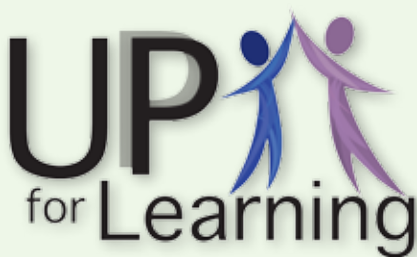


UP for Learning

Spring 2013 Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning



YATST Launches New Identity



Our Mission

Increase student engagement by developing youth-adult partnerships in learning to ensure that each and every student has the skills, self-confidence, and opportunities to assume meaningful roles in shaping their learning and their lives.

Our Vision

We envision a time when students will take responsibility for their own learning by collaborating with adults to reach their own goals.

Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST) has experienced a dramatic expansion of services this past year. In response to growing demands, the organization has increased its leadership team and broadened its training and facilitation to fulfill our vision of increasing student engagement in learning throughout Vermont. In addition to the YATST action research model, services available to all high schools now include:

- State-level policy advocacy
- Student data analysis to drive change
- Customized youth leadership skill training
- Statewide conferences
- Youth school board member advocacy and support

The UP for Learning organization encompasses both the YATST action research initiative, as well as these new services. UP for Learning stands for “Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning”. YATST is UP for Learning’s signature training program and the fullest expression of our core values and principles.

Current research affirms the value of our efforts. “Fostering student voice—empowering youth to express their opinions and influence their educational experiences so that they feel they have a stake in the outcomes—is one of the most powerful tools schools have to increase learning” (Toshalis & Nakkula Executive Summary, 2012). This newsletter provides a glimpse into the continued accomplishments of YATST teams, along with stories of the new ground we are breaking to harness the power of youth-adult partnerships in learning.

Our Values & Guiding Principles

Share Responsibility. The process of change must be transparent and must be driven by adults and youth, in equal measure.

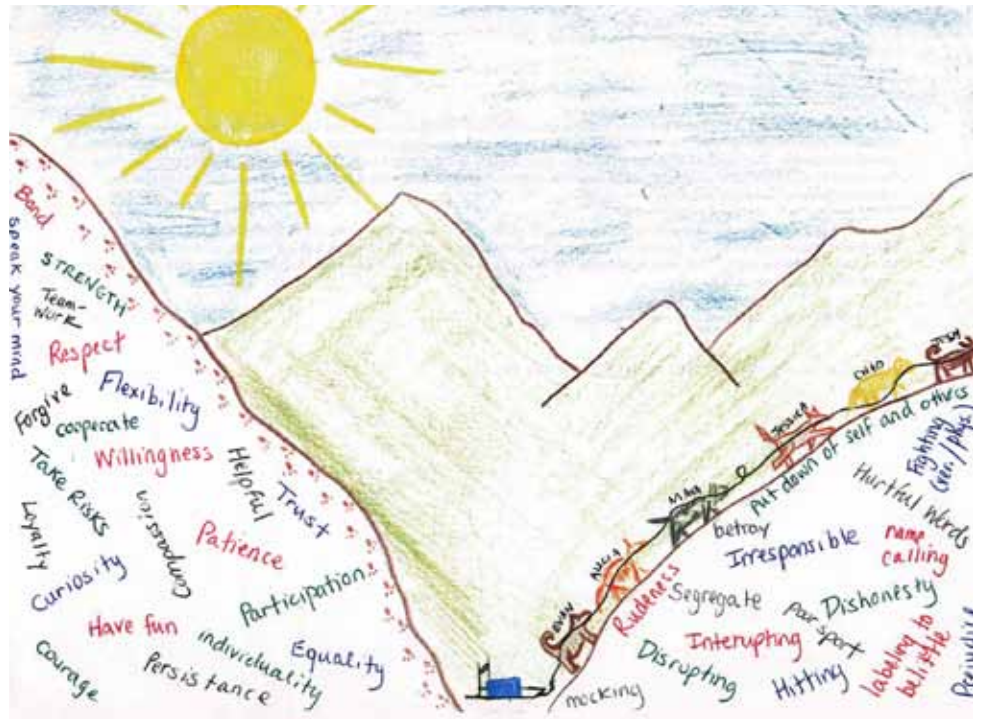
Start from Strength. Students, educators and parents possess the wisdom and capacity to orchestrate change. Beginning with what's working—as opposed to what's not—provides hope and energizes a community to embrace change.

