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STAFFORD ADMINISTRATOR NAMED CONNECTICUT'S 2009 NDP



DR. MARCIA ELLIOTT
CT's 2009 National
Distinguished Principal

Congratulations to **Dr. Marcia Elliott**, principal of West Stafford School in Stafford Springs, who was named *Connecticut's 2009 National Distinguished Principal*. She was nominated for the award by her colleague, Francis Kennedy, principal of Stafford High School.

Marcia earned a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from Manhattanville College

in New York and a master of arts and doctorate of education degree from the University of Connecticut. She has served the Stafford Public Schools since 1999 when she joined the district as its director of curriculum and instruction. According to Stafford Elementary School Principal Henry Skala, during her tenure as curriculum director, Marcia "invigorated the district with thoughtful and powerful initiatives" including a reflective, assessment-driven teacher evaluation system which became one of the models used as exemplars in the state. In 2003, Marcia was appointed principal of the then Borough School which served pre-kindergarten through grade three students. In 2007, when the elementary schools in Stafford were reconstituted and Borough School was closed, she assumed her current position as principal of West Stafford School.

Superintendent Dr. Therese Fishman credits Marcia with fostering a vibrant, caring, student-oriented culture where students can grow socially and emotionally as well as academically. "If you visit West Stafford School, you will know immediately that you are in a special place that is warm and nurturing and child-centered," says Fishman. Each day, students are greeted personally by Marcia and by her daily messages which are prominently displayed on a white board in the school entryway. Her messages are always meaningful and directed; and they aim to inspire what Marcia calls "an ethic of care and a zest for learning."

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Marcia Elliott, *continued from page 1*

In her six years as an elementary school principal in Stafford, Marcia has been the driving force behind a number of successful programs. A partnership with the Hanson Initiative for Language and Literacy, which she introduced six years ago, has resulted in significant increases in CMT scores in reading and writing; as chair of the Stafford Early Education Council, she helped ensure the successful integration of the district-funded pre-kindergarten, Head Start, School Readiness and Family Resource Center programs into a seamless system of services for young families in the greater Stafford community; she established a number of activities which promote family literacy including *Raising Reader* workshops, family reading nights, and an at-home reading campaign; she implemented a creative block schedule which facilitates team teaching and differentiated instruction; and, she led her staff through a successful National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation process.

Marcia's successes as an administrator are largely tied to her collaborative approach to building leadership, which involves empowering her staff to be partners in the decision-making process and working side-by-side with them to develop and implement a vision for improved educational opportunities. Elliott has created an atmosphere of collegiality where all stakeholders – teachers, parents, and community members alike – feel valued, appreciated and engaged. Says first grade teacher Brandy Gadoury, "At West Stafford School, every voice counts and is valued."

One of Marcia's many strengths is her focus on data-driven decision making and her ability to use assessment data as a tool to accelerate student learning. She vigilantly keeps abreast of new research and emerging trends in education and is always presenting new information for the staff to consider and digest. Says Fishman, "Marcia is a leader who is always encouraging everyone to strive to continually learn and improve practice and who shows, by example, what that striving looks like."

All who work with Marcia agree that she is a thoroughly unselfish colleague who willingly goes out of her way to provide guidance and assistance to fellow educators. Town of Stafford Selectman Richard Dobson, Sr. describes Elliott as the "epitome of dedication." "She is always willing to share her expertise and time," says Dobson. "She has been a tireless worker seeking to improve the educational system, including the facilities and the programs."

Marcia has won the love and respect of staff, students, parents, and community members alike, all of whom agree that her every action is driven by her desire for improved educational opportunities for her students.

Marcia will be honored by CAS at the "Celebration of Distinguished Administrators" to be held in the fall at Saint Clements Castle in Portland. In October, she will travel to Washington, D.C. to participate in a two-day national recognition event along with National Distinguished Principals from each of the other forty-nine states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands.