

# UP for Learning

Summer 2015 Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning



## 'Power Squared' Summit Delivers on Its Promise



Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

### 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.

Nearly 200 people gathered on April 8 at the Lake Morey Inn in Fairlee, VT, to explore the power of youth-adult partnership as a dynamic force for shaping the future of Vermont education. The Power<sup>2</sup> Summit convened high school students, teachers, administrators, school board members, and other partners working together for school change. Designed as a day to “inform, inspire, and move us to action,” the conference was a collaborative effort of local and national organizations working directly with Vermont schools: UP for Learning, Shelburne Farms, the Partnership for Change, Big Picture Learning, and the School Project Foundation, with support from the Bay & Paul Foundations. Bruce Perlow, an UP for Learning school coach, summarized the goal: To see “organizations and schools with a genuine and deeply held belief in youth-adult partnership sharing their experiences and visions and connecting with one another.”

As registration swelled in the days leading up to the event—attendance was nearly double the original projection—organizers pointed to growing awareness of the need for change following passage of Act 77 last year. That legislation, with its mandate for “flexible pathways” to graduation and personal learning plans for all students, will take effect next fall. The Power<sup>2</sup> conference

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## 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.



GTY training day in Montpelier

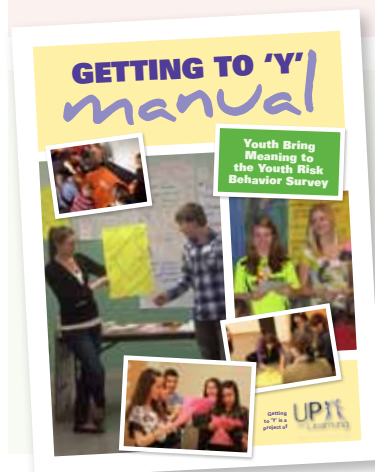
## Students Bring Meaning to their Youth Risk Behavior Survey with GTY

**G**etting to 'Y': Youth Bring Meaning to their Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is an initiative that gives students an opportunity to take a lead in bringing meaning to their YRBS data and taking steps to improve their community. The program began seven years ago in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Education. Currently UP is partnering with the Vermont Department of Health to share the GTY initiative with Vermont schools and help meet their strategic plan priority: That more students in Vermont take an active role in shaping their school cultures. Since GTY began, 49 Vermont middle schools and high schools have participated. During the 2014-15 school year, 13 schools attended a day-long training in October.

To learn more about what the Getting to 'Y' schools did this year please read the latest GTY newsletter on the UP for Learning website: [upforlearning.com/images/GTYnews2014-15\\_web.pdf](http://upforlearning.com/images/GTYnews2014-15_web.pdf)

*"This was all worth it. It's a great opportunity and I feel pretty accomplished."*

—GTY youth participant



UP for Learning is thrilled to unveil the **updated Getting to 'Y' manual**. Over the past year UP for Learning has partnered with the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque to revamp the GTY manual with new activities and easy-to-use handouts. UP has been working with graphic designer Dana Dwinell-Yardley to "UP-ify" the new manual, including pictures! To check out the new manual, please visit [upforlearning.com/images/GTYmanual2015-web.pdf](http://upforlearning.com/images/GTYmanual2015-web.pdf)

## UPdate on Resources

**NEW! Getting to 'Y': Youth Bring Meaning to their Youth Risk Behavior Survey Manual.** [upforlearning.com/images/GTYmanual2015-web.pdf](http://upforlearning.com/images/GTYmanual2015-web.pdf)

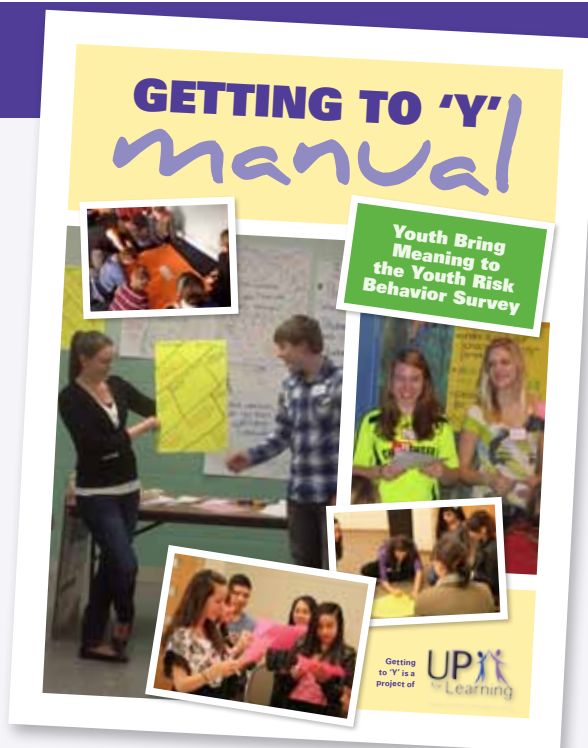
**NEW! YATST Curriculum Guide Module: Why Change Schools?** The new resource provides engaging activities to explore the rationale for why schools need to change. This module is part of the larger YATST Curriculum Guide, which covers all phases of the YATST change process and the action research cycle. [upforlearning.com/images/YATSTmoduleB-lowres.pdf](http://upforlearning.com/images/YATSTmoduleB-lowres.pdf)