Assume Positive Intentions. Educators truly want students to thrive. Young people are ready and able to commit to their learning and be involved in its design.

Seek Equity & Justice. The most effective learning environments are ones in which youth and adults are equally valued and heard. Those who have been most disenfranchised have the right to aspire to a more meaningful education.

Employ Data to Drive Change. Research is a powerful means to create a shared understanding and a vitally important way to build credibility between youth and adults. When a community works together to make meaning of their own data, they are strengthened by what they learn and emboldened to take action.

Create Open Dialogue. Deep conversation is central to changing school cultures. Young people are particularly able initiators of this dialogue, creating a shared vision for education and the learning process.



Our New Name: The Background Story

Picture a class of 15 eighth-graders from East Charleston Middle School, intent on creating a visual image that captures their commitment to their learning community. After brainstorming many possible metaphorical images, they settled on one and dug in. They were a team of sled dogs, working together to propel themselves forward, capable of great accomplishments given the strengths and unique talents of each team member and their commitment to each other.

It was all falling into place... until one student brought the work to a screeching halt. "But a dog sled team is harnessed with leashes," she objected. "They are held together by force and controlled by the driver."

The students' deflated spirits were all too clear to their adult partners, as the group agreed that this was not their aspiration. As they struggled to accept that they needed to start from scratch, a prolonged silence ensued. Then, out of this void a voice said, "But our team doesn't need to be leashed. The team can be linked if each dog holds a rope in its mouth, by choice." Their energy renewed by this shift in the metaphor, the group then developed a visual image of the journey they were committed to pursuing (above).

This story of a breakthrough moment helped shaped our organization's new name: Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning. Like the eighth-grade class, UP for Learning believes that young people and teachers thrive in schools when they meld their many talents, interests, and passions, within a spirit of shared responsibility. When students engage in learning that matters, in partnership with teachers, they commit to this community by choice because it feels so rewarding. As the eighth-graders demonstrated, when young people are given an opportunity to co-create their learning, they are capable of profound insights and high aspirations. We "just" need to create the venue for this to unfold. That is the work of Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning.



Great Expectations Regional Trainings

Why do expectations matter? Just ask any of the youth or adults from the six school teams who attended either the Rutland or Burlington-based “Great Expectations or Not?” workshops. They will give you a compelling response. Research confirms that an individual’s self-expectation as a learner is one of the most powerful predictors of future academic success; teacher expectations have a profound impact on a student’s performance and sense of self. Three Hazen Union students played a major role in facilitating these day-long workshops, designed in a “training of trainers” format. That means that when the school teams returned home, their job was to share the same information with students, faculty, and community members.

The “Great Expectations or Not” curriculum module has been updated, with many new excellent resources. One of those new resources is the Twinfield Union student script reading of the “This is Your Brain on Information” play to explain how the brain learns and the impact of self-concept on that process. This

was professionally video-taped and is now available on the YATST YouTube channel as a prototype. Participating schools have already begun sharing information back at their schools.

This initiative was made possible through a partnership with the Vermont Agency of Education, who fully funded the undertaking.

Telling Our Story: Communications Work

“What exactly is YATST?” After years of fumbling to provide a concise and compelling answer to this question, we have enlisted the assistance of a communications expert to better tell our story. Jane Feinberg has been helping schools communicate their visions and goals for years, and has an expansive understanding of the research that informs this endeavor. We first learned of Jane’s work via her involvement in Burlington and Winooski High School transformation efforts.

