

# The **PROGRESS** Report

*A Newsletter for the SEI Community*

## Navigating Students Toward Focused Futures



"What do you want to be when you grow up?" Remember being asked that question all the time when you were in elementary school? Most of us answered with pretty standard replies, like teacher, doctor, lawyer, or fireman. The truth is, most of us never go into the profession we declared at the mere age of 6 or 8, and one reason for this is that young children have a very limited knowledge base of career options at that age.

But for high schoolers, it's a different story. For them, the list of career paths is virtually endless, and the High Road Schools & Academies of Southern Maryland and Washington, DC, want to do all they can to help our students navigate this vast pool of possibilities.

Enter **Kuder Navigator** ([www.kudernavigator.com](http://www.kudernavigator.com)), an online tool High Road has recently adopted to assist teenagers with the daunting task of making decisions that will impact them throughout adulthood. Starting with the 2014–2015 school year, all of our schools in Prince George's County, Charles County, and DC began using the site to provide guidance, insights, and resources intended to shape and steer students' future career aspirations.

This web-based education and career planning program serves as a one-stop shop for students looking to zero in on postsecondary schooling options, available majors, and the career choices most suitable to their individual skills, strengths, and interests. The site's numerous components include career preparation materials and inventories.

Kevin Mattison, Transition Coordinator of the High Road Upper School in Beltsville, MD, is very pleased with how the early implementation of Kuder Navigator is going: "Our students like that everything is on one website. They find it easy to use and, as a result, have been more energized to prepare for their futures." As the year progresses, students across our numerous campuses in the Metro area will have an increasing amount of college and career preparation resources right at their fingertips.

**kuder navigator**

*Building Student Confidence  
and Competence  
Through Personalized Academic  
and Behavioral Interventions*



### What's Inside:

- College & Career Week at Perryville, MD
- Clayton Academy's Math Whizzes
- New School Library in Hartford, CT
- Transition Room at Rivers Bend
- Scottsdale's Radio Stars!
- National Day of Service in DC



# Scottsdale Students on the Radio!



KFNX 1100 AM, an independent talk radio station based out of Phoenix, AZ, hosts a bi-monthly radio show called *The Young Reporters* that allows at-risk youth and students with challenges to develop their confidence and communication skills by interviewing local business leaders and prominent citizens to prepare segments for the show. In fall 2014, the Sierra Academy of Scottsdale participated in the program for the first time, as yet another means to expand its students' horizons and enhance their social skills.

Three Sierra students took part in this community-based learning project—middle schooler Coltin, sophomore Ali, and senior Allison—all of whom have had words used against them in hurtful ways. That's why they were all excited to be part of this experience: to turn words into an empowering vehicle to overcome social barriers and improve self-esteem.

It all started when program founder and host Bob Fishman invited Sierra Academy students to be interviewers on his show. Fishman, whose background is in speech pathology, works with his guest students before they conduct their interviews to develop their conversational skills and to pinpoint areas needing improvement, like paying more attention to listening carefully to a speaker than to what they themselves would say next. After his initial training session at the school, a Sierra Academy staff member assumed the role of the studio guest so that students could continue to practice and improve before the big day.

When that day arrived last September, the small group of students and their language arts teacher, Heather Dunphy, traveled to the radio station to meet with Fishman in the prep room. There, he coached them on the importance of the journalistic questions—who, what, when, where, and why—and taught them about taking notes to make interviews more engaging. For this particular segment, the interviewees included a man who runs several art schools, a professional video designer in the process of making a documentary, and a home builder who uses art as a means to get youth involved in science and math. As Ms. Dunphy notes, "Another benefit of this show is that it allows students to see what careers are out in the community."

When taping actually began, everything went wonderfully. "I loved how this entire experience gave meaning to what I teach in the classroom," says Ms. Dunphy. "The students paid such close attention to Bob and the guests' words because there was a purpose to it all, not just an assignment. They took turns, waited for cues, and spoke clearly when they had a question or comment. I saw my students in a new light that day."

The students themselves were equally impressed. At the start, Coltin says he had difficulty remembering things, but he became more confident as the two-hour show progressed. "Coltin made some amazing connections between the guests," observes Ms. Dunphy. "He remembered what one guest said and then tied it into another guest's experience." Fishman noted his perceptiveness as well: "I've been doing this for many years, and I can spot a talented reporter when I see one. Coltin has what it takes."

Ali was nervous at first. "But afterward, I felt really good. I like knowing that many people will hear my voice and it made me feel more confident." She wants to go back to the studio, but next time as a guest with her mother to discuss how to sell her artwork to raise money for her native Ukraine.

Allison, too, was nervous before the show started. But ultimately, "I feel so good that I met my goals and that I also set a good example for my school. If people know that I achieved my goals, they can be inspired to achieve theirs."

"Self-esteem isn't something teachers can give to children," states Ms. Dunphy. "What we do at the Sierra Academy is provide students with tools to assist them in learning to deal with life's problems and with opportunities to develop new skills. In my experience, students build self-esteem by doing things that are hard for them."