The **NEW Youth as Facilitators of Change video** provides insight into the power and capacity of youth as facilitators of change. [youtube.com/watch?v=JZCv4t1sLTI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZCv4t1sLTI)

UP for Learning partnered with Jane Feinberg of Full Frame Communications and Daniel Baron of the School Project Foundation to create the Nellie Mae Foundation's **Students at the Center Toolkit** web resource for New England and beyond. The goal is to help schools build public understanding and support for school change. The site showcases our Vermont communications change model, weaving together strategic framing, dialogue-for-change, and of course youth-adult partnership. UP's greatest contribution was in the "Youth Engagement" section. This is a remarkable opportunity to advocate for involving young people in the change process, moving from "doing education *to and for students*" toward co-creating learning *with* young people as full partners. Enjoy the many references to YATST and UP for Learning as you roam the site. [studentsatthecenterhub.org/toolkit/authentic-youth-engagement](http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/toolkit/authentic-youth-engagement).

### Brand-New Article and Video Search for the Missing 'R'

Hot off the press . . . check out the newly published UP for Learning article, "**The Case of the Missing R,**" in the June 2015 Educational Leadership digital journal (distribution of 200,000). Visit [ascd.org](http://ascd.org) for more. Another "don't miss" is the **video** produced by Ned Castle of the Vermont Folklife Center to accompany this article, thanks to the generosity of the Bay and Paul Foundations. You can watch it at [upforlearning.org](http://upforlearning.org).



### Shaping Our Future Together Resources

Check out the **video of the Communicating School Redesign class Vermont State House Special Event** with opening comments by the Secretary of Education, Rebecca Holcombe. [youtube.com/watch?v=iBbh8pl1cUI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBbh8pl1cUI)



**ShapingOurFutureTogether.org** will develop your school's capacity to build public understanding and support for school change. Tools and resources abound in this website. [shapingourfuturetogether.org](http://shapingourfuturetogether.org)

**Shaping our Future Together: Resources for Building Public Understanding of School Redesign in Vermont.** This packet of materials jumpstarts an effective evidence-based communications approach for community dialogue to build understanding of Act 77 and proficiency-based learning strategies. The packet includes Frequently Asked Questions and Talking Points, an Act 77 "elevator speech," a sample press release, prototypes for brochures, and School Reform Initiative protocols. [upforlearning.com/images/SOFTresourceguide-final.pdf](http://upforlearning.com/images/SOFTresourceguide-final.pdf)

**Hazen Union High School Shaping Our Future Together website.** [sites.google.com/a/ossu.org/hazen-union-shaping-our-future-together/home](http://sites.google.com/a/ossu.org/hazen-union-shaping-our-future-together/home)

**Shaping Our Future Together for Twinfield.** [twinfieldsoft.weebly.com](http://twinfieldsoft.weebly.com)

literature cited these directives as “unprecedented opportunities for youth to partner with adults as messengers and co-creators of school change. Personalized learning will require that students assume a far more active role in their learning; it will fundamentally reshape the student-teacher relationship to one of shared responsibility and partnership.”

At the Power<sup>2</sup> Summit, this concept was not a distant vision but an immediate experience. The conference promised to answer the question: “What does it look and sound like when young people partner with adults as they shape their educational experience?” The evidence was everywhere as youth and adults shared leadership in a dozen workshops showcasing examples from around the state.

Topics included advisory programs, “Any Time, Any Place” learning, Proficiency-Based Learning, End-of-Year Studies, and alternatives to traditional discipline—restorative justice practices instead of suspension. Many sessions engaged participants in active work on the topics. A team from Northfield High School, for example, distributed ten potential themes to guide an advisory curriculum, asking participants to agree in small groups on a priority order. “We really had to think hard about this, and then explain our reasoning,” said one student as her group completed the task. “It helped me see how many good ways there might be to organize advisories,” said an adult member of the group. “There’s no single blueprint, but it’s critical to have students involved in the planning from the beginning.”

