

As part of the federal Head Start reauthorization signed in December 2007, Head Start providers were asked to publicly share information on funding, enrollment, education and support services. These pages provide a snapshot of CRT's Early Care and Education Programs, which CRT supports with funding from many sources including federal and state Head Start, School Readiness from the City of Hartford; child care from the Department of Social Services, and more. This report also reflects some of the work that is done by our delegate agencies in Bristol and East Hartford, which serve 290 children in their Head Start programs.

OFF TO KINDERGARTEN

To ensure that children are off to a great academic start in kindergarten and beyond, CRT uses the research-based Creative Curriculum in all ECE classes, and provides extensive training for all staff members. The curriculum meets the standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Connecticut Department of Education's Benchmark Standards.

Following the Head Start Performance Standards, CRT ensures that all children going to kindergarten know how to write their names, know at least ten letters of the alphabet, and are able to count to 10. For the last two years, CRT's Transition Services have provided parents with a simple and colorful checklist to help them keep track of the required pre-kindergarten skills that their children had mastered.

For 2009-2010, CRT had 490 children making the transition into kindergarten, with registration processes varying among all six of the communities the Agency serves: Bloomfield, Clinton, Hartford, Middletown, Portland and Windsor. Transition Services provides a memo to each family, detailing the immunization requirements, registration and screening dates, and required documentation for their community.

The process is particularly complicated in the city of Hartford, which is an all-choice system that includes neighborhood schools, magnet schools operated by the Board of Education, magnet schools operated by a private organization, and spaces in participating suburban schools. CRT holds Kindergarten Information Fairs so that parents can learn about the various options, and conducts center-based Application Days where staff help parents review transportation rules and after-school options, then complete their on-line applications. For many of the families, CRT's assistance is crucial because they do not have internet access at home, or are confused by elements of the Choice Lottery system.

Once a child is enrolled in a school, ECE staff sends the Pre-Kindergarten Report Card to the elementary school, where it will be reviewed by kindergarten teachers before the children start school in the fall. Children with special needs have a Transitional PPT (Pupil Placement Team) prior to entering kindergarten, which will include parents, the CRT teacher and Special Needs Facilitator, and the Board of Education staff. CRT makes every effort to ensure that the transition goes smoothly for all of the children leaving an Early Care and Education Center.



COMMUNITY RENEWAL TEAM, INC. 555 Windsor Street, Hartford CT 06120. www.crtct.org



COMMUNITY
RENEWAL TEAM'S

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

A Great Start on a Lifetime of Learning



JANUARY 2011

AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE

High quality, affordable Early Care and Education is one of the best investments that a community can make in its own future. Each dollar invested in preschool services yields nearly \$19 in benefits over the subsequent two decades, according to research prepared by the Connecticut Commission on Children.

These benefits are shared across the generations: Children acquire both the academic and the social-emotional preparation they need to be successful in school, and to move on into productive adult lives. With dependable childcare, parents' engagement in the workforce increases and household income grows. Taken together, these factors result in significant long term community savings in many areas, including education, law enforcement, health care and public assistance.