And it was hard for these students to meet total strangers in an unfamiliar setting, to know that thousands of unseen listeners might hear them. But they broke through their fear of social interaction and performed beautifully, thanks to community mentors like Bob Fishman who are willing to share their time and experience with kids with special needs so they can ultimately find their voice, express their individuality, and make a positive difference in their community.



Allison, Ali, and Coltin learn about extemporaneous speaking from radio show host Bob Fishman.



# Serving Our Community



To commemorate the **National Day of Service** on September 11, the High Road Academy and the High Road Upper School of Washington, DC, partnered with two esteemed and community-minded organizations—The Home Depot and College Summit—for a "Day of Beautification" on campus. To make the best use of time with our community partners, certain areas were earmarked for beautification, including the portion of the High Road building's grounds that runs adjacent to a pedestrian and bike path. Working alongside Home Depot volunteers, our students cleared away overgrown vegetation, built planter boxes, stripped and painted benches, and covered graffiti.

This effort came about as a result of Crysta Norris, Team Depot District Captain for the Washington Metropolitan Area, attending our Career Fair last spring, in March 2014. At that time, she asked if High Road would be interested in partnering with the Home Depot on a beautification project for us. Obviously, we jumped at the chance. Ms. Norris has been working at the Home Depot for 10 years, involved in the company's community outreach initiatives. As she explains, "This is an opportunity to give back to the community and enrich the communities where we have stores."

To make this project possible, we needed assistance applying for a grant, so we reached out to the nonprofit organization College Summit, with whom we've been collaborating for a decade. College Summit has been integral to High Road's efforts to get our students who want to go to college into college, so we couldn't think of a more committed or generous partner in putting our teenagers to work in such a productive way to improve our school environment. Merci Thomas, Community Engagement Coordinator for the National Capitol Region of College Summit, worked with us to make this project happen, helping us to complete and present the paperwork for the \$2,500 grant to the Home Depot needed to purchase such supplies as paint, rollers, brushes, soil, plants, wood, and a variety of garden tools. When asked about College Summit's role in the project, Ms. Thomas offered, "I was really excited to see the students work hard alongside the Home Depot volunteers; it was great to see how a project comes together in the community and schools that we serve."

Our students ended up doing a fantastic job. Although it was a hot day, all the volunteers worked diligently to get the job done. Marquis Osborne, a sophomore at the High Road Academy, says, "It was a good experience because it gave me a way to think about different jobs I would like to do. I am now interested in working as a painter." Michael Rogers, a freshman at the High Road Upper School, was asked what he liked most about the project. "I liked painting the benches and planting," he answered. "It also got me thinking about working in construction."

In the end, High Road's National Day of Service project was a three-way success: Our students fulfilled community service hours while improving their own community; they gained hands-on work experience in essential industries; and they gained insight into several potential career paths in their future. As they helped their community, they helped themselves.



Working as a team with Home Depot volunteers, our students took pride in both beautifying their campus and contributing to their neighborhood community.



Senior James Cooper stayed busy all day, first clearing away some unruly ground cover and then stripping a bench.



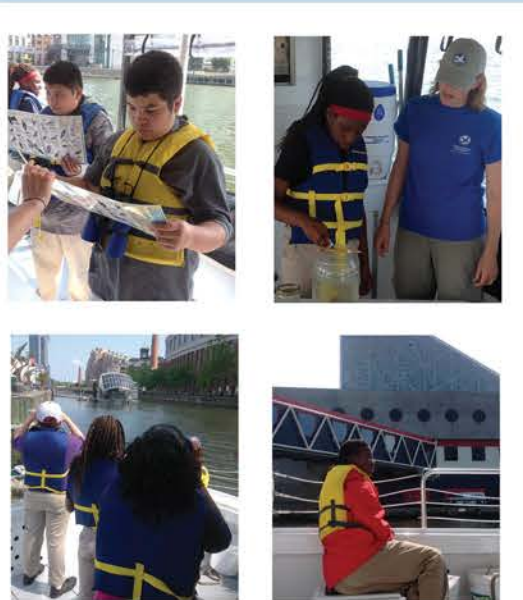
# Field Learning



SESI schools are always looking for ways to teach our students about the world at large, especially when we can do so outside the classroom. A particularly notable field trip happened last semester, when the High Road Academy at Annapolis Middle School visited the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Baltimore Harbor Program. The students enjoyed an entire day on the 46-foot workboat *Snow Goose*, with the Port of Baltimore and the Patapsco River serving as their classroom for the day.

After departing from the Baltimore Aquarium dock, the students started off their morning by labeling a large map of the Chesapeake Bay. One of the sights along the way was the newly constructed Baltimore Harbor Water Wheel Trash Interceptor, of special interest to the students because they had previously watched news broadcasts introducing this mechanism that collects debris from Jones Falls to the Baltimore community. Out in the harbor, they explored the unique interrelationships between the estuary and the bay's most demanding users of the watershed; they learned about oyster dredging, fish trawling, and watershed geography; and they identified local waterfowl, fish, crabs, and other organisms that share the Patapsco River. They also had the opportunity to use water-quality testing equipment to generate data on the dissolved oxygen and salinity of the river.