Other sessions explored ways for students and adults to work together on community initiatives and education for sustainability, as well as the work of school improvement itself. At Burlington High School, students offer “consultancy” sessions to help educators gain new perspectives on their questions and dilemmas; some recent examples include “How should students and advisors be grouped?” “How can school leaders best get honest student input about athletic coaches during and at the end of the season?” and (from the Superintendent search committee) “...What are the qualities that students want to see in the next leader of Burlington’s schools?”

At Leland & Gray, Mill River, and Otter Valley Union High Schools, youth-adult teams participated this year in a new “collaborative peer review” project, observing every classroom and providing feedback as a basis for continuing improvement. “This has totally changed the way I think



about my own education,” said Leland & Gray sophomore Jake Wilkins, who hopes to mentor other students and teachers when his school does its next review.

In the afternoon, participants met for “open space dialogue,” gathering to discuss topics and questions of their choice. Burlington High School teacher Dov Stucker reported afterward on his experience with fifteen students who convened their own open-space session: “The level of honesty, vulnerability, equity, and honest curiosity was somehow both miraculous and obvious. As we ended, there was a pause, and it was clear that no one wanted to stand up or leave the room. The content was rich, of course, but it wasn’t the substance that was the glue, it was something else...it speaks to how known they felt. This in turn speaks to how much trust they have all built with adult partners.”

A student from Colchester expressed his side of the partnership experience this way: “Being part of a school-wide change has made me feel like students are finally being given the role we deserve in our education system.... Students are often told to just go with things, or their input is not sought for, but once students are part of the change that will happen to them things will change much smoother. When students have a say they feel like they matter and what could possibly be more important for a student?”

As the conference ended, UP for Learning Executive Director Helen Beattie said, “Today presenting teams helped move the concept of partnership from theory to practice, inspiring us all with the range and depth of possibilities. Given Vermont’s change agenda, we have never had a better opportunity to infuse youth-adult partnership as a central means for change.”



## CSR Teams Move Communication Plans Forward, Come Together at State House to Celebrate

This spring was a flurry of activity for the five Communicating School Redesign (CSR) teams around the state, as they implemented their Communications Campaign Action Plans. While the Harwood CSR team was training 35 youth facilitators to help lead a full-school dialogue morning session with over 800 students, the Hazen team was working with a local videographer to polish off their video script as a tool to introduce personalized learning plans to the student body and community. They would later upload it to their new web page that also featured the five OpEd articles written by varied stakeholder groups (students, parents, teachers, etc.), published in their local newspaper throughout the spring. In the southern part of the state, Otter Valley was finalizing their school board presentation, while Colchester was editing their “personalized learning plans are like chocolate chip cookie” metaphor trigger video. In the meantime, the Twinfield crew was deep into web design and production of a compelling audio Public Service Announcement, aired repeatedly on the local radio station.

These teams converged at the Vermont State House on April 29 to share their efforts and reflect on their learning with the House and Senate Education Committees and varied educational leaders in the state. Vermont Secretary of Education Rebecca Holcombe offered the opening remarks, saying, “You have all heard how a little butterfly fluttering its wings can cause a tidal wave halfway around the world. That’s what you are doing in Vermont when you engage in these kinds of very powerful conversations about what matters for kids and how we make it a reality in schools.”

Peter Peltz, the prior chairperson of the House Education committee that crafted Act 77, provided an historical context for the policy. As he noted, legislators are seldom privy to the impact of their legislation. This venue honored both the forward-thinking legislators of Vermont and the work of these five school teams. The CSR teams have carved out a new and vital role for both youth and adults in building public understanding and support for some of the most innovative educational legislation in the country.

A new cohort of CSR schools is currently being accepted into this initiative for the coming year, including BFA Fairfax, Burlington, Rochester, South Royalton, and Chelsea and Whitcomb High Schools.

The Shaping Our Future Together complementary state-wide campaign was concurrently launched this spring, including a web site, [shapingourfuturetogether.org](http://shapingourfuturetogether.org), which will serve as a hub for schools throughout the state to help build public understanding of both personalized learning plans and new proficiency-based learning efforts. This site will capture a rich compendium of stories about successful Vermont efforts, aiming to inspire and inform others.