When we contacted Jane, we learned her client roster was full and she had committed to taking NO new clients. She did agree, reluctantly, to meet once with YATST UVM communication intern Hillary Laggis and Director Helen Beattie last fall. That meeting changed her mind. She immediately saw the void YATST has stepped in to fill, bringing students to the forefront of current change efforts. Jane is now a passionate advocate, believing, as she says, that it is time to “find the ‘student’ in the shift to student-centered learning.” With her guidance, our leadership team has refined the organization’s vision and mission, identified guiding values and principles, and constructed a master narrative. With the help of UVM seniors who have taken on YATST as their communications capstone project, we will soon have new flyers, posters, “elevator speeches,” and videos to share our message with others.



The youth facilitator team.

Today's conference was inspirational. It gives me hope for change!

—feedback from a principal who participated in the fall conference

New Ventures in Policy Advocacy: Vermont Education Quality Standards

YATST has an identified seat at the table as the Agency of Education (AOE) updates Vermont's Education Quality Standards. These standards translate Vermont's vision for transforming schools into specific expectations (e.g., proficiency-based graduation requirements, flexible pathways to graduation, personalized learning plans, etc). Peter Evans, YATST leadership team member, has been participating in deliberations throughout the year as our organization's representative. He has flagged the importance of youth involvement in learning and decision making at every opportunity. We are deeply appreciative of the invitation of the AOE to play an integral role in this process, a clear indication that the Agency values both our organization's work and the importance of youth partnership in school change.



Fall Conference Highlights

Fourteen Vermont high schools converged at Vermont College of Fine Arts on a cold November morning to explore “Expanding Partnerships: Teachers as Learners, Students as Teachers.” Dialogue, punctuated by inspiring music and improvisation theater (and of course an ample supply of pipe cleaners), led us to a deeper understanding of youth-adult partnership in learning — the key to YATST change efforts.

The day was c-hosted by the Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center of Estes Park, Colorado (a corporate Social Responsibility initiative of the American Honda Education Corporation). Eagle Rock serves young people whose educational needs have not been met by their local high schools. It provides engaging learning opportunities, leading to high school graduation.

The day drew to a close by singing “Imagine” to celebrate the spirit of our work. This conference was made possible through the generosity of the Vermont Department of Education. Go to yatst.com for the full story of this event.

Vermont School Board Work

YATST Advisory Board members Kate Lapp and Cara Cookson are passionate about strengthening and expanding the voice of youth school board members across Vermont. In March, they joined forces with the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) to host a gathering of youth and adult school board members from across the state, as well as five superintendents and VSBA and YATST staff.

At the end of a day of rich dialogue, the group identified the following next steps:

- Promote and expand student representation on all high school boards
- Provide training and mentoring for student representatives
- Expand the breadth and depth of student voice on school boards
- Assure comprehensive communications to all student board members

This is the beginning of a long-range commitment to partner with the VSBA on furthering a shared vision of authentic youth participation on boards.



*Partnership creates ownership;
ownership sparks motivation;
motivation drives learning.*

—Helen Beattie,
UP for Learning director

Facilitator Training

Mt. Abraham Union High School has a vision of infusing youth voice throughout all aspects of school life. They approached YATST to offer a two-day facilitator training to help students gain the skills necessary to be effective in this new role. YATST partnered with the Vermont School Reform Initiative, the Rural School and Community Trust and Twinfield student Morgan MacIver to host this training in February. The following day students led a faculty meeting, organizing a “fishbowl” dialogue process to explore the advisory system. By all reports, their efforts were very successful.

The Mt. Abe youth facilitators also organized follow-up dialogue to an emotionally charged student assembly held in conjunction with nearby Vergennes High School. Two Mt. Abe students joined YATST Director Helen Beattie to train 22 Vergennes youth facilitator volunteers to help in this effort.

This work is an example of extending the reach of YATST training resources beyond the core schools engaged in action research. By responding to new opportunities and needs, UP for Learning can advance youth-adult partnerships in the state in innovative ways tailored to schools’ interests.