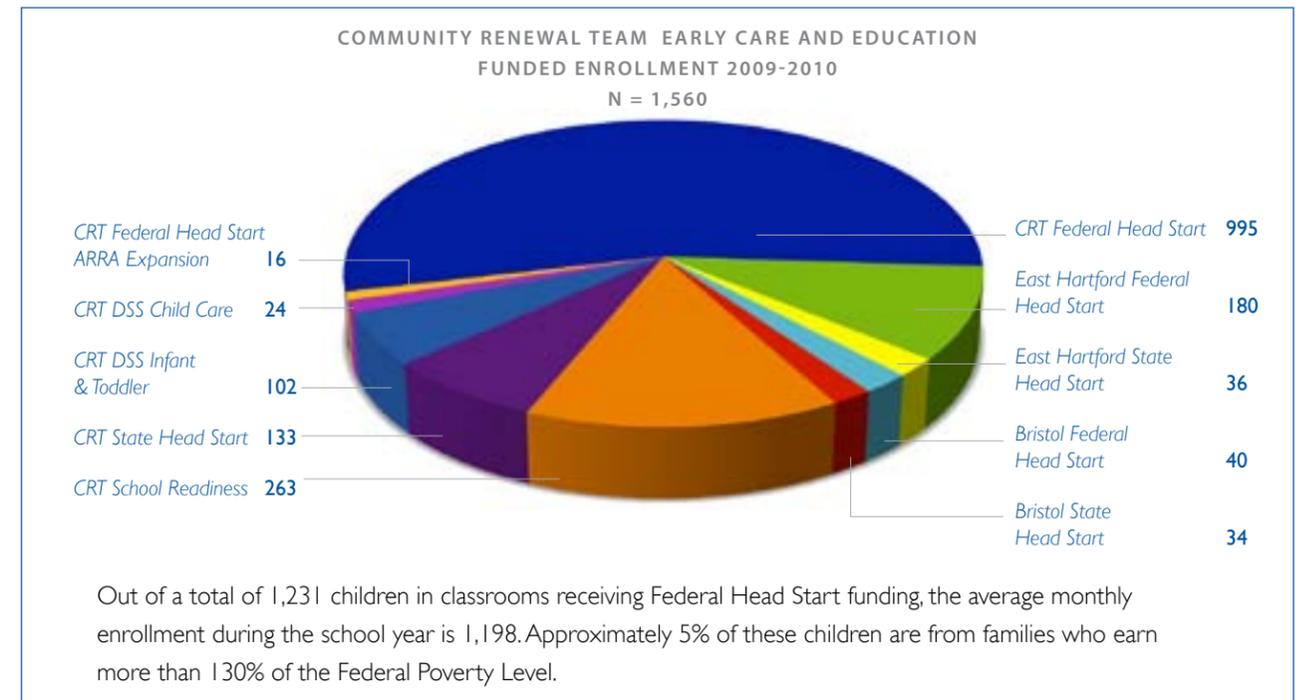
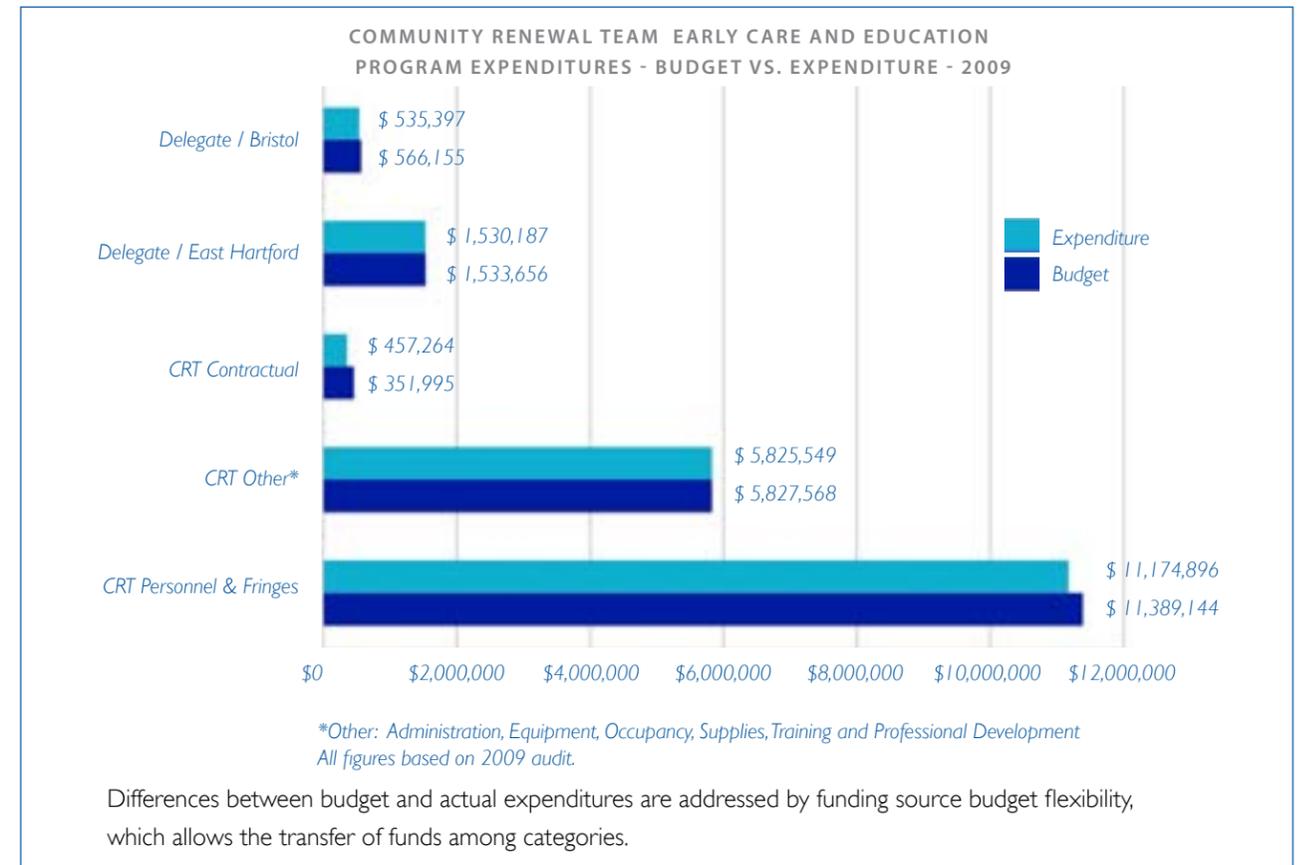
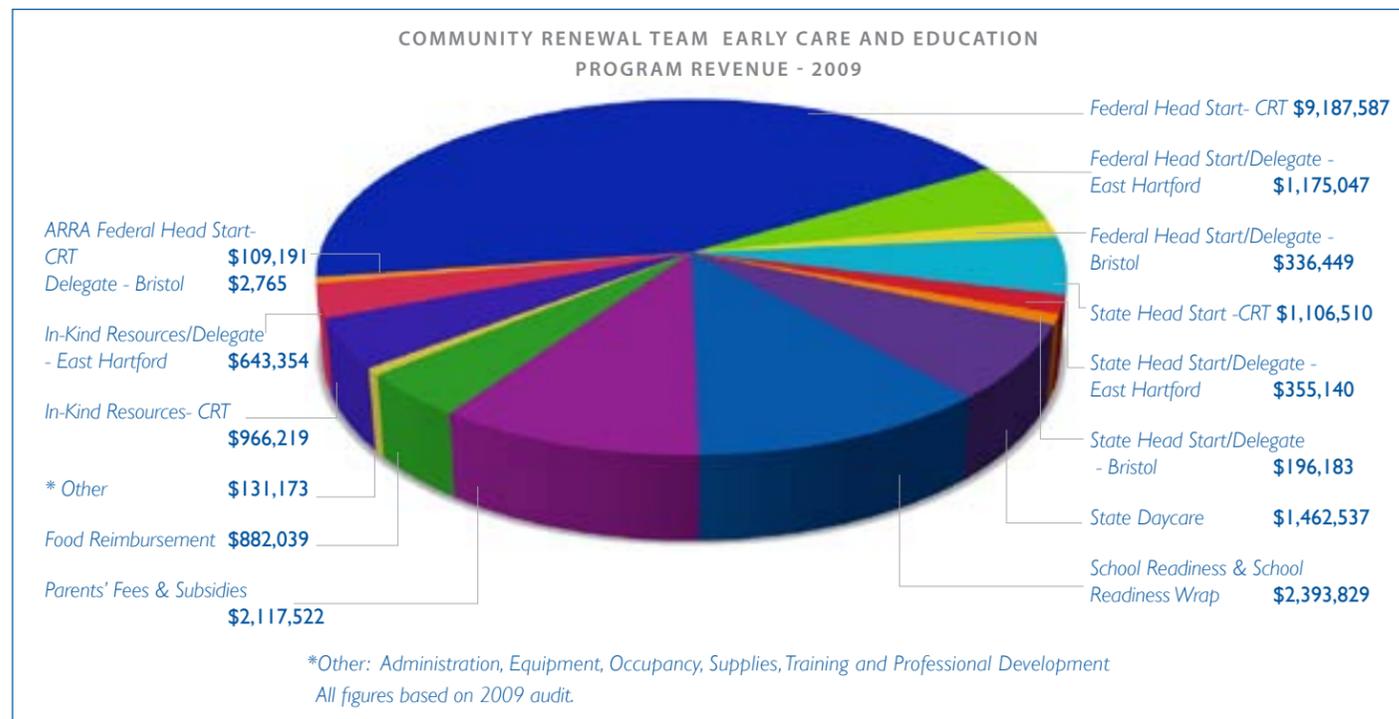
The Community Renewal Team has been providing this type of quality Early Care and Education for more than 40 years. The Agency was in the first pilot for the Head Start program, which was developed by a team from Yale University.