*CSR is a collaborative effort with Full Frame Communications and The School Project Foundation, in collaboration with the Vermont School Board Association. It has been funded this year by the Bay and Paul Foundations, the Agency of Education, the Nellie Mae Foundation.*

## Collaborative Peer Review: What Next?

Can an intensive one-year experience be the catalyst for multi-year change? Last summer, three pioneering schools joined with UP for Learning to create the program called Collaborative Peer Review, CPR for short. The pilot schools—Leland & Gray, Otter Valley, and Mill River Union—launched a new way to work on continuous improvement in teaching and learning, through classroom observation, reflection, and dialogue led by youth-adult teams. It was a bold experiment, rooted in the conviction that the people in local school communities, not outside “experts,” have the capacity to chart their own path toward excellence.

In the fall, the CPR participants achieved their first ambitious goal in exchange visits to each school: to observe every classroom, seeing teachers and students at work through the lens of the Four Rs (rigor, relevance, relationship, and shared responsibility). Over the winter months, each school team worked to synthesize the observation findings with other data sources such as survey results and Global Best Practices ratings. By spring, they had a report summarizing key evidence, identifying both strengths and questions for the larger school community. Through a series of structured dialogues, they could then share their findings with students, faculty, school board and community members.

This final dialogue phase concluded the year-long CPR experience, which was set up as a credit-bearing course for the youth and adult participants. A single year, of course, can only be a launching pad — a “jumpstart,” as one student put it. CPR was designed to play a supporting role for other improvement efforts; as a Mill River teacher said, it served as “an important element in a series of initiatives.” The long-term goal is to establish an ongoing cycle of observation, reflection, dialogue, and action planning. The real impact of a CPR year, therefore, will show up only later, as schools develop these habits and adapt the strategies to their own cultures and needs.

The experience at Leland & Gray demonstrates some of the ways that might happen. For example, a group of teachers decided in mid-year to organize peer observation within their own department, using the Four Rs framework to visit each other’s classrooms and offer feedback. In addition, as noted in a March *Brattleboro Reformer* report ([www.reformer.com/localnews/ci\\_27708777/leland-gray-completes-first-peer-review-process](http://www.reformer.com/localnews/ci_27708777/leland-gray-completes-first-peer-review-process)), the CPR experience elevated the role



CPR participants in action.

of students as partners in change, including the discovery that “teachers are very open to receiving feedback regularly from their students” along with a broader commitment to engaging students as colleagues in the change process. A major “next step” will be a youth-adult team working to implement Personal Learning Plans Next at Leland & Gray next fall — a key element of the Act 77 reforms aimed at increasing student engagement. As CPR participants (and all UP for Learning schools) know, changes intended to benefit students will be most effective when youth themselves join in the design and “roll out” of those plans.

At this point, then, there is evidence that Collaborative Peer Review has launched new ways of thinking that will continue to inform improvement in teaching and learning for its pilot schools. There’s also the question of “What next?” for CPR itself. Future versions of the program might help schools prepare for Education Quality Reviews, a new approach to assessment currently in the planning stage at the Agency of Education. It’s also possible that the CPR model could prove valuable in school districts working on consolidation. Whether Collaborative Peer Review carries on in its present form or adapts to fit a new set of needs, it’s unlikely that Vermont schools will keep using the old models of external evaluation. As a Leland & Gray senior said after her CPR experience: “I’ve never understood what school evaluation has been about. By participating in this, I’m surprised the school has ever done it any other way.”

# Spotlight on Blue Mountain Union High School YATST Members

## Kayle

I was born and raised in Palm Beach, Florida, and I moved to South Ryegate, Vermont and started going to BMU when I was 8. I enjoy basketball and being outside. My best learning experience in finding my voice and becoming a leader in and out of the classroom has been at the YATST conferences I have attended.

In my YATST class youth adult partnership looks like everyone really gets along and we are like a big family. When we go to conferences, there is always myself and a couple other students that will get out of our shells and talk to other YATSTers, then bring them into our group to meet

everyone else. My greatest accomplishment is when I got the one-to-one computer program started at BMU as a result of our YATST action plan and also the dialogue chalk talk assembly with students to gather information for our YATST actions for next year. Both of these actions were such big accomplishments for me to complete and I can't wait to do more!

## Anne Bergeron

I teach literature, writing, and yoga at the Blue Mountain Union School. I live in Corinth in an off-grid house my husband and I built ourselves. We tend large vegetable and perennial gardens and flocks of sheep and chickens. I love to write, read, practice yoga, cycle, hike, Nordic ski, and knit. Although reading William Wordsworth's "The Prelude" during my freshman year in college or seeing my AP English students do well on their exams are wonderful classroom learning experiences, my best learning experience happened during travel. When I was 22, I rode my bicycle 3,000 miles from Athens to London with a girl friend, camping most of the way. On that trip, I learned how to plan, problem solve, and trust in the goodness of world, as well as trust in my ability to make my dreams a reality.

