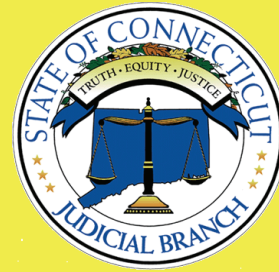


# CSSD Chronicle

State of Connecticut Judicial Branch  
Court Support Services Division  
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## Family Support Centers throughout Connecticut Celebrate Youth Accomplishments at “Back to School” Rallies



There were glasses of orange juice, cups of coffee, and plates piled high with bacon, eggs, and pancakes as parents, community members, CSSD representatives, and program staff congratulated more than a dozen court-involved youth at a “Back to School” awards breakfast at the Bridgeport Holiday Inn. The event, held on August 26th, was sponsored by the local Family Service Center (FSC), Connecticut Renaissance, to celebrate the students’ completion of the first *Summer Youth Employment Program*.

**Program for success**—The *FSC Summer Youth Employment Program* was designed to

assist at-risk 14- to 17-year-old students with a history of school delinquency, non-violent disruptive class behavior, or other school issues, by providing them with structure, consistency, skill development, school credit recovery, and incentives for success. During the 8-week summer program, activities included career exploration, how to search for jobs, resume writing, appropriate work attire, and interview skills. Local businesses provided job shadowing opportunities for students and, for some, actual “hands on” work experience.

The rally in Bridgeport was just one of many celebrations held to mark the end of the FSC summer programs in Hartford, Middletown, New Britain, New Haven, Waterbury, and Waterford. Students at all the FSC sites received local recognition for their achievements and were provided with a school backpack filled with tools for success: a binder, scientific calculator, homework planner, notebooks, college-ruled paper, mechanical pencils and pens, and gift cards to purchase school uniforms or back-to-school clothing.

An emphasis on community service was a key component to the students’ summer learning experience, exposing them to the idea of

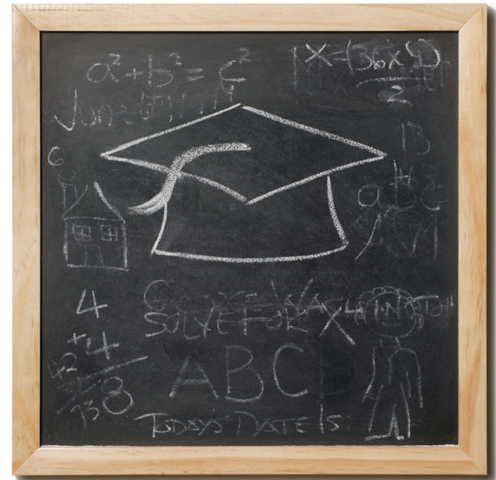
civic responsibility as citizens of their town or city. For example, the Hartford FSC students volunteered at the MANNA Community Meals on Church Street; in New Britain, students did volunteer work at the Friendship Service Center, a local soup kitchen that provides 114,000 each year to residents in need. New Haven students volunteered at the Ronald McDonald House, a place where non-local families of hospitalized children can find food, lodging, and support at little to no cost.

**Learning can be fun!**—But it wasn’t “all work and no play” at the FSC summer program sites. Each FSC provided activities for the students to enjoy that also provided opportunities for them to learn pro-social skills. For example, there was a scavenger hunt at Mystic Aquarium, and tours of local Connecticut attractions such as the State Capitol in Hartford, the New Britain Youth Museum and New Britain’s Art Museum, and a trip to the Peabody Museum in New Haven. Out-of-state activities by some sites included a trip to the Roger Williams Zoo in Providence, Rhode Island, Boston University in Massachusetts, and the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York.

**What students had to say**—For one young woman in Bridgeport, being part of the summer program meant “getting up early when I wanted to sleep in. I’m NOT a morning person,” she said, but her mother, who was also at the breakfast, remarked that despite her daughter’s initial reluctance to attend, her child always had a lot of positive things to talk about when she returned home. “They kept her busy,” said the girl’s mom, “and she stopped complaining after the first week.” Another student recalled his initial reaction when he was told he would be attending the program. “I thought it was going

to be...well, HORRIBLE,” he said, loudly and dramatically. “But, it wasn’t.” Several of his friends at the breakfast table chuckled at his remark, and agreed with him about their own first reactions, but they also talked about the positive skills they learned over the summer that will help them with attendance, study habits, and other issues when they return to their respective school districts. “School is like a job, and I gotta get it right,” said another young man. “Like, when I get a job, I have to get to work on time, but most of all, I need to show up if I want to get paid!” The teen-aged boys once again devolved into laughter and began talking about other things, but one of them stopped long enough to comment that he had made the connection—taking school seriously now, and improving his attendance and grades, will make it easier to start a career after graduation.

**Other remarks and comments**—CSSD Executive Director Bill Carbone attended the Bridgeport FSC ceremony and praised everyone involved—including parents—who made the eight week program a success. Carbone spoke to the students directly, stressing the importance of a high school—and college—education, and suggested that their success within the summer program also benefitted others. “Your friends, and other kids, will look to you as role models when you go back to school,” he said. Carbone also noted that connecting children and families with needed services, like the *Summer Youth Employment Program*, helps to make neighborhoods a little safer by keeping youth connected with their schools, and out of trouble. “When you change one person, you change a family for the better, as well as their local community.”



At the end of the summer program, CSSD worked with the FSCs to distribute a survey to students and their parents on the effectiveness of the *Summer Youth Employment Program*. There were 92 students who started the program; 90 of them made it to completion. Along with demographic information, a dozen questions were asked on the survey about the appropriateness of activities, and if positive changes were experienced by the students. Student responses showed that:

- 81% of them noticed at least an occasional change in their behavior toward school, and 62% noted that these behavioral changes occurred frequently or always.
- 72% agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them learn new skills to improve their lives.

Among the parents who were surveyed:

- 72% either agreed or strongly agreed that the educational component of the program was helpful in preparing their children for the appropriate grade level.
- 80% either agreed or strongly agreed that their child learned new skills to help them for the rest of their academic career.

**Bittersweet endings**—At the close of Bridgeport’s breakfast celebration, students gathered for a group photo, and then collected their certificates and backpacks to go home. There were hugs and good-byes among the kids, their families, and staff, and many seemed reluctant to leave to go home. CSSD Court Planners Sonia Contreras and Erica Nowakowski, who worked intensely with the FSCs on the summer program, said the same scene played out in other parts of the state at each program’s ending ceremonies. Tina Marino, Educational Consultant at the New Britain FSC echoed the bond created between the students in an e-mail about her site’s program. “They really are a group of extraordinary young people from diverse backgrounds who not only obtained a wealth of knowledge, but taught us as well. My fondest memories were watching them work together and build positive relationships with one another. I look forward to doing it all again next year!”

For more information on the *Summer Youth Employment Program*, please contact  
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*The CSSD Chronicle is a regular publication of information and news about the Court Support Services Division. Questions or comments on this edition, or suggestions for future articles, can be directed to [Linda.Grzeika@jud.ct.gov](mailto:Linda.Grzeika@jud.ct.gov)*