Center has a strategic fund development plan that includes implementing an annual appeal, a corporate council, on line donations, recruiting board members with capacity and interest in fund raising along with enhancing grant writing, major gifts and events.

Another challenge has been the significant budget cuts every school participating in The Discovery Center has had to endure for the upcoming year. School budget cuts have included eliminating teacher positions, cutting budgets for substitutes, transportation, field trips and all other aspects. The Discovery Center has been consistently communicating with the schools and has been able to help address some of their budget cuts in order to maintain stability in our program. This will continue to be a major focus of FY 10 – 11.

As mentioned earlier, The Discovery Center continued to have a significant impact on two of the most difficult and compelling challenges facing our society today – improving race relations & reducing the achievement gap between urban and suburban schools in CT. These results were achieved in a very cost effective manner spending approximately \$311.00 per student

Overall, FY 09 -10 was a remarkable year with continued student & school interest and participation along with positive evaluations that proved that The Discovery Center was fulfilling its mission of shaping positive attitudes about race and differences and improving academic interest in math, science and language arts.

## **2. Explain how you measured the effectiveness of your activities against your goals and objectives; what you learned?**

A thorough evaluation of The Discovery Center program was undertaken for students, parents and teachers. The results indicated that student's attitudes and respect for individuals from different racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds improved. The analysis also showed that parents and teachers felt the program was very well run and provided an excellent experience for the students. Please see appendix for results.

### **A. List the original goals and objectives of the program, and tell how they were met during this reporting period.**

*Goal; Create a sequence of opportunities for positive interactions between individuals from diverse racial, cultural and personal backgrounds that foster potential long-term relationships.*

Throughout the year there were 27 parent information sessions held at different schools to provide vital information about the program and complete registration forms. Additionally parents were invited to attend 7 Open Houses at Camp Woodstock designed to bring parents together from the urban centers and

rural/ suburban communities to tour, meet the staff and become more familiar with the facilities and the program. During FY 2009 - 2010, 225 parents attended different Open Houses; setting an all time record. Along with participating in the residential program, students were involved in a myriad of other activities including reunions, pen pal relationships, emailing, various school field trips, and joint educational projects. A highlight of this effort was the Language Arts Diversity Initiative and the Parent Initiative featuring parents and students from different schools getting together for joint projects and receptions.

Parents and teachers from different schools also attended the Multicultural Food and Wine Tasting at the Hill Stead Museum. This opportunity provided a social opportunity for teachers and parents from schools with different racial and cultural backgrounds to get together and build relationships.

*Goal: Increase appreciation for individual and cultural diversity and prevent the development of prejudice and fear.*

Each student gained a greater appreciation for different cultures, languages, and racial backgrounds by participating in academic, diversity, teambuilding classes and activities that included writing poems together and personal journal writing. Students were also taught how to resolve conflicts and how to work together. Friendships were formed and positive attitudes were developed about race and differences. Student surveys and independent evaluations indicated that students treated others better and related better with each other.

*Goal; Engage participants in a powerful, transformative curriculum emphasizing multicultural education and experiential learning.*

A revised and upgraded academic curriculum in accordance with CT State Department of Educational standards was followed in FY 09-10 that focused on Howard Gardiner's educational theory of Multiple Intelligence. The Discovery Center teachers utilized the outdoor setting of Camp Woodstock for its experiential learning. Evaluation indicated that students truly improved their academic skills in math, science and language arts by 26% and there was a 40% improvement in the treatment of others after the students participated in Discovery.

*Goal: Establish and effective model program that can be expanded to benefit all Connecticut school children.*

The model, quality and cost effectiveness of the program has attracted interest from school districts throughout the state of Connecticut to consider adopting the program. Efforts continue to meet this increase in interest with a focus on securing increased state and public funding.

**C. What differences did The Discovery Center make in the community, for the population being served. Specify any statistics that you believe help to measure the effectiveness of your project.**

The major difference had been the increase in student participation from approximately 500 in 2002-2003 to over 3,000 in the FY 2009-2010. The Discovery Center has recruited key suburban schools previously reluctant to participate in a partnership with urban center schools. This increase in interest continues with a number of suburban and urban schools on the waiting list to join the program. A major gauge of the effectiveness of the program is the acceptance of the students and parents being served. The concept of teaching young people how to respect and honor others from different ethnic and racial backgrounds is gradually being accepted.

The Discovery Center had completed a very successful FY 2009 - 2010 calendar year culminating in a residential experience at Camp Woodstock in Woodstock, CT that has changed student's lives. The program has been very well received by the students, parents, and teachers as well as by state and local education officials.

A research project conducted by the University Of Hartford Center Of Social Research indicated that students truly learn how to respect and honor others from different cultural, racial and socio-economic backgrounds.

**D. Describe any unanticipated benefits or challenges encountered with this project.**

There has been one unanticipated benefit. The unanticipated benefit has been the endorsement and praise of the quality of the program by the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Capital Region Education Council. Both view the program as effectively reducing isolationism and building positive relationships between individuals from different racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, the parents from different schools are beginning to form relationships and continue contact throughout the year.

There has been an increase in interest in the program from corporations and individuals that was not present two years ago. This has been primarily due to the increase awareness of the mission of The Discovery Center and the recognition that steps need to be taken to improve race relations and academic interest in math, science and language arts to reduce the achievement gap.

**E. Describe how collaborative or cooperative efforts with individuals and organizations affected organizations.**

The evaluation process has produced a cooperative effort with the teachers, parents and students offering opinions on the program, curriculum, operations and staff. Teachers from different schools have developed relationships that have lead to collaborative efforts on the curriculum, discipline, field trips and educational projects. The end product has lead to enhancements that of the The Discovery Center academic and diversity/teambuilding program.

**F. Lessons Learned**

**A. What are the most important outcomes and “lessons learned from this project?”**

The primary lesson learned has been the increased emphasis schools are placing on the academic programs and the need for math, science and language arts in the curriculum. The Connecticut Mastery Test has produced a greater need to include a curriculum focus that will enhance student knowledge in these areas. Another key outcome has been the increasing emphasis schools are placing on teaching students to respect and honor others from different racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The Discovery Center is addressing these vital and key educational areas in a positive and proactive way.

**B. How will you use what you learned to inform future work?**

The Discovery Center utilized the results of the evaluations from FY 09 – 10 to refine the math, science and language arts curriculum for the 10 - 11 academic year, to hire a medical supervisor, to conduct more Open Houses for parents, teachers, students and administrators, to conduct Leadership workshops for a diverse world and to increase participation by expanding the program to other parts of the state of CT.

**Future Plans: What is your plan for the future?**

The future plans for The Discovery Center is to continue to improve the quality of the program and to conduct and independent attitudinal evaluations of the effectiveness of the program. There will also be an effort to increase the number of students who can participate in the program by conducting programs in the schools who could not attend the residential portion.

A major ongoing effort will be to expand revenue sources and increase the fund raising effort. The future plans include meeting and surpassing The Newman’s Own Foundation challenge grant.

**Conclusion:**

The Discovery Center has continued to grow and prosper while addressing some critical societal issues. The need is great and steps need to be taken to improve racial relations and academic skills in math, science and language arts in order to reduce the achievement gap. The Discovery Center under the direction and guidance of the Board of Directors will continue to make a difference in student lives and provide a laboratory for students to be taught how to work effectively with individuals from different racial, cultural and socio – economic backgrounds and become productive citizens in a diverse world.