I like to give students autonomy in their independent project work, helping them behind the scenes, but allowing them to feel the strength of their own voices in our community. This leads to an authentic sense of the actual work necessary to bring about school re-design and, I hope, to a true sense of accomplishment on the part of students. When YATST students succeed in changing governance policies or when they enhance the climate and culture, they have the satisfaction and pride in having done the majority of the work themselves.

There have been so many great school improvement projects at Blue Mountain, but the great accomplishments happen every day when I see students understand that their voices in our school community really do matter.



## Fall Workshops Offered on M<sup>3</sup>: Mindset, Metacognition & Motivation

New legislation in Vermont expects students to take a greater role in shaping their education. In order to be successful, all students must become fluent in the "language of learning" — building their skills as designers, self-advocates, and independent learners.

UP will be offering workshops on **M<sup>3</sup>: Exploring Mindset, Metacognition & Motivation to Build Readiness for Personalized Learning** this coming fall to help young people understand the neurologic basis and language of successful learning. Student-teacher teams will attend a day-long workshop and return home to share this information with peers and faculty.

A northern training will be offered on October 13 at the Capitol Plaza Hotel in Montpelier and a southern training on October 20 at the College of St. Joseph's in Rutland.



A group from the Danish Association of Pupils visits Main Street Middle School in Montpelier.

## Connections in All Directions

UP for Learning director **Mary Whalen** and assistant director **Erin Dezell** presented UP for Learning programs and participated in a panel discussion for Washington County's **2C Community Health Team**. The community group has the long-term goal of increasing the number of students who feel like they matter, as reflected in the YRBS data for Washington County.

Erin, along with a student team from Montpelier Main Street Middle School, presented at the 8th Annual **Conference of the Vermont Middle Grades Collaborative**. The group conducted an interactive workshop about the Getting to 'Y' initiative to a packed room of 40 middle school students and adults.

The UVM 2015 graduate **Mixed Methods Research course**, taught by Dr. Bernice Garnett, Professor, College of Education and Social Services, hosted a presentation by Mary Whalen, Helen Beattie, Asah Whalen and Finn Kane.

Helen Beattie and Peter Evans, along with the Colchester School Communicating School Redesign team, presented at Dr. Claudine Bedell's **St. Michael's College graduate class in education** on Personalized Learning Plans for students.

**The Danish Association of Pupils**, a non-government organization dedicated to increasing student engagement

and democratic education, came to tour Vermont. UP for Learning helped facilitate a visit to the Montpelier **Main Street Middle School**, where student ambassadors reflected on their experience with the Getting to 'Y' initiative. The visiting group also sat in on School Innovation Seminar, a class at **Burlington High School**.

This spring Mary, Erin, and YATST consultant Bruce Perlow attended the **New England Secondary Schools Consortium's annual conference**, High School Redesign in Action. "The NESSC conference is a wonderful opportunity to explore what schools across New England are doing to transform education and students' educational experiences," Bruce reflected. "It also provides the opportunity to connect with educators and students, and discuss their work and visions."

In late May, a small Communicating School Redesign (CSR) team was invited to present at the **10th Annual Transition & Career Planning Conference**, sponsored by Vermont Student Assistance Corporation. The local news station, WCAX, interviewed the student member of the team, Alexa Widschwenter (right). She was one of a handful of high school students





at the conference — out of 300 participants! To watch the interview, check out the UP for Learning blog.



Clara Lew Smith and Dylan McAllister (left) co-presented two “Student Voice” workshops with Sally McCarthy and Helen Beattie at the AOE **Proficiency-based Learning Conference** June 2 at Castleton State College.

Over the past several years UP has worked with Catharine Biddle Ph.D, to complete evaluations of several of UP’s initiatives. Recently Cat has been awarded her doctorate from **Pennsylvania State University** and will be a faculty member at the **University of Maine**. She has already booked a Skype conference with UP participants for her fall graduate class.



