



THE DISCOVERY CENTER

A classroom without walls for a future without prejudice

DISCOVERY CENTER SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT July 1 –December 31, 2009

1. Describe organizational and/or programmatic achievement and setbacks: significant board and/or staff changes.

The Discovery Center has had a very successful start for the first six months -July 1-December 31, 2009 of FY09/10. Positive results were gained in student participation levels, teacher and parent feedback, diversity/teambuilding, math, science, and language arts classes, board changes, as well as fundraising.

For the fall 2009 session, 1,043 students participated in the residential program at Camp Woodstock with another 153 students participating in Discovery Center programs conducted at various schools. The following CT schools participated: East Windsor Middle-East Windsor, O'Connell Elementary-East Hartford, Eastbury, Naubuc, and Nayaug Schools from Glastonbury, Batchelder, Mary Hooker, Rawson, and Sanchez Schools from Hartford, Bennet Academy, Highland Park, and Verplanck Schools from Manchester, Smith Elementary from New Britain, and Scotland Elementary from Scotland.

The leadership of the Discovery Center remains strong with Allan Wilson as the Executive Director. He brings to the program his experience and success in education, camp programming, fund raising, public relations and management. Returning staff included: Sharon Roberts as Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Carolina Mimo' as Director of School and Parent Relations, Todd Robinson as Residential Program Director, April Beattie as Assistant Director of Residential Programs, Lead Science Teacher-Melany Gronski, and Lead Math Teacher Terri Boshka. Also 10 experienced activities counselors, two additional teachers, and a medical supervisor were employed to round out the camp program staff.

The Discovery Center curriculum follows Howard Gardner's multi intelligence theory that emphasizes a hands on learning approach. Using this approach as well as following State of CT Department of Education academic strands for math, science and language arts provides an excellent learning environment for students. Students truly enjoyed learning and as a result performed better on KWL-Academic Evaluations. Discovery's curriculum is also designed in coordination with participating schools to help enhance and meet CT Mastery Test objectives in math, science and language arts. Schools that participated in Discovery showed improved scores on CMTs.

The Discovery Center Board of Directors demonstrated significant growth and development this past year. Bob Haggett was elected board chair in June after serving as board treasurer since 2002. Bob brings a long time commitment to the program and its mission, as well a strong background in finance which will help us to achieve stability and direction as a small non-profit in the years to come. Amy Hines completed her three years as board chair and was a significant factor in the creation and development of Discovery. Amy served on the board from 2002-2009 and was board chair from 06-09. She was a great asset to the program and

helped The Discovery Center develop and grow from its infancy to the present day's success. She supported the upgrade of the diversity and teambuilding exercises, the inclusion of the math, science and language arts curriculum and was instrumental in increasing student participation from approximately 890 students per year in 05-06 to over 3,000 in 2009. Jo-Ann Price, one of the original members of the board resigned in 09 due to personal reasons. Jo-Ann was instrumental in helping to develop the diversity and teambuilding program as well as with raising funds. Four new board members joined Discovery in 2009 that helped improve the racial and cultural representation to over 50% minority membership. Each member brings their own expertise that will enhance and help build the Discovery Center for the future. These new board members are: Diane Kearney-Director of Adult Education; Manchester Public Schools, Gerald Martin-Principal, Rawson School; Hartford, Elsa Chin-Senior Financial Analyst; Hartford Financial Services Group and Lynn Pasquerrella- Provost at the University of Hartford. As of July 1, 2010, Lynn Pasquerrella will become the President of Mount Holyoke College.

Overall, The Discovery Center had very positive growth and made great impact on reducing student isolationism, shaping positive attitudes about race and differences, and improving academic skills in math, science and language arts.

2. Explain how you measured the effectiveness of your activities against your goals and objectives: what you learned

An end of the year evaluation of The Discovery Center was undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the program. The evaluation approach included pre and post student surveys and written comments, teacher surveys and observations, as well as parent surveys. The 2009 analysis of the program indicated that student's attitudes and respect for individuals from different racial, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds improved. Over 90% of students thought it was important to meet other students that were different than themselves and would treat others better.

The analysis also indicated that parents and teachers felt the program was very well run and provided an excellent experience for the students. Also, the 2009 Discovery Academic Evaluations indicated that students improved their skills in math, science, and language arts by 25%.

A. List the original goals and objectives of the program, and tell how they were met during this reporting period. Please include specific outcomes included in your report.

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

In preparation for the fall 2009 session, The Discovery Center staff held meetings that involved parents, teachers and administrators from participating schools. Along with participating in the residential program, each student was involved in a multitude of activities including pen pal partnerships, and email writing to students from their sister schools, various field trips, joint educational projects and classroom activities.

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, racial backgrounds by participating in the academic theme projects, various joint activities and living together in supervised residential facilities. The students also resolved a real life conflict and developed strategies to deal with this problem in their classes, schools, homes and communities.

Goal: Engage participants in a powerful, transformative curriculum emphasizing multicultural education and experiential learning that improves math, science and language arts skills

The curriculum was revised for the fall 09 program to meet State of CT Department of Education Standards and CMT objectives as well as upgraded to better utilize the outdoor setting for experiential learning. The students participated in learning laboratories that centered on various topics including diversity, the environment, language, poetry, art, math and science. Academic /KWL evaluations indicated that students improved their knowledge of math, science and language arts by 25%.