From that small pilot, CRT's early childhood programs have grown to serve more than 1,600 children annually in 98

classrooms in Hartford, Middletown, Bloomfield, Windsor, Portland, Clinton, Bristol and East Hartford. These children and their families benefit from a multi-dimensional program that includes:

- **Effective education using a proven curriculum**
- **Free nutritious meals**
- **Dental, hearing and vision screening**
- **Services for children with special needs, including mental health, behavior, disabilities and medical consultation**
- **Intergenerational literacy activities**
- **Family advocacy and case management**
- **Access to a broad variety of community-based resources**
- **Parents' governance and leadership training**
- **Programming tailored to families' concerns**

The confidence shown by our funders, our families and our communities is evidenced in the revenue chart, shown below.



ENGAGING PARENTS

CRT's Locust Street Early Care and Education Center in Hartford was selected as one of just ten centers nationwide to receive distinction as an Engaging Diverse Families exemplary program by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) – the nation's leading organization of early childhood professionals.

Nationally, some 120,000 Head Start and ECE Centers serve more than 11 million children. The Engaging Diverse Families honor denotes that the 368 children served at Locust Street have a major leg up in lifelong learning by attending a center that excels in encouraging parent participation in learning both inside and outside the classroom, a major indicator of future education success.

"We have an open-door policy with our parents. They are welcome at any time to join us in the classroom to observe or join in and learn along with us," says Locust Street Unit Manager Elizabeth Mosquera.

The goal of the Engaging Diverse Families project is to learn how excellent early childhood programs are effectively engaging diverse families and to share what is learned with other programs struggling to start and sustain family engagement practices. The Engaging Families project manager at NAEYC will spend a year reviewing the submissions from award winning programs, make several site visits, and publish a "best practices" guide for other centers.

The Locust Street Center, which is also among just 10% of centers nationally to hold NAEYC accreditation, has achieved remarkable levels of family engagement, as demonstrated in the following statistics:

- **More than 90% of parents indicated on a survey that they regularly see communication from the school, and that it is in a form that is useful to them. Monthly communication is sent home in the parents' preferred language (primarily English and Spanish, with some Portuguese).**
- **100% of families participated in the Parent-Teacher Conferences in December 2009 and May 2010.**
- **Approximately 10% of families attend monthly Parent Committee Meetings, which are the local governance of each CRT ECE Center.**

- **More than half of all Locust Street parents volunteered in their children's classrooms during the 2009-10 school year; in many cases they have used their lunch hours, or have rearranged their working hours to do this.**
- **Center-wide activities, including a Social-Emotional Day, Multi-Cultural Day, Science Fair, Arts Exploration and more, attract between one-fourth and one-third of parents.**
- **Literacy activities attracted more than 200 parents in 2009-10. Some of these were individual read-aloud events, but one was a book club that met for eight successive weeks.**

Several members of CRT's ECE staff traveled to Arizona to accept the award at the National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development Conference in June. Locust Street children, staff and families celebrated the honor with a multicultural event at the center.