According to sixth grader Rianna, "The field trip was fun because we got to go with our teachers and drive the boat." Heriberto, another sixth grader, acknowledged that his favorite part of the trip was "looking for different kinds of birds." At the conclusion of the trip, the students had a much better understanding of the Chesapeake Bay's ecosystem and their ability to influence it. Since then, we keep hearing: "When are we going back?"



Students on the field trip—including (clockwise) Fabio, Heriberto, Rianna, Qwmain, Nijay, and Alexi—relished their school day at sea.

# Strong Bodies, Strong Minds



**Sierra Strong** is the Sierra Academy of San Diego's morning workout program, aimed at helping students regulate their sensory systems and preparing them for their highest level of learning for the rest of the day. Sierra has adopted a "Strong Bodies Equals Strong Minds" philosophy, meaning that academy students sit strong, stand strong, and walk strong. Each morning, the 30-minute rotation designed by the school's occupational and physical therapist incorporates a sensory-based activity according to the following weekly schedule:

- Monday: Marathon Tracking Program
- Tuesday: Yoga Class
- Wednesday: Fine & Gross Motor Activities
- Thursday: Station Circuit Training
- Friday: Team-Building & Blacktop Games



Last year, Marathon Mondays were added to the routine, in collaboration with Achilles Kids, a running/walking program for students with disabilities based out of New York. With the goal of promoting stronger and healthier children, distance covered each Monday is tracked and submitted to Achilles Kids. Each student is given the challenge of completing a virtual marathon over the course of the school year, and when they meet that challenge, the student receives a free pair of running shoes! The program has been very rewarding, with more than 20 students earning their very own shoes last year.

Curt Edwards was extremely proud to be the first student at the school to complete the marathon challenge, even writing an essay called "Success with Marathon Mondays." In it, he shared his commitment to jog two miles over 30 minutes each Monday, with his favorite part of the activity being the time spent outdoors. Now he wears his "very comfortable" brand-new sneakers and inspires his fellow schoolmates to follow in his footsteps!

# The Birth of a School Library



*Good Night Moon. Green Eggs and Ham. Where the Wild Things Are. The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.* Everyone can name their favorite childhood book, and seeing the cover of a book from our early years can bring on a surge of sentimental joy as we travel back in time. Books have the power to transport us to virtually anywhere in the universe—to adventures far and wide, to fantastical places across vast expanses of the imagination.

For children who struggle with reading, though, the joy of these adventures can disappear. Rather than feeling happy anticipation and excitement when opening a book, many of them instead feel embarrassment, frustration, anger. They may avoid reading at all costs. Seeing children who hate to read is a heartbreaking experience, and any teacher who has worked in a school for children with significant reading difficulties has witnessed this avoidance—sometimes even fear—of books firsthand.

Not wanting her students to miss out on the joys of reading for pleasure, Deana Gagliardi, LCSW, Education Director of the High Road School of Hartford: Primary/Middle School (CT), took it upon herself to find a way to bring this joy to her school site. Given the size of the school, a large library wasn't a standard part of the program or the program budget, so Ms. Gagliardi started small—she sent out an email to family and friends, asking for any donations of old books they might be able to dig out of the attic. She expected a few boxes to trickle in, maybe a bookshelf or two. But what actually arrived was the stuff out of fairytales!

"I was humbled and speechless over the generosity of the community in helping us to establish a library for our students," Ms. Gagliardi shares. "We received so many books that we had to push back the progress of our library to buy more shelves and organize the piles and boxes of books that were donated." Special thanks go to the hospice team at Masonicare, Girl Scout Troop 65252, retired special education teacher Lucille Furey, the UConn Dodd Center, and a host of individual families and High Road students, who all contributed greatly to the effort. The Girl Scouts invested so much time and effort into their book drive for the school that they earned a Bronze Award for their service to the community!



All this just from the Girl Scouts' book drive!



Starting to sort through the hundreds of books donated by generous benefactors.

Special thanks are also due to Ben Velasquez for painting the library; to the staff and students of the High Road School of Hartford: High School for helping to build the bookshelves; and to beloved teacher Melinda Dombrowski for volunteering hours over her summer vacation to organize all the books and prepare for the library's opening for the 2014–2015 school year.

Now the High Road School has a whole room full of bookshelves overflowing with stories to take students away on fabulous adventures. The room is also furnished with beanbag chairs, a cozy couch, and a newly installed Panaboard. It offers a comfortable place for students to select books of their choice to read during free time, as well as an inviting space in which to socialize with the students from the High Road School of Wallingford: Primary/Middle School when they come to visit on Fun Wednesdays.

Students Wilfredo and Johnny speak for the whole school when they praise the plentiful contents and quietude the library affords. "There are books for us to read if we need a break," Johnny says. "We can read books for being smarter."