Two Mt. Abe students help train Vergennes student facilitators.

Funding Updates

We are pleased to announce that YATST was the recipient of a \$10,000 Ben and Jerry’s discretionary grant this fall. We also received a \$15,000 grant from the Vermont Agency of Education to develop the “Great Expectations...or Not” curriculum guide and regional training efforts. The Vermont School Reform Initiative generously provided a \$5,000 grant to help YATST adults attend the SRI annual conference. Finally, the Wisdom Connection has once again generously underwritten the cost of the summer orientation (\$12,000).

We are deeply appreciative of this support, which has directly contributed to the expansion of YATST services.



Welcome, Otter Valley Union School

Community members from Otter Valley Union School filled the cafeteria to participate in a student-led evening to discuss their Youth Risk Behavior Survey results (above). Otter Valley youth, along with principal Jim Avery and teacher Bruce Purlow, will be joining YATST next year to extend youth voice and leadership into the academic learning realm. The principal has brought a team of students and teachers to nearly every YATST conference and training this year—the most effective means to understand our goals and methods. We warmly welcome our new member school!



IDEA School Tour

It was winter school vacation week when the Institute for Democratic Education in America (IDEA) announced hosting a New York City high school tour this April. This message was immediately forwarded to YATST member schools, with an offer to pay for one student from each attending team. Within two days, three teams had signed on: a total of eight students and five faculty from Cabot, Twinfield and Blue Mountain Union Schools. These YATST members comprised the majority of participants of the tour group of 22, with the biggest youth representation IDEA has ever hosted!

The tour included visits to the South Bronx Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School (the poorest school district in the nation), a community youth arts and activism organization in that neighborhood (The Point), a private progressive school in Manhattan (The Calhoun School), and Le Puente's Academy of Peace and Justice in Brooklyn. As a group, we reflected on dramatic contrasts between our rural Vermont schools and these diverse urban institutions. We also discussed the striking similarity of our shared desires for equity, youth empowerment, and youth-adult partnership to shape our learning and our lives. For more information, please see the feature article on the YATST website, along with pictures on the Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST) Facebook page.



Fannie Lou Hamer picture and quote.



The NYC Youth Voice Collaborative, who will participate in the May 10 conference by Skype.

Connections in All Directions

This year marked the beginning of many ongoing partnerships with the **University of Vermont**. Hillary Laggis, a UVM junior, devoted her fall semester to working on communications issues for our organization. She made the connection between YATST and the **Dewey House**, a Living and Learning Center service learning option. The Dewey House's mission is remarkably consistent with YATST's founding beliefs. They have been a ready partner on a number of training opportunities this year:

Dewey House for Civic Engagement students organized and facilitated a **public speaking workshop** (right) for YATST students this fall. A team from Craftsbury benefited from this excellent offering. Due to the worth of the learning experience for both UVM student trainers and YATST participants, the Dewey House has made this event a formal part of their curriculum and will be hosting it once again next year.



UVM hosted a March 29 **Great Expectations training** (left) for Troy middle school, along with Williamstown and Craftsbury high school youth-adult teams.

In addition, 11 UVM communications major seniors (above right) have committed to helping YATST

“message” its work as their **final semester capstone project**. They are currently in the process of producing videos and a media toolkit, which will be unveiled at the upcoming May 10 conference.



YATST could not have had a better end-of-year present than Dr. Dana Mitra's 2011–12 evaluation. Dr. Mitra, of Pennsylvania State University, is nationally recognized for her expertise in youth-adult partnership research and advocacy. She identified YATST as a rich “learning laboratory” and largely subsidized the cost of this research, which included 23 interviews with teachers and principals, a review of over 150 documents and attending the summer three day YATST orientation. The University also funded a research assistant, Catharine Biddle, to help her in these efforts. Dana and Catharine captured both the context and the spirit of YATST through a detailed overview and critique of the model, accompanied by quotes from participants. Her conclusions affirm that YATST is on the right track to achieve our desired outcomes.