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

The Discovery Center had 2 new school districts with the inclusion of the Glastonbury and New Britain School Districts as well as adding new schools from Hartford, East Hartford, and Manchester in 2009. The goal of the program for the next two years is to enhance and improve the quality of the diversity and teambuilding exercises as well as the math, science and language arts curriculum. The Discovery Center currently has a waiting list of schools interested in becoming involved. In response to this waiting list, Discovery has developed a leadership workshop program for students and teachers that brings The Discovery Center program into the schools for a three or six hour workshop.

B. Variance from original project plans often occurs. In what ways did the actual project vary from your initial plans? Describe how and why?

A project variance that occurred during the fall 09 session was the postponement of some student's participation. The last two weeks of the fall session was postponed to the spring 2010 session due to the H1N1 outbreak and the concern for the health of the students. 1043 students participated in the residential program at Camp Woodstock in the fall with another 153 students participating in Discovery Center programs conducted at different schools

There continues to be a steady increase in interest and demand for students and schools to participate in the program. The projection for student participation for FY 09-10 is approximately 3,000 students. In an effort to satisfy the increase in student participation and to sustain The Discovery Center for many years to come, the Board of Directors approved and implemented a Strategic Fund Development and Sustainability fund raising effort to raise \$1,025,000.

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 fall 2009 program was very well received by the schools, teachers, parents and more importantly the 1,043 – 4th, 5th and 6th graders who improved their level of appreciation and respect for others while improving their academic skills by 25%. The Discovery Center program also increased the number of schools that conducted joint field trips and educational projects. The addition of 2 new school districts Glastonbury and New Britain occurred in 09 as well as having additional schools from Hartford, East Hartford, and Manchester greatly increased the impact Discovery had on the students in Greater Hartford, CT.

The Discovery Center also expanded the Leadership Workshop component of the program in 09. Before the start of the fall 09 college academic schedule, Discovery staff conducted an intense Leadership Workshop for the Trinity College's Office of Multicultural Affairs P.R.I.DE. Leaders at Camp Woodstock for three days and two nights. Nearly 25 Trinity College students from different racial and cultural backgrounds participated in diversity and teambuilding exercises designed to teach them how to build respect, appreciation and relationships among students. The program was very well received with the potential for more Leadership Workshops for college students to be expanded. Future Leadership Workshops will also be conducted for 4th-12th grade students and teachers.

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

The biggest unanticipated challenge encountered in 2009 was to meet the increased interest and demand for participation of students and schools in our program. This was especially difficult this year due to the current economic decline in our country. Most of our funding comes from private foundations, corporations, and individuals along with 20 % from state funds. It took a lot of effort to meet these financial demands through increased as well as creative fundraising efforts since many loyal funders declined, decreased or postponed funding this year. As mentioned earlier a strategic fund development plan was also implemented.

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

Evaluations from teachers and parents have lead to our improved curriculum that lead to improvement in student’s academic achievement. These collaborative evaluations and meetings have helped build stronger partnerships between The Discovery Center and each school. Collaborative efforts with parents included parent meetings, Open Houses, and socials that have impacted these families and communities.

The Discovery Center also partnered with The University of Hartford Center for Social Research to develop an evaluation instrument that determines the effectiveness of the program in shaping positive attitudes about race and differences. This evaluation tool will be utilized by Discovery in our on-going effort to analyze and improve the program. An executive summary by the University of Hartford’s Center for Social Research found that the Discovery Center program model was well defined, based on sound theory, and implemented well.

F. Lessons Learned

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

A primary lesson learned has been the increased emphasis schools are placing on academic programs that meet the need for math, science and language arts objectives in the curriculum. The Connecticut Mastery Test has produced a greater need to include a curriculum focus that will enhance and improve student knowledge in these areas. Another lesson learned this year is that there is an ever increasing need to expand our program and we must continue to be creative in our fundraising efforts in these uncertain financial times.

Future Plans

What is your plan for the future?

The plans for the future include refinement of the diversity/team-building exercises as well as enhancement of the curriculum to meet CMT objectives in math, science and language arts. We plan on expanding the Leadership Workshops for students, teachers, administrators, parents and other members of the community.

The Discovery Center is also continuing to expand and improve its evaluation process by partnering with the University of Hartford’s Center for Social Research to refine the evaluation tool to measure the program’s longer-term effectiveness at changing attitudes.

Discovery’s future plans also include the recruitment of new board members as well as the enhancement of the advisory council and the creation of a corporate council.

Like all non-profits, The Discovery Center was faced with raising funds in the most difficult economic time since the depression. This challenge was addressed directly with the board of directors designing and approving a three year Strategic Fund Development and Sustainability Plan. The Strategic Plan encompasses building a fund raising infrastructure that included soliciting major gifts, an annual appeal, on-

line donations, events and the enhancement of corporate and foundation giving. The Discovery Center did receive a challenge grant from the Newman's Own Foundation to start the fund raising effort and as of December 31, 2009 over \$700,000 had been raised towards the \$1,025,000 goal.