

A young boy with a shaved head, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt with white cuffs, is leaning over a table. He is looking intently at a map spread out on the table. His right hand is resting on the map, and his left hand is propped up under his chin. In the background, there is a blue wall with a poster that says "You are about to enter a Learning Zone!" and a window with a white frame.

Witness an online magazine

**A Clear Path**  
Confronting The Education  
Achievement Gap

Text by Ariane Rasmussen  
Photography by Richard Falco

# A Clear Path

## Confronting The Education Achievement Gap

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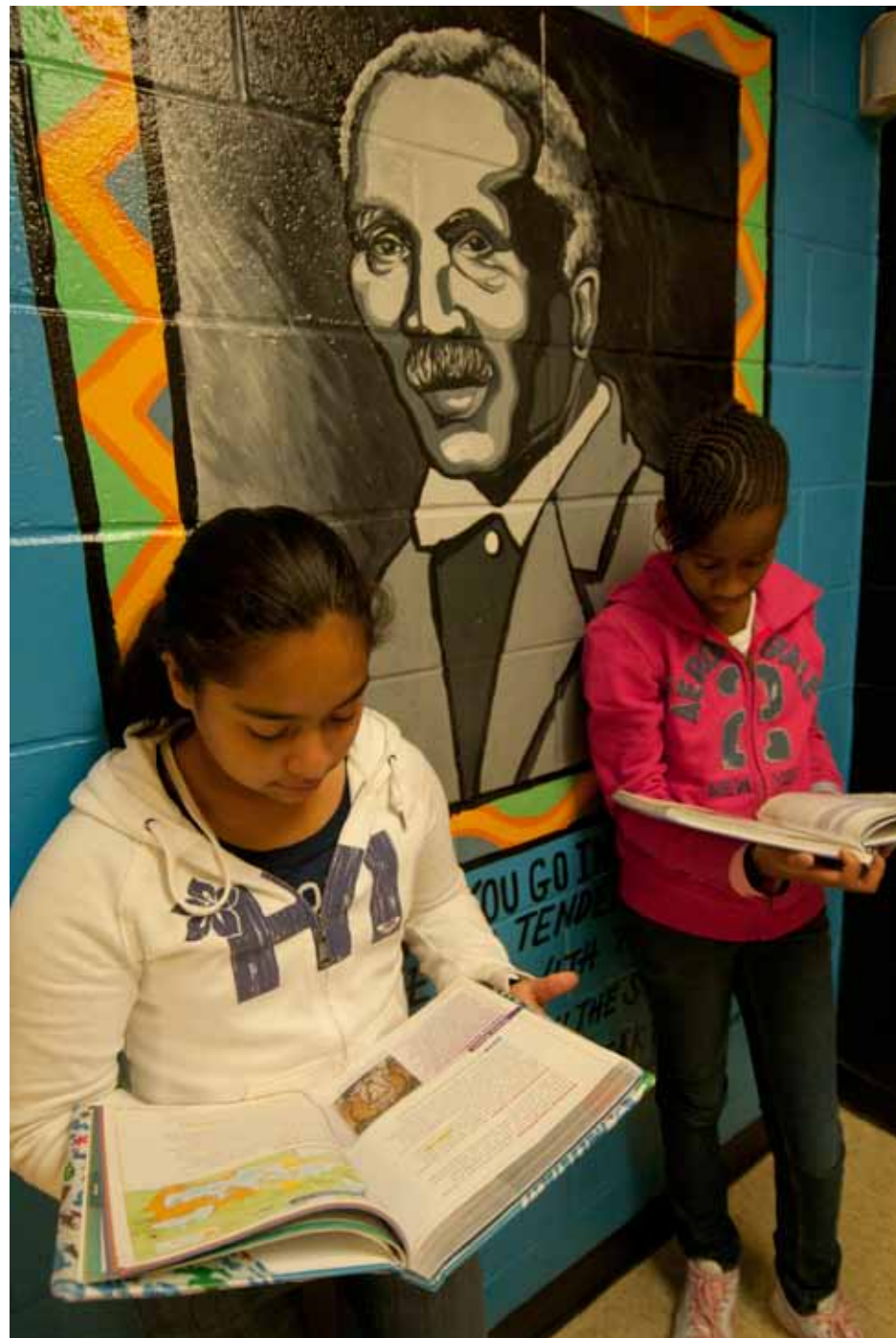
American education is under close scrutiny. Educators often refer to the ever-expanding “achievement gap” as the next important issue that needs to be addressed.