Jermaine and Nyzaiah enjoy their quiet reading time, lounging in the new library room.

## Meet Hazel



There's no doubt that children's exposure to animals—even outside their natural habitats—allows them to make positive and enriching connections to the wider world. At the High Road Primary & Middle School of Washington, DC, this connection has come in the form of Hazel the gerbil, a classroom pet that has touched each and every student who has met her, nibbling her way into their hearts one at a time.

The lessons students are learning from Hazel are multifold and meaningful. As they observe and care for Hazel, it instills a sense of responsibility and respect for life, which transitions to increased sensitivity to and awareness of the feelings and needs of others. The students are also learning that no living thing wants to be treated roughly—if they want to be liked and trusted by an animal, they need to treat it carefully and kindly. Students work together on a daily basis to complete their assigned chores for Hazel, which is promoting cohesion and building teamwork.

Classroom teacher Yvonne Davis-Hambrick, M.Ed., who oversees all student interaction with the gerbil, shares that Hazel's presence has lessened tensions in her classroom and is also improving attendance, since students are eager to come to school to participate in Hazel's care. Given how wonderfully the students have been displaying their nurturing skills, she'd like to add another gerbil and maybe a fish or two to her classroom environment. Students and pets—a winning combination!



Lavelle Harris gently cradles Hazel in his hands, glad to be part of her classroom caretaking team.

## Clayton Students Place in Top 100

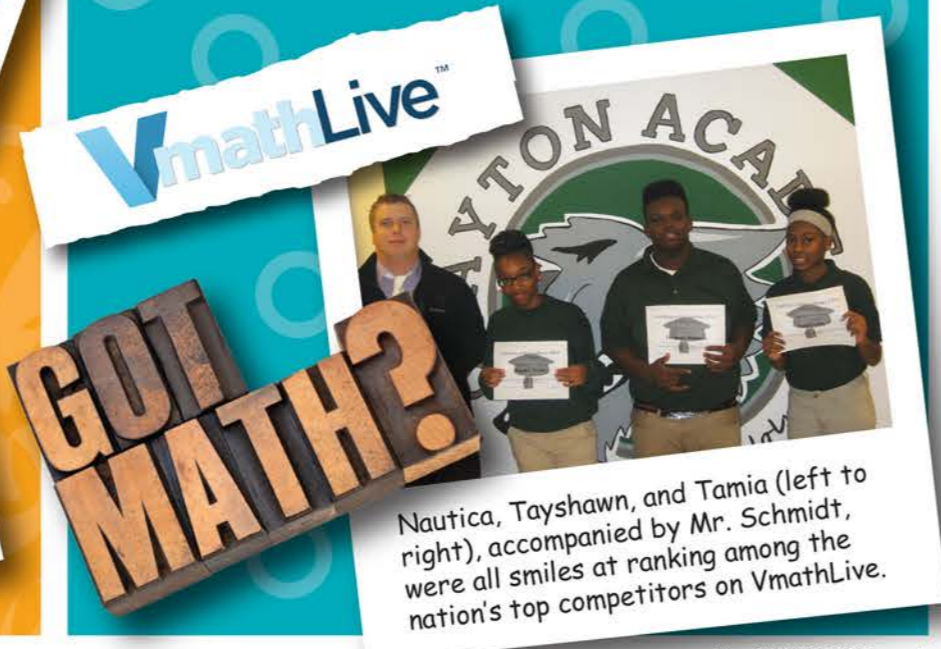


Three middle school students from the Clayton Academy in Pittsburgh, PA, have been recognized for reaching the ranks of the Top 100 participants nationwide in VmathLive™. A product of Voyager Sopris Learning, VmathLive is a results-driven, research-based intervention for students in grades 2–8 that delivers modular-based instruction. The content was just added to Clayton's curriculum this fall, so the fact that three of our students—eighth graders Nautica Archie and Tayshawn Robinson (who ranked 69th and 98th, respectively) and seventh grader Tamia Little (75th)—made the National Leader Board in their first week of engagement proves not only that the math program seems to be a hit on campus, but that effort and hard work pay off in exciting ways!



Students interacting with this computer-based program have already shown tremendous growth in skill areas. Middle school teacher Mr. Schmidt, the faculty member responsible for overseeing use of the program at Clayton, has noticed a marked difference in his students. "Vmath enables kids to compete and stand out while incorporating the lessons brought by the website. Kids [are] excited to continue learning even out of school in order to earn a high rank," states Mr. Schmidt. The entire middle school is competing in the program, which Nautica says is fun because "it gives me extra math practice, and I like to beat the other kids!"

Each of the three Top 100 students was presented with a Certificate of Extraordinary Effort in VmathLive, followed by a Friday-afternoon celebration with their fellow students who placed in Clayton's own Top 10. The academy looks forward to continued use of the program that empowers students to master math content at their own pace in a motivating online environment. "By the end of the first week of use," Mr. Schmidt reports, "it was students teaching other students, which only concentered their mastery of the material even more."



