



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS ABOUT EDUCATION

FROM BIRTH THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

Across America and here in Connecticut, citizens engage in lively discussions about education. There is common agreement that changes need to be made to prepare upcoming generations of citizens for the world around them. What these changes should be is the subject of spirited debate.

How can the quality of education debate be improved? How can these discussions be made more civil with a richer exchange of ideas among participants? How can the dialogue be more inclusive?

Community Conversations About Education offer an opportunity for communities to come together for dialogue and deliberation about significant educational issues. *How can we make sure all children arrive at school ready to learn? How do we get more parents involved? What standards should our schools set? How do we deal with bullying? How can we best use limited funds to support our schools?* Communities must consider such questions every day.

In over 100 Connecticut cities and towns, Conversations have helped citizens to engage in productive dialogue about local educational issues. According to David Nee, Executive Director of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, "Community Conversations have helped communities identify key issues and build local action plans."

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

Initial grants of up to \$2,500 for communities to host conversations on topics relevant to education.

Alumni grants of up to \$1,500 for a city or town that has previously held a Community Conversation.

Past Conversations have included topics such as:

Parental Involvement

Early Literacy

School Readiness

Purposes of Education

Racial Rebalancing

Helping All Students Succeed in a Diverse Society

Early Learning and Care

The No Child Left Behind Act

Bullying

Student Dress Codes

Making Standards Work

Creating a Formula for Success

School/Family/Community Partnerships

Education for Sustainable Development

Gay/Lesbian/Bi/Transsexual Youth

School Safety

Support materials are available to kick-off discussions about many of the above topics. Conversations staff are happy to help customize materials to support locally determined issues about education. Spanish language videos and guides are available for several topics.

THE GOALS

Community Conversations...

- Give participants an opportunity to speak openly about critical education issues.
- Bring together diverse groups of people to share thoughts and opinions.
- Help participants find common ground.
- Help to identify concerns and questions.
- Lead to shared perspectives and insights that generate new approaches to tough local issues.
- Develop options to move forward to action

THE PROCESS

- A local working group agrees to organize a planning team of 15-20 representatives.
- The planning team invites a diverse cross-section of 100+ local residents to attend.
- Conversation participants share a light meal and a general session before dividing into small groups.
- In small groups, all participants have an equal voice.
- Trained local moderators facilitate the small group discussion.
- Recorders take notes on flip charts to capture the essence of the dialogue. Notes are posted for comments and corrections.
- The notes serve as the basis for a report shared with participants, school boards and administrators, the media, and local government officials.
- Participants generate ideas for next steps and action plans.

HOW TO APPLY

The full application, guidelines, and deadline dates are available on our Web site:

www.ctconversations.org or at

Community Mediation

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For more information, please contact:

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**William Caspar Graustein
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<http://www.wcgmf.org>