## UPcoming Events

**Communicating School Redesign (CSR)**

**CSR Class Kick-Off,** Thursday, September 17

**CSR Strategic Framing Introduction,** Friday, September 18

**CSR Class,** Thursday, October 15

**CSR Facilitator Training,** Friday, November 13

**CSR Studio Days,** Wednesday, January 27 & Thursday, March 10

**CSR Legislative Day,** Thursday, April 7

**Getting to ‘Y’ (GTY)**

**GTY Middle School Training,** Thursday, October 1

**GTY High School Training,** Wednesday, October 7

**M<sup>3</sup>: Exploring Mindset, Metacognition & Motivation**

**M<sup>3</sup> Northern Training,** Tuesday, October 13

**M<sup>3</sup> Southern Training,** Tuesday, October 20

**Youth & Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST)**

**YATST Orientation Overnight,** Friday, October 2 & Saturday October 3

**UP/YATST Northern Facilitation Training,** Thursday, February 11

**UP/YATST Southern Facilitation Training,** Friday, February 12

**Design Day,** Wednesday, March 30

## Thank You, Morgan!

Four short years ago a young Morgan MacIver decided to attend the Twinfield Union Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together summer retreat at Lyndon State College, having recently graduated from middle school. Her poise, commitment and wisdom was readily evident then, and has only grown over time as she has invested in school improvement at Twinfield and contributed to statewide policy development on the Vermont State School Board.



Morgan has co-facilitated countless retreats and facilitation trainings, encouraging others to believe in themselves and to invest in shaping their world for the better through both her words and example. We are grateful for all her contributions to building a richer vision of the power of youth-adult partnership during her tenure with UP for Learning and wish her the best in this next chapter of her life.



Fayston and Moretown student leaders.

## Elementary & Middle School UPdates

**T**he **Fayston and Moretown Schools** have been engaged with developing a school improvement plan that places the partnership of students and adults at its center. The “School as Subject” project was initiated by the idea that student voice and action are essential for any school improvement plan. The Vermont Rural Partnership and UP for Learning Director Mary Whalen both supported this initiative.

At the core of the plan were two teams of student leaders from each school. Trained and readied for their work, both teams embarked on a journey that would yield significant changes to their school climate and even the way they learned. Their plan included four main process steps that would allow them to tap key stakeholder voices from within their own schools. In step one, both school teams were trained to be data miners/explorers within their own and another school’s data. Step two included developing and distributing a survey that elicited information from the school stakeholders — their classmates. In step three, each team analyzed and prioritized their survey results as these pertained to possible action steps that could benefit their school. Step Four included the visitation of other schools where the student teams’ investigative skills would be put to use to examine and identify elements of other schools that could be utilized as inspiration for their own work. Step five: action! This phase brings to life tangible results from action steps that would support the change needs identified through their research work.

Our continued hope is to utilize this process to continuously work to improve our schools as a learning community where the stakeholders hold the opportunity to effect positive change.

The **Twinfield Middle School** Cabinet spent the past school year working on incorporating Restorative Circles into everyday life at Twinfield. Circles are a highly structured intentional space designed to promote connection, understanding and dialogue in a group. They build relationships, establish norms, and help people work through differences. Our plan of action came from our Getting to ‘Y’ data analysis process, focusing on the percentage of students in Twinfield and Cabot middle schools who had been in a physical fight while at school. Our goal was to cultivate a safe environment at our school, that promotes communication and peaceful conflict resolution. The eight students and two adult members of the TUS Middle School Cabinet organized a Restorative Circle full-day training off campus in March. We also invited other stakeholders from grades 5–8 to the training. This included teachers, behavior specialists and more students of course. At the beginning of May we presented the principles of Restorative Circles to all students and staff in grades 5–8, followed by six student led Restorative Circles to model how a Circle works. Over the past few months we have seen Restorative Circles being utilized in classrooms (high school, too!), TAs, and by the student council in grades 5 and 6. This has been our most successful action plan and we’re thrilled by the enthusiasm from our school community to implement Restorative Circles.



The Blue Mountain Union YATST team.

# YATST School Updates

*Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST) is a network of youth and adult teams committed to building school communities in which learning is engaging for everyone and students are fully empowered. These end of year Updates have been written by YATST teams.*

## **Blue Mountain Union School**

It's been an exciting year at Blue Mountain Union as we continue to develop the strength of our youth/adult partnerships and implement positive changes in school culture and climate. We've been thrilled to see projects undertaken last year come to fruition in the 2014–15 school year. Our 1:1 technology program is underway, our advisory system is evolving to keep pace with Act 77, our attendance policy reflects student needs, our locker rooms are sparkling and reflect the pride we have in our athletic teams, and our students enjoy the new "Grab and Go" snack daily.