Nautica, Tayshawn, and Tamia (left to right), accompanied by Mr. Schmidt, were all smiles at ranking among the nation's top competitors on VmathLive.

## Yard Sale Helps School Sail



"Mrs. Kennedy, can we have a yard sale for our school?" That's how it all started last semester, with high schooler Kayla Steward proposing a simple but wonderful idea to High Road School of Bloomington (IL) Director Vicki Kennedy, who quickly got on board.

Right off the bat, several goals were set for the yard sale. First, to promote awareness of the school in its surrounding community. Second, to provide the students with real-life experience that would give them opportunities to practice their academic and social skills; specifically, the students would participate in the sales—counting money and making change—as they interacted with the variety of people who would attend. Third, the school was excited at the prospect of raising a few extra dollars to put toward games and materials for "Positive Peer Interaction Fridays."

It was important to the event planners to make this a family affair, so students' families were heartily encouraged to volunteer time or goods. The Kelley family in particular—Tina and Mike—helped tremendously throughout the day from start to finish, as well as donating many items. Here's what they had to say about the experience: "Assisting with High Road's summer garage sale was a great opportunity for parents and the community to meet the teachers and the students. My husband and I assisted with the sale, and we are thankful for the opportunity to volunteer for this and other activities at High Road. It was a clever way to encourage the kids to interact with others while learning about recycling and dealing with money. Our community is very fortunate to have resources like the High Road facility and their faculty."

But it was the real-world experience the sale afforded our students that made it such a standout event. They enthusiastically assisted in planning, preparing, and organizing the event. They made posters and signs to advertise the yard sale. Indeed, they participated in the full array of tasks required for such an entrepreneurial venture, including collecting donated goods and baked goods, sorting and pricing items, creatively displaying the wares on sale, making sales and exchanging money, and cleaning up afterward.

Through it all, the students were thoroughly engaged, actively greeting customers and assisting them as they shopped. High school student Sha'a Wasef-Hajbeh felt that "it was a good experience for me because it was kind of like running a store, and I could practice making change." An elementary student remarked, "I liked getting things ready for the sale. Next year we need to have a free box of toys!" And elementary student Max Kelley's favorite part was "having my mom and dad at the sale!"

The goal to increase community awareness of the school was met, as several people expressed that they previously hadn't known that the High Road School was in the area, underlining the continuing need to keep reaching out to locals to let them know about the school's presence and mission.

An added bonus of the sale was meeting Nancy S. Lind, business professor at Illinois State University, who brought along her therapy dogs, Ebony and Shadow. Since then, she has returned to the school several times, and it's been wonderful to see how the students respond to the dogs, especially the students with autism. As an award-winning educator for 30 years, Professor Lind is highly qualified to observe: "I was positively impressed by the teachers and administrator at High Road. It was obvious that each teacher cared about his or her students and engaged each one in individualized activities. The atmosphere was based solely on positive feedback and channeling negative behaviors into a positive realm."

All in all, the school yard sale was such a hit that it's going to be an annual event. So keep your eye out for 2015's announcement and then stop on by if you happen to be in the neighborhood!



Students Sha'a, Max, and Evelyn (left to right) prepare for the High Road School of Bloomington's yard sale.



After taking inventory of the yard sale, senior student Myrissa got a good-bye visit from therapy dog Shadow.

# Looking to the Future



At the High Road School of Perryville (MD), the week of September 15th was dedicated to what lies ahead for our student body. For many young people, planning for the future isn't exactly a priority, so the transition staff members consider it their job to steer students' vision beyond school walls—to gently remind them that they won't be in school forever. It's just the natural progression of life, one that we want them to feel optimistic about. To get them to ask "What's next?" with excitement rather than trepidation, the Perryville school created **College & Career Week**.

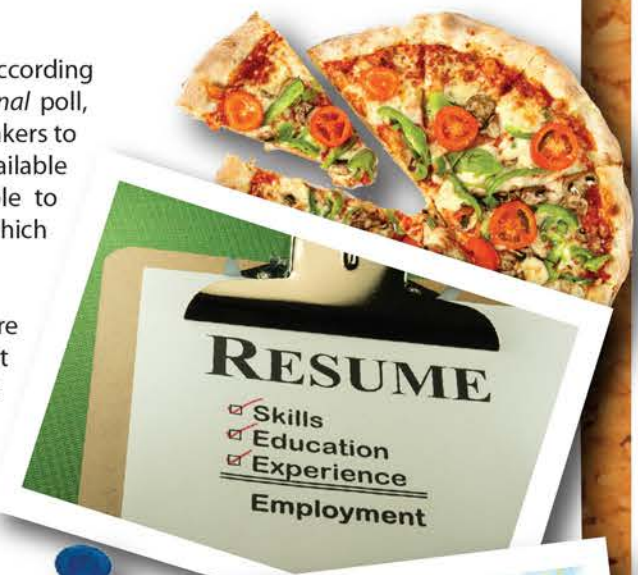
College & Career (C&C) Week consists of five whole days of completely saturating our future graduates with possibilities and options for their future—in terms of both continuing education choices and potential occupations. This is how it works: Every day for a week, two or three speakers come in and make a presentation to the students about the college they're currently attending or the career in which they're currently working. Most of these presentations are done in the format of a "chat and chew," an informal, low-key, open way of presenting to a small group while everyone enjoys something to eat (in this case, pizza!).