The “achievement gap” is the disparity in school performance between groups of students based on race, gender, and socioeconomic status. The quality of education is measured by a variety of factors, including standardized testing, school dropout rates, and college-enrollment and completion rates.

In the state of Connecticut, the problem is escalating to unprecedented proportions. Recent reports show that Connecticut, made up of some of the wealthiest and poorest areas, has the largest academic achievement gap in the United States. A student’s socioeconomic background plays a big role in that.

After-school programs help address the student-performance problem by supplementing the regular school day with academic support, cultural enrichment, and a safe recreational environment. This is particularly true for individuals and families from low- and middle-income neighborhoods. These programs also help fight crime by keeping kids off the streets and molding them into successful individuals.

“The achievement gap is an opportunity gap,” says Novelette Peterkin, executive director of the George Washington Carver Community Center in Norwalk, Connecticut, an organization that offers after-school and high-impact programs to students who need it. “We have kids that were born into poverty and we’re trying to make sure that they have opportunities and access – that’s my main mission here. A lot of kids will tell you, ‘We just want to have a level playing field.’”



Students read together under a portrait of George Washington Carver at the Carver Center.



Students and staff members participate in a basketball game in the Carver Center gym.

A press release by the Connecticut State Department of Education says, “The achievement gap based on family income is vast and is present in nearly all Connecticut communities.” Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education’s 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that Black and Hispanic minority students are three times as likely to be far behind in Math than White students in Grade 8.

“I think the financial advantages that some children have really helps out, or that some of the children have both parents that come home in the evening and may be able to assist them with their homework. Whereas, with some families, it may be a one-parent home where the parents are really depending on centers like the Carver to help them,” says Renee Cadlett, who does intervention at Columbus Magnet School, Norwalk, and is the head tutor of Carver’s CASPER program.

Time is not the only barrier that parents, students, and educators in the United States face. With such a large population of immigrants, language barriers also contribute to low student-performance rates.



Students at Norwalk High School wait for the afterschool program to begin. The program is coordinated through a collaboration with the Carver Center.

Claribel Cordero, a working parent from Puerto Rico, relies on the Carver Center's after-school program for her 6-year-old son, Kyle. "I get out of work at 4:30, he gets out at 2:40 p.m., so I don't have to be rushing. When I come [to the Carver Center], he got a snack and he got his homework all done," she says. "They are very nice to him. If I need something for Kyle and I say, 'He need reading,' they do it with him."

The income achievement gap is not an isolated problem, but a nationwide one.

Connecticut is among the eight states with the highest household income inequality when compared to the United States as a whole, according to a U.S. Census Bureau report for 2005-2009. The other seven places with the highest disparity in income levels are the District of Columbia, New York, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, and California.

A long-term study released by Stanford University, which analyzed national statistics, concludes that as the income gap between high- and low-income families widens, so does the academic achievement gap between high- and low-income children.

Professor Sean F. Reardon, who led the Stanford study, writes that "family income is now nearly as strong as parental education in predicting children's achievement."

The growing number of states requesting a waiver from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 from the United States Department of Education is another indicator of states' inability to meet the NCLB's academic requirements. In February, Connecticut joined 36 other states and the District of Columbia in applying for this waiver.

"The purpose of the NCLB waiver, in part, is to provide the state with greater flexibility to design a new and improved system of accountability, support, and intervention in schools and districts and to target and repurpose federal funds to meet student needs more effectively. Currently, NCLB places restrictions on the use of federal funding," explains Mark Linabury, communications director of the Connecticut State Department of Education.

About 47 percent of Connecticut's schools did not meet the academic requirements of NCLB for the 2010-2011 school year, according to results based on student performance on the 2011 Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and the 2011 Connecticut Academic Performance Test.