A sampling of Dr. Mitra's findings:

Few models of youth-adult partnership exist in the United states and of these, YATST has one of the

continued next page ►



Upcoming Conference

“Tending What Matters: Students & Adults Partner for Change” is an apt title for the end-of-year conference for YATST member schools and those “Getting to Y” schools where students brought meaning to their Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data through student analysis retreats and community dialogue nights. This event will be held May 10 at Vermont College in Montpelier, from 8:30 AM to 2:00 PM. The highlights of the morning high school session will be:

- Unveiling the UVM student-produced videos and media kit materials
- Sharing accomplishments and reflections by YATST and YRBS schools through a talk show panel discussion and open “marketplace”
- Hearing reflections of the students who went on the IDEA NYC school tour
- Being inspired by youth action researchers in New York City and Toronto, Canada, who will Skype in to share their stories

For more information, please visit the YATST website: yatst.com.

◀ continued from previous page

most sophisticated visions of this work....The forms of technical assistance provided by YATST staff are highly sophisticated and a model nationally and beyond for how to provide support to a youth-adult partnership process. . . .

Each component of the YATST vision and process is based on best practices from research and other successful reform efforts. The careful crafting of this program based on evidence-based practice provides a solid foundation on which schools grow.

The full report can be found on yatst.com.

The Vermont School Reform Initiative funded two YATST adult advisors, **Karl Stein** of Craftsbury Academy and **Sally McCarthy** of Hazen Union (right) to go to the national conference in San Antonio this past January.



YATST Director Helen Beattie visited the **New York City’s “Youth Voice Collaborative”** group during her recent trip to the city. They will be keynoting at the spring conference (via Skype) to share the story of their action research efforts. Similarly, the **Ontario-based “Students as Researchers”** group will also be joining us via cyberspace. This is part of an effort to create a network amongst like-minded action research youth groups, to inform and inspire our collective work.

The third annual international convening of youth voice researchers and practitioners will be taking place June 26–28 in Cambridge, England, an event organized by **Dr. Alison Cook Sather of Bryn Mawr College**. Mary Whalen (Twinfield YATST advisor) and Helen attended the first meeting of this group two years ago. An invitation was extended to YATST to present at this next gathering, in partnership with Dr. Dana Mitra. The Bay and Paul Foundations have offered their support to make this possible.

The **University of New Mexico at Albuquerque** is replicating Vermont’s “Getting to Y: Youth Bring Meaning to their Youth Risk Behavior Survey” initiative, with support from the Kellogg Foundation. This model was created by YATST director Helen Beattie in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Education. Helen facilitated their initial training in January and will be partnering with the University to edit and publish the training manual.

The Vermont Agency of Education has once again partnered with YATST to sponsor next fall’s 2013 statewide conference. It will feature Dr. Margery Ginsberg of the University of Washington, along with the principal and two students from the Seattle school she works with on a weekly basis. They will be sharing several simple but powerful strategies to enhance student and teacher engagement in the learning and change process through qualitative research strategies.





Hazen Union students help lead a Great Expectations regional training.

YATST Team Snapshots

Big Picture School

At a morning student-led retreat this fall, the YATST team decided to re-administer their survey to assure a more complete profile of participant perceptions of their learning. They also have taken a lead role in state-wide efforts to further performance-based assessment development, sharing the Big Picture school model and employing their youth facilitator skills in the process.

Blue Mountain Union School



Four students at BMU have made YATST the core of their year-long Senior Exit projects. They've used the action research process to identify topics and worked closely with faculty to pursue improvements. Their goals range from changes in parent conferences, to establishing a mid-semester feed-

back system, to a proposed new master schedule for the school—with room for YATST as a course! They also rallied a team of five for the IDEA NYC school tour (photo above left).

Burlington High School

Burlington High School is part of a large multi-year transformation initiative funded by the Nellie Mae Foundation. YATST efforts have focused on establishing a clear presence in this complex transformation organizational design. Benjamin Rouesch, a BHS teacher, took the necessary measures to create a credit-bearing course next year, which will weave in core components of the YATST model.