CRT's Grace Street Center in Hartford also celebrated receiving NAEYC accreditation in 2010, meaning all eligible preschools operated by CRT are now NAEYC-accredited. CRT centers have received scores of 100 percent on most accreditation guidelines, including encouraging positive relationships, evidence of strong curriculum, teaching, leadership and assessment as well as building healthy families, environments and communities. In some cases, the scores were actually 100+, meaning that the center met the standards that are being proposed for the future, as well as those the current rubric by which centers are measured at this time.

"In the 25 years since NAEYC Accreditation was established, it has become a widely recognized sign of high-quality early childhood education," said Maril Olson, NAEYC Director of Family & Community Initiatives.

Parent Survey is Revealing

In May 2010, CRT distributed a Parent Survey in English and Spanish to 1,011 families who have children enrolled in a Head Start-funded classroom. Participation in the survey was very high, with 88% of the surveys returned to the children's centers, indicating an exceptionally high level of parent interest and involvement.

AND DIVERSE FAMILIES

Almost all of the parents said that they regularly receive flyers and newsletters with monthly calendars in a language and format that they can understand; that they had received and reviewed a Parent Handbook; and that they had participated in Parent-Teacher Conferences and home visits with staff.

Workshops and Activities Involve Parents

For two years, CRT has offered PACT – or Parents and Children Together – in many classrooms. Every month, parents are invited into the classroom as participants, rather than as observers. PACT activities assist adults in affirming, discovering, and expanding their parenting skills; give them time to read, sing or do crafts with their children; and see themselves as teachers in their families. The classroom teachers facilitate the activities, and help parents overcome their reluctance to follow their children's lead in play, while guiding the child's learning activities. Parents' feedback has been very positive on these and other classroom participation opportunities.

Parents' workshops are planned based on ideas generated at the center-level by the Parents Committee, or needs and concerns that are brought to the attention of classroom staff or ECE specialists. A ten-week course called The ABC's of Parenting met at the Douglas Street Center for two hours every Wednesday morning, attracting a steady core group of ten participants.

Every month, CRT's centers are also providing single-session workshops on a wide variety of topics. Here are some of the most popular ones that were offered during the 2009-2010 school year:

- **Recognizing and Preventing Child Abuse – Children's Trust Fund and CRT Staff**
- **Employment services – Urban League**
- **Getting a Child Ready for Kindergarten – Achieve Hartford**
- **Understanding Special Education - Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities.**
- **Credit Counseling, Budgeting – CRT Financial Literacy Team**
- **Preventing Lead Poisoning – CRT Health Staff**
- **Children's Nutrition – WIC Program of Hartford**
- **Immigration Support Group – Ongoing at the ECE program in Clinton**
- **Supermarket Smarts, Food Pyramid for Preschoolers, Cook Right/Eat Right – University of Connecticut School of Allied Health, Dietetics Program**
- **Know Your Rights - Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund**



Teacher Silvana Carreon leads a group of children in a Multi-Cultural Parade at the Locust Street Early Care and Education Center in Hartford.

KEEPING CHILDREN HEALTHY AND SAFE

Before beginning the basics of learning, a child needs the basics of safety and health. In the 2009-2010 school year, every child in a Community Renewal Team Early Care and Education Center received a physical exam and established a relationship with a pediatric or family practice – a medical home.

But CRT's early childhood programs go far beyond the basics to provide holistic physical, mental, nutritional and social wellness for young children and their families. In this way, CRT ensures that every child, in every CRT center, is embarking on a safe and healthy lifetime of learning.

Finding a Way to Serve Every Child

When Chayce Gordon's parents wanted to enroll him at CRT's NAEYC-accredited Thomas D. Ritter ECE Center, they faced challenges. Challenges aren't anything new to Chayce, who has had to use a feeding tube since birth. His parents wanted him to enjoy a full preschool experience, and they believed that the CRT center was the right place, but getting all of the required documentation from Chayce's multi-physician care team was a struggle.

"We were at a stand still because we didn't know what the exact needs of the child were," said Kittie Spedding, MS, RD, CD-N, CRT's Health and Nutrition Manager.