This year has been as full as the last, with a number of positive state-wide connections made and projects accomplished or underway. As a kick-off to our year, we were pleased to host the Otter Valley YATST team for group-building ac-

tivities, a student/faculty panel discussion about advisories, and a banquet-style lunch for both teams. At the request of our administration, our team also prepared and implemented a highly successful anti-bullying workshop with all students in grades 7 and 8 that promoted strategies for increasing kindness and equity in our interactions with others. Two of our students received school board approval for a change in policy that, beginning in September 2015, will allow juniors and seniors to receive credit for physical education classes. Another student has partnered successfully with faculty to work on designing a new, two-week January Term for the 2016 school year that will provide learning opportunities that extend well beyond the classroom.

In addition, the Blue Mountain YATST team was hosted by Burlington High School students in their school re-design course. We toured the school, shared lunch outdoors, and participated in a student-directed tuning protocol for the project work of both teams. We also visited the I-Lab at Winooski High School and Big Picture at South Burlington High School as part of our PLP and PBGR action research.

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# YATST School Updates

◀ *continued from page 11*

One member of our team wrapped up our activities for the year with a data gathering assembly for grades 8, 9, and 10. The assembly provided an overview of our team's work to date and utilized chalk talks to generate student feedback. We will be using the results of this data to identify trending areas of student concerns as we seek to develop responsive, relevant projects for the coming school year.

## **Burlington High School: School Innovation Seminar**

2014-15 was the second year of BHS' School Innovation Seminar, a year-long multi-disciplinary elective class designed to engage students in the work of school transformation. This year, our student group was smaller in numbers, but no less full of diverse perspectives and powerful insights.

The core content of the course offered a chance for students to explore brain-science, conditions-for-learning, motivation and mindset, school organization, assessment and proficiency, and authenticity/audience/impact. However, similar to last year, these topics were only one element of the course. And while studying "school itself" is something few learners have had a chance to do, it is really the other elements of SIS that make it unique. Some of these include: A series of "Student Consultancies," in which professional educators brought dilemmas to SIS students, who offered their insight and wisdom. Among other things, our students were able to have a significant impact on the BSD's Superintendent search, as well as the design of BHS' Advisory Program; independent inquiry-based learning projects, inspired by students' natural curiosity, and connected later on to opportunities for authentic impact; a permeable design, allowing for partnerships with dozens of community-members (e.g., guest-facilitators, research partners, consultees, etc.), which helped blur the boundaries between school and "the world."

Another great asset that we built on this year was our ongoing collaboration with YATST/UP for Learning. First, four SIS students were actively involved in the design, planning, and implementation of April's Power2 Summit. This was a powerful opportunity to experience youth-adult-partnership in action. Our group also corresponded with--and subsequently hosted--the YATST group from Blue Mountain Union. This was a great opportunity to share and offer feedback on our respective projects, and to build solidarity

with friends from across the state. Overall, we are thrilled to have seen our students respond so readily to a learning environment that honors curiosity and connection--and offers such immediacy and purpose. We're excited, too, about connecting with other schools doing similar work. Don't be strangers, folks! We'd love to be in touch.

## **Green Mountain Union School**

As I write this summary, we are madly preparing for an exhibition night in our school. Earlier this year, we finished our survey and looked at the results. We chose some interesting data to bring back to teachers and students to get their input on what they thought was happening. We've recently summarized the chalk talk conversations and will share those with families and community visitors at the exhibition tomorrow night. We are also asking for their thoughts on

our data. The information is fascinating.

What's coming up for us seems to be an awareness in the ways that teachers and students talk to one another. Each one is not quite sure what the other means or makes assumptions. Students think

teachers don't like them because they give them bad grades, and teachers assume some of the kids are goofing off because they don't care about learning. It seems like most people in our school do care about learning, but we are misreading each others' signals. We are starting to have some pretty rich conversations in YATST.

We have a long way to go, but we are getting there. We feel like we are making a difference.

## **Harwood Union School**

YATST collaborated with the Communicating School Redesign (CSR) class to bring about an all-school dialogue. Almost 40 youth and adults were trained in facilitation techniques to lead the dialogue with the support of Daniel Baron and UP for Learning. Dialogue was guided by the comparative results of the youth and adult surveys conducted two years ago. The dialogue included grades 7-11 with volunteer participation of seniors. Dialogue culminated in action step



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# YATST School Updates

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suggestions to respond to the disparities in the data. YATST is reviewing the action steps they would like to take on for next year's work.