Cabot School

The Cabot YATST team (right) re-administered their 4 Rs survey and led a half-day retreat to analyze the data, which included both the superintendent and the principal. They are currently organizing a faculty meeting to share this information and shape a new action plan. Cabot also sent a team to the NYC tour.



Craftsbury Academy

The team began the year focusing on increasing the level of respect within the school community. They then re-designed and administered their survey, and are currently organizing a school-wide event with students and faculty to share their analysis and solicit input on next steps. In the meantime, a team attended the Great Expectations workshop and are planning on sharing that information with fellow students and faculty.



Harwood Union School

The HUYATSTers (left) have successfully implemented a pilot for their "Classroom Assistant" model, affording students the opportunity to take a more meaningful role in classroom instruction. The mid-semester student-teacher feedback model kick-off occurred this spring semester. Lastly, they recently re-drafted their survey

continued next page ▶

◀ *continued from previous page*

and will close the year by re-administering it and analyzing the results in May. Faculty involvement in YATST greatly increased this year when it became a professional learning community option on district in-service days.

Hazen Union School

The Hazen team has taken a lead role in developing the “Great Expectations...or Not” state-wide initiative. Youth team members keynoted at the fall district in-service and led all 10th grade Hazen students in classroom sessions about expectations. They then helped co-design and facilitate two regional training-of-trainers workshops, sharing the curriculum guide tools with youth-adult teams from five high schools and one middle school around the state. They also continue to work on the mid-semester feedback model and on plans to re-administer their survey this spring.

Mill River School

The team led a faculty meeting to share their data analysis and shape next steps. They also attended the “Great Expectations...or Not” Rutland workshop and are designing means to share this information with both staff and students by the close of the school year.

Peoples Academy

The PA YATST group has improved student voice by promoting use of the Mid-Semester Feedback tool in classes. Karen Parry of the PA Tech department has taken the digital challenge of individualizing the feedback form based on teachers’ requests to “personalize” the online survey for each

class. In order to promote individual aspirations, the group used a hallway chalkboard and invited any passer-by to write an anonymous response to “Before I graduate I want to . . .”

Current efforts are focused on reforming student council to better reflect student voice by utilizing YATST training for student leaders and promoting the use of students in the hiring process.

Twinfield Union School



YATST was integrated into the 10th grade Humanities class this year, and students performed the “This is Your Brain on Information” skit for the “Great Expectations” initiative. Morgan MacIver has also sustained YATST work through the school’s independent study “Renaissance” program, developing her facilitation skills and applying them within YATST

regional trainings and on the school’s Technology and Media Committee. Plans are underway to establish YATST as a stand-alone club for next year.

Windsor High School

This year members of the Windsor team attended both the YATST November conference and facilitation training with Daniel Baron. They presented the results of last year’s survey data to both the faculty and to the student body. Positive “data” was highlighted by means of a school-wide affinity map, engaging the school community by having them “map” evidence of strengths.

Upcoming Events

MAY 10: Statewide Conference: Tending What Matters.

JULY 31–AUGUST 2: YATST Orientation/Retreat at Castleton State College.

AUGUST 5–7: YATST Orientation/Retreat at Lyndon State College.

UP for Learning offers strategies, tools and expert coaching

for building a school community in which learning is engaging for everyone and youth are fully empowered. Vital youth-adult partnerships lie at the heart of this vision. YATST remains UP for Learning’s signature training program and the fullest expression of our core values and principles.

For more detailed information about UP for Learning, go to yatst.com or contact Director Helen Beattie at hnbeattie@gmail.com.



The **UP for Learning** newsletter provides a brief snapshot of our work. It documents our efforts, strengthens communication between retreats, sparks reflection and celebration and inspires others. Partnership — we can learn a great deal from each other!

NEWSLETTER DESIGN BY DANA DWINELL-YARDLEY.