A young offender talks with his probation officer and the Reverend Albert Dancy.

Connecticut Governor Dannel P. Malloy introduced a comprehensive plan to restructure Connecticut's schools in 2012. The strategic reorganization of the State Department of Education was approved by the State Board of Education on January 18, 2012. The changes will be



A young man hangs out at one of Norwalk's Housing Projects. The projects are filled with crime, drugs, and gang activity.

implemented over a period of time to address the widening achievement gap in the state of Connecticut.

“After-school programs are an essential ingredient on the path to helping students with their education. To close the achievement gap, Gov. Malloy has proposed the Commissioner’s network: a system of state supports and interventions to improve chronically low-performing schools,” says Linabury.

A lack of funding has contributed to the deficiencies in schools. “Standardized testing is a reality. Unfortunately, schools are funded through property taxes. People do not want their taxes raised. The schools in Norwalk are becoming more poverty based,” says Dr. Lynne Moore, principal of West Rocks Middle School, Norwalk. “Greater educational time and opportunities must be provided for our students. The City has not financially supported the schools for the past 3 budget years.”



A high school student does his homework at the Carver Center.

The Carver Center has 13 distinct initiatives in the Norwalk public schools. It currently has a budget of \$1,225,148 for all of their after-school and high-initiative programs. That includes their main location, at 7 Academy St. in Norwalk, Connecticut, and their school-base initiatives in Nathan Hale Middle School, PONUS Middle School, Roton Middle School, West Rocks Middle School, Brien McMahon High School, and Norwalk High School.

Carver has partnered with these schools by hiring certified teachers from the school itself for their after-school programs. For 2010-2011, 37 percent of Carver's budget came from grants, 38 percent from contributions, and the rest from a combination of resources.

While working with the schools, Carver found out that many students had not taken the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test PSATs the previous year because they were offered during the weekend for a fee. This made it inaccessible for many kids.

"We learned that out of all the kids who were supposed to take the PSAT, fewer than 500 of them took the PSAT last school year. So we

worked with Dick Whitcomb to raise the money so that every tenth- or eleventh- grade student would take the test in school working with the College Board." Whitcomb is a special advisor and advocate for the Carver Center.

As a result, Carver was able to raise the money to give to the Norwalk Public Schools so that 1,292 students could take the PSATs during regular school hours without paying anything.

"We are focused on the high-impact initiatives that target the different deficiencies that we see, like [our] Algebra and CMT programs," says Peterkin. "But our after-school program is not designed around remediation. It's taking kids no matter which level they are in. It's high-performing kids working with kids that are not at such a high-performing level."

Research by the University of California at Irvine in 2007 shows that regular participation in high-quality after-school programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores and work habits as well as reductions in behavior problems among disadvantaged students.

"When the kids graduate and go on to college, those are really



Carver staff member, Diane Day, helps children resolve a problem with homework.



A Carver Center hallway. The Center's atmosphere is both colorful and cheerful.

memorable moments because you've watched them grow up," says Anthony Pryor, Carver program counselor and former participant of the program. "I have this kid, Evan Kelly. I've known him since he was nine. He has always been underneath my wing and he is actually at Sacred Heart University playing basketball right now. To see him do that, to watch these kids grow up and achieve, is a really memorable thing."

The advantages of quality after-school programs have been proven. Yet, only 15 percent of the K-12 children, nationwide, participate in after-school programs, according to statistics by the Afterschool Alliance (2009).

"The achievement gap is a result of kids who aren't good at certain concepts. Basically, time is the answer to the achievement gap," says Waid Ramsuhag, CASPER Program Manager for the Carver Center, who was



also a teacher in the Bridgeport Public School system. “When kids don’t have enough time to grasp a concept, they fall behind already and then they fall behind on another concept and it’s a domino effect. It’s just a matter of putting more time in what it is that they need to learn.”

Kids need a place where they can get this extra time and dedication. The Carver Center is one of these places.



Children play a game after their homework is complete (top right). The Carver Center conducts all kinds of activities and events that keep children involved and learning. Their goals are to create a place where children enjoy coming and feel safe.







### **A Template for Success**