Among the presenters for C&C Week 2014 were representatives from Cecil College, Harford County Community College, Wilmington College, and the University of Baltimore. From the military, representatives from both the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy attended (representatives who just also happen to be High Road teachers from the Elkton and Perryville school sites). And, finally, multiple businesses were represented, including the YMCA, McDonald's, and a local accounting firm.

Some people doubt the effectiveness of on-campus career fairs, but according to a Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)/*Career Journal* poll, over 70% of HR departments rely on job fairs and representative speakers to recruit employees. At our career fair, students got to inquire about available and upcoming positions within organizations. They were also able to submit their applications and résumés in person to the recruiters, which puts them at an advantage in the hiring or admissions process.

Most notably, our students were happy to be taking part and were extremely engaged throughout. After the event, one student remarked, "I didn't know I had these options." Another student mentioned that she "learned so much about what happens after school and would have been lost without this." Students took the time to inquire about anything and everything that interested them. In response, each presenter took the time to answer every question carefully and thoroughly. One presenter even went so far as to give an impromptu résumé workshop!

The success of the High Road School of Perryville's C&C Week was so significant because it afforded students dedicated and ample time to explore future career paths, to narrow down or extend their possibilities, and to get a very hopeful glimpse at all that might await them with a little planning and hard work.

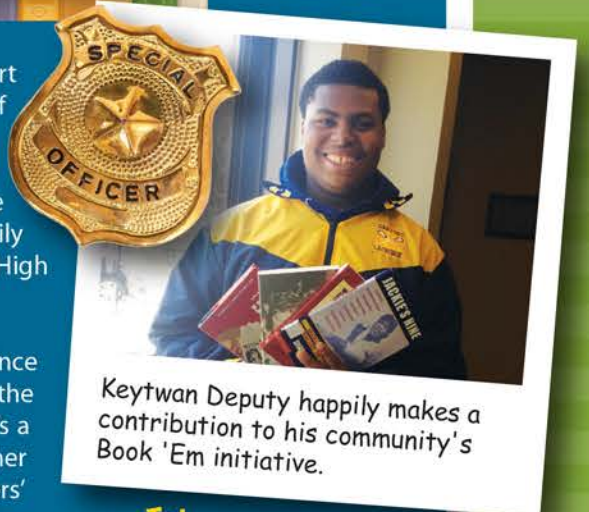


# No Such Thing as Too Many Books



In Wilmington, DE, a group of police officers has been blanketing the city in an effort to book kids ... and the kids are loving it! The books, in this case, are in the trunks of police cruisers as part of the **Book 'Em Cops and Kids Literacy Initiative** created by Master Corporal Gary Tabor. During his time working for the police department's Major Crime Unit, Tabor found that children's literature was missing from most of the homes he entered. Recognizing the importance of having reading materials readily available to children at a young age, he launched this invaluable initiative, which the High Road School of Delaware is immensely proud to take part of.

Over this past summer alone, High Road donated more than 1,000 books and has since been holding regular bake sales to raise money to purchase even more to donate to the program, in response to requests made for age-specific books for at-risk youth. It's a win-win for everybody. Transition Coordinator Carriann VanDzura points out another benefit of the program: "Our donations not only contribute to keeping these officers' patrol cars full of books, but the experience also allows our students to see law enforcement personnel in a positive light if they didn't already do so."



Keytwan Deputy happily makes a contribution to his community's Book 'Em initiative.

To learn more, visit [www.delawareonline.com](http://www.delawareonline.com)

# A Mountainous Endeavor



If Mohammed won't come to the mountain, then the mountain must come to Mohammed. This statement truly exemplifies the most recent advancement to the Rivers Bend Academy in Suffolk, VA: a completely revamped and refurbished **Transition Room**.

Rivers Bend Academy accommodates a select group of unique students who are both of age and position to benefit from individualized and structured teaching. But because many of these students are unable to travel from school to an environment where they can be provided with the type of distinctive learning designed to equip them with real-life skills, the Transition Room was born on campus, bringing to them a workspace in which they receive specialized, hands-on experience that prepares them for more independent futures.

This functional workroom features various items pertaining to daily activities, and each activity is overseen by a staff member. Some of the activities include:

- Food shopping (a student is given a list or a picture of an item and instructed to locate it, purchase it, and wait for change)
- Bagging and stocking groceries
- Folding and hanging clothes
- Sweeping and vacuuming
- Cleaning tables and stacking chairs



Rivers Bend's Transition Room originated in 2013 and was renovated in September 2014. Under the watchful eye of Erin Murphy, Behavior Specialist, the transition project has proven to be a blessing for students and staff alike. When asked about the significance of the room, Ms. Murphy replied, "It's awesome! The Transition Room provides our students with the opportunity to learn valuable skills in a structured setting that can be generalized to community settings. It is about dignity and independence; being able to complete a job independently creates a sense of accomplishment. Our students deserve that."