Working closely with Chayce's mother, CRT's ECE health staff drew on their community contacts and referred the family to the Special Kids Support Center at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center (CCMC), which works with medically-complex children. With CCMC's help, Chayce was enrolled in school and staff were trained on how to meet his needs, keeping him healthy and safe. His parents and teachers report that Chayce is a happy little boy who excels in the classroom and has made many friends. "The other children in the classroom also have adapted well to Chayce and help him around the classroom," Spedding said. Since they can depend

upon the care he receives, both of Chayce's parents have been able to maintain their jobs.

Chayce's special needs are unique, but the need for special medical care among CRT's ECE families is not. Thirty-seven percent of the children in CRT classrooms entered the program with medical conditions, ranging from seizures to severe food allergies, asthma, ADHD, eczema, heart murmurs, Spina Bifida, shunts for hydrocephalus, nursemaids elbow, G6PD deficiency and sickle cell anemia.

The work of CRT's nine full-time and two part-time health and nutrition staff paid off for those children and others, achieving the following outcomes:

- 100% of children received a physical exam.
- 100% of children had a medical home, meaning a pediatric or family practice to which they went regularly for care.

- 94% were tested for hearing, vision, TB, lead and hemoglobin.
- 93% received a dental screening.
- Of the children requiring follow-up dental treatment (19%), 90% had received it by the end of the year.
- 94% of children secured a dental home, up from 57% at the start of the year.
- 100% of classrooms received age-appropriate presentations on child sexual abuse.
- 100% of classrooms participated in special programming for National Nutrition Month.

Abuse and Bullying Prevention

CRT provided child abuse prevention education, including safe-touch presentations and adult programs on identifying and reacting appropriately to child sexual abuse, for every ECE family. The major focus occurred during April, recognized as National Child Abuse Prevention Month. CRT Mental Health/Disability Manager Bethanne Vergean reached out to state and local legislators, educators, families and one best-selling children's author to reinforce the message that children's bodies belong only to them. Author and social worker Cornelia Maude

Spelman led 45 visitors, including State Child Advocate Jeanne Milstein and Assistant State's Attorney Gail Hardy, in reading her book "Your Body Belongs to You" at 18 CRT centers. Throughout the month, all of CRT's ECE Centers decorated bulletin boards with pinwheels, the symbol of child abuse awareness, and several centers created beautiful pinwheel gardens. For her role in organizing this event and

Children's author Cornelia Maude Spelman reads her book, "Your Body Belongs to You" at CRT's Douglas Street ECE as part of Child Abuse Prevention Month in April.



other child abuse prevention programming, Vergean was honored by the Aetna Foundation and the Hartford Multi Disciplinary Group with the "Child First Award."

CRT also initiated "Building Empathy and Fostering Positive Interactions," an anti-bullying program, in all classrooms. The program's purpose is to educate children, teachers and parents on having a positive school climate, how bullying and meanness can affect a child at any age and how mean-spirited behaviors can affect children physically, emotionally and intellectually.

Nutritional Guidance

In addition to its successful Head Start-mandated Health Advisory Committee, CRT recognized a desire among ECE families to become more involved with guiding the nutritional and physical activity programming at centers. To fill that gap, CRT instituted the ECE Wellness Committee in 2009-2010. The committee gathers parents and staff together to develop, implement, monitor, and improve nutrition and physical activity policies and practices, ensuring all classrooms provide consistent positive messages around nutrition and physical activity to students and parents. Meetings thus far have reviewed evidence-based literature on childhood obesity to determine a baseline of information from which to act, and have modified the ECE Celebration Policy to encourage parents to bring in healthier options instead of cupcakes and chips.

To further encourage proper nutrition for ECE families, all CRT classrooms observed National Nutrition Month with healthy food activities, preparation and snacks, as well as special presentations for parents led through a partnership with the University of Connecticut Dietetics Department. During the month of March 2010, UConn students came to all 18 centers and held parent meetings that tied to nutrition themes covered concurrently in classrooms with children. More than 175 parents attended the meetings and had the opportunity to implement in the home alongside their children what they had learned.



Nutrition month: Hannah Barros, daughter of Crystal and John Barros and Nicolas Tarres-Fuentes, son of Lorena Tarres, enjoy making and eating spinach-turkey wraps as part of National Nutrition Month at the CRT Center in Clinton.