## Hazen Union School

This year the Hazen YATST team focused on strengthening our Teacher Student Advisory (TSA) program. Each high school TSA had a representative who attended a monthly session. These sessions were led by members of YATST. TSA representatives participated in activities and learned facilitation skills so they could return to their TSA and, in partnership with their teacher, lead an activity and discussion on school redesign. Topics included Mindset, Why Schools Need to Change, Act 77, and Personal Learning Plans. Next year YATST plans to continue to strengthen communication and our advisory program and to extend their work to the Hazen middle level advisory program, too.

## Mill River School

The YATST team at Mill River analyzed a lot of data this year! We worked with data from our schoolwide YATST survey, choosing some focus points as a group on which to base our future action plan, then later facilitated discussions with faculty around the data and its implications. MR YATST also spent time analyzing data from the End of Course survey that was given (for the first time) last year to students in all of their courses. The course survey was part of the implementation of the action plan written in 2014 which focused on relationships within the school. We analyzed the data, revised the survey, and had students take it again this year, giving faculty personal feedback about student experiences in their class.

## Otter Valley Union School

The Otter Valley YATST classes had an eventful and productive year in 2014-15. Chas Hall became our new YATST advisor, and together we started the year by plunging into



the data we generated with our school culture survey from the last year. We used this data as well as other supporting evidence to promote the creation of an advisory program here at OV. Our YATST team also created a student survey on advisories to help ensure that student voice was a major component in shaping our new Advisory program. The idea eventually went into a planning phase with the creation of a dual-enrollment course created through Castleton State College in which teachers, administrators and students partnered to create the foundation of

what our advisory program will be. YATST students Chloe Speyers, Charlotte Winslow, Courtney Randall and Chrissy Wiles participated in this break-through experience. We are thrilled to report that OV will have an advisory program for all students in grades 7-12 starting next year!

Other accomplishments for this year include the creation of the Otter Pups Program, a mentoring program where high school students plan lessons and activities for elementary students in our district's elementary schools. This year we visited the Leicester School, the Whiting School, Sudbury Elementary, and Neshobe Elementary. The program was a huge success with the high school students and well as the elementary students and teachers. We look forward to continuing to expand this program next year. We are also looking forward to continuing to supporting the implementation of advisories and learning more about proficiency-based learning and teacher feedback models.

## U-32 High School

U-32 YATSTers engaged the entire student body this spring as they facilitated assemblies for all students and educators to formally introduce the mission and focus of YATST, en-

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gage students in valuable discussion and dialogue, and poll students for live data on a variety of questions. The assemblies were so well received and drummed up new YATST members passionate about our work! We have a lot on deck for next year. We will analyze our survey data at the start of next year to guide our work. We are also talking with our Director of Curriculum about student representation on our curriculum steering committees to ensure that students have the opportunity to engage in meaningful adult and student partnerships that influence curriculum and assessment work throughout Washington Central Supervisory Union. We've laid a strong foundation for next year and can't wait to get back to work together!

### **Williamstown High School**

The Williamstown Middle High School YATST team moved forward with their action plan this year by presenting the results of the climate survey in two forums. First, YATST representatives held a faculty meeting for the adults in our building by creating diagrams from the results to share with the faculty. It was opened up to a group discussion around gaps and strengths. The YATST representatives recorded the feedback to bring back to the YATST team

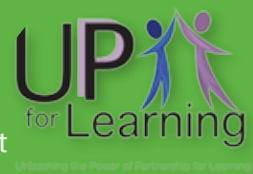
for discussion on how to proceed in the future. Second, the YATST team held class meetings with each class and had YATST representatives for each class presentation. Again, the YATST representatives shared the results in diagrams to facilitate their discussions around gaps and strengths. The YATST representatives recorded the feedback at each meeting to bring it back to the YATST team for a discussion on how to proceed in the future.

As a result of the feedback from the dialogue and YATST team analysis, next year's work will be to meet as a group to create a teacher feedback form. This is a practical way to inform the teachers on their instruction to decrease some of these gaps and enhance their strengths. This also empowers student voice to build relationships around rigor and relevance in our daily work. As a part of this work next year we would like to put on a workshop for our students on "How to give constructive feedback on a teacher feedback form" and talk with the teachers on the importance of implementing this as a regular practice for Williamstown Middle High School. We are excited about this work and are looking forward to continuing this for the betterment of our school and community.

### **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 information about UP for Learning, go to [upforlearning.com](http://upforlearning.com) or contact Executive Director Helen Beattie at [helen@upforlearning.com](mailto:helen@upforlearning.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.

*I believe that all of the schools that are present are innovative or they would not be willing to partake in this work. What is exciting about that is the opportunity to learn from each other.*

—guidance counselor and Communicating School Redesign team member