Ms. Murphy ensures that the room is well stocked and available to everyone at all times. So now, on a cold, blustery January morning, our students and transition specialists can remain comfortable and snug in school, not having to venture out to receive personalized, interactive experience required for successful daily living. And it's all because of the mountainous endeavor at Rivers Bend Academy. Climb on, Rivers Bend, climb on.



# HRS of Waterbury Recruits Inspiration



Whenever one of our students walks to the graduation stage at the end of the year to accept their diploma, it's a tear-jerking moment that makes every step of that student's journey along the way well worth it. In the case of Chris Bishop, graduating senior of the class of 2014 from the High Road School of Waterbury (CT), when he joyfully threw his graduation cap in the air, onlookers could see the neatly displayed U.S. Army patches on the cap, symbolizing the close of one chapter in his life and the start of the next one.

The onlookers—who included the school's Associate Director, Jessica Coviello; Chris's classroom teacher; and Army Sergeant Bedard—couldn't have been more proud of Chris's accomplishments or more thrilled at his future prospects. For Chris Bishop's story is truly something to celebrate.

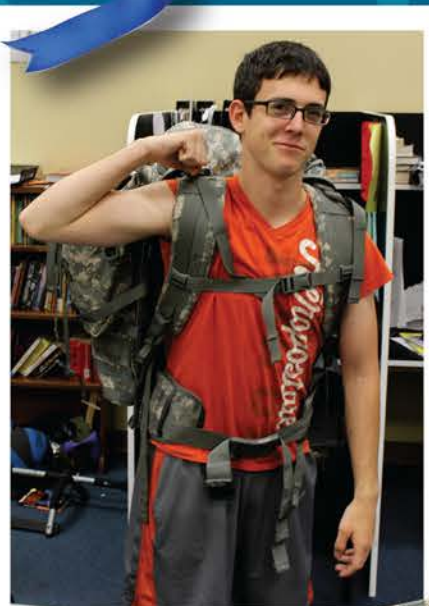
When Chris first entered the doors of High Road, he didn't have any vision for himself, his path was uncertain, and his attitude toward school and his teachers was decidedly negative. But the program led him to apply himself, and after two years of determination, hard work, and commitment, he made the personal decision to remain at the High Road School. This choice was driven by his desire to join the military—to do so, he had to pass the entrance exams, and that meant brushing up on his math skills.

Motivated by this focused goal, Chris began to flourish at High Road, until his demeanor, confidence, and competence shone with positivity. His attitude toward his teachers completely changed, and it was evident to all that the boy who had walked through the doors a few years prior was growing into a fine young man.

As graduation approached, he had a final meeting with Ms. Coviello to determine his next steps, and Chris asked her if the High Road School would be interested in employing him over the summer months leading up to his deployment. "As a teacher," Ms. Coviello recalls, "you create the foundation for your students upon which they will build the rest of their lives. There is nothing more rewarding than to see a student radically change and to behold the growth of their education."

Chris was given the opportunity to work at the High Road Academy of Wallingford for the summer, where he managed and operated the school's coffee café, Cup of Inspiration. He also assisted the transition students attending the summer program with learning how to execute the day-to-day operations of the café. His work ethic, maturity, diligence, and self-respect were no longer personal aspirations but, rather, personal realities. His transformation was evident to Rosemary Schaeffer, Wallingford's Transition Program Specialist. "Chris is such a delightful young man," she says. "He has been an asset to our staff and a role model for our students."

Borrowing the motto of Chris's next stop on his journey, we advise all our students to "Be all that you can be." Hopefully, Chris's story will encourage others to map their own path and follow their own dreams.



U.S. ARMY

# Keeping Suspended Students in School



Restorative Practices Academy (RPA) is a unique program that benefits the school district, students, and community of York, Pennsylvania. Students learn the necessary social skills to return to their sending schools while maintaining pace with their peers academically. The School District of the City of York benefits by reducing the number of out-of-school suspensions, and York City benefits by not having these students at home or in the streets, where they are at increased risk of trouble or danger.

RPA began operating in April 2014 on the first floor of William C. Goodridge Academy, with the express purpose of supporting the York City district in reducing the large number of out-of-school suspensions there. As such, middle and high school students who receive out-of-school suspensions for 5 to 10 days are referred to RPA in lieu of suspension. Students and their families complete an intake process that includes learning about the program's structure, how the staff is trained, and what a student's expectations are in the program.

At RPA, students participate in daily activities such as assembly, guided group intervention (GGI), and social skills training. These activities are vital to the program as they teach young people such values as personal ownership and accountability. Many students enjoy the structure of the program and respond positively to it. The three-times-a-day assemblies inform students of all daily announcements. In GGI sessions, students participate in group discussions and offer different viewpoints about negative behaviors—they have the opportunity to address their peers and provide feedback. And social skills classes focus on real-life situations and appropriate ways to handle behaviors when they return to their sending school.

The program also entails what are called "restoration packets." The first packet is an Action Plan that requires students to complete 20 redirections and ownerships each. Under the direction of staff members, students record the reasons for being redirected as well as their daily allotment of ownerships, which allows them to see what behaviors are interrupting their educational process most frequently and to learn to deal with these behaviors appropriately. The most important part of the Action Plan is the essay, wherein students must answer two questions: What behaviors occurred to get them sent to RPA? And how do they plan to address these behaviors upon returning to their sending school?

RPA staff member Mr. Blazi tells the students, "We're not going to make you angels in five to ten days." He and his colleague Mr. Johnson make it clear that they do not expect to change students' personalities in such a short time. However, they do offer students more positive and productive approaches to managing their behaviors, and they provide insight to the students about the emotions and underlying causes of their negative behaviors. Most students respond well to these personal discussions and take ownership of their actions.

Two months into the fall 2014 semester, RPA had already serviced 19 students for the School District of the City of York, all of whom avoided what otherwise would have been 150 school days of out-of-school suspension. The students who complete the program usually return to their home schools without any more major behavioral issues and with a new perspective, on track academically. What would happen to these students without RPA? Thanks to SESI's alternative education programming in York, PA, we'll never have to know.

P personal  
R responsibility  
i in  
D delivering  
E excellence

for what is thought to be best in any relationship point of view.  
**Education** is the knowledge of skills, learning process, and enlightens the mind for what is thought



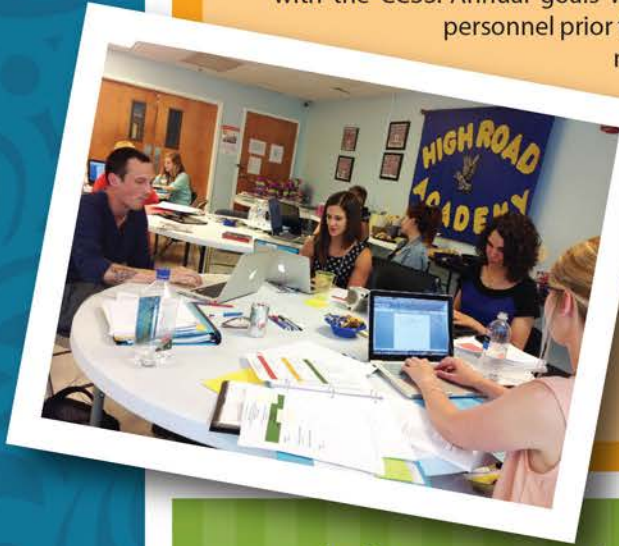
# SESI Launches New ACI Model

For the 2014–2015 school year, Specialized Education Services, Inc. launched a brand-new company-wide model for **assessment, curriculum, and instruction** (ACI). Under the expert direction of Ellen Gaske, Ph.D., SESI's Chief Academic Officer, a nationwide team has been assembled to address the academic needs of all our students in all of our various programs. For close to 30 years, SESI has already been providing outstanding academic and behavioral services to our students, but the creation of this more advanced model raises the bar even higher— enhancing and expanding the materials, programs, and other supports available at all our schools.

Dr. Gaske's ACI team includes Autumn Kelley, Director of Research & Technology, and Melissa Fischer, Director of Assessment & Data Analysis. Additionally, each of SESI's eight regions now has a Regional Facilitator to represent the unique needs of the schools in that region, extending from New England and the Eastern Shore all the way to California.

In July 2014, the ACI group met for the first time to refine the new "SESI Model," which is based on three tiers of intervention. Tier 1 represents students who are "typical learners"; these students respond well to instruction and participate in grade-level curriculums in alignment with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Tier 2 represents students who fall below grade level academically; these students require personalized interventions in order to close the skills gap. Targeted remediation is required for these students for a specified period of time to address deficits, and further modifications and accommodations may be necessary in order for these students to access the CCSS. Tier 3 represents students who fall significantly below grade level in reading, math, and/or written expression, as well as in content areas. Intensive programming in sufficient dosages and systematic research-based interventions are required for these students to close the academic gap and access the CCSS.

By the start of the school year, a fully developed and well-defined model was in place that addresses: academic assessment; curricular methodologies, materials, and programs; instructional models and routines; and alignment with the CCSS. Annual goals were mapped out in each area, and the final product was shared with all key personnel prior to the fall semester. In years to come, SESI will continue to develop and expand our model—always intent on delivering to our students the highest-caliber educational services that will allow them to reach their highest potentials.



[facebook.com/sesischools](https://facebook.com/sesischools)

385 Oxford Valley Road • Suite 408  
Yardley, PA 19067  
Phone: 215-369-8699 • Fax: 215-369-8690

[www.sesi-schools.com](http://www.sesi-schools.com)



[twitter.com/sesischools](https://twitter.com/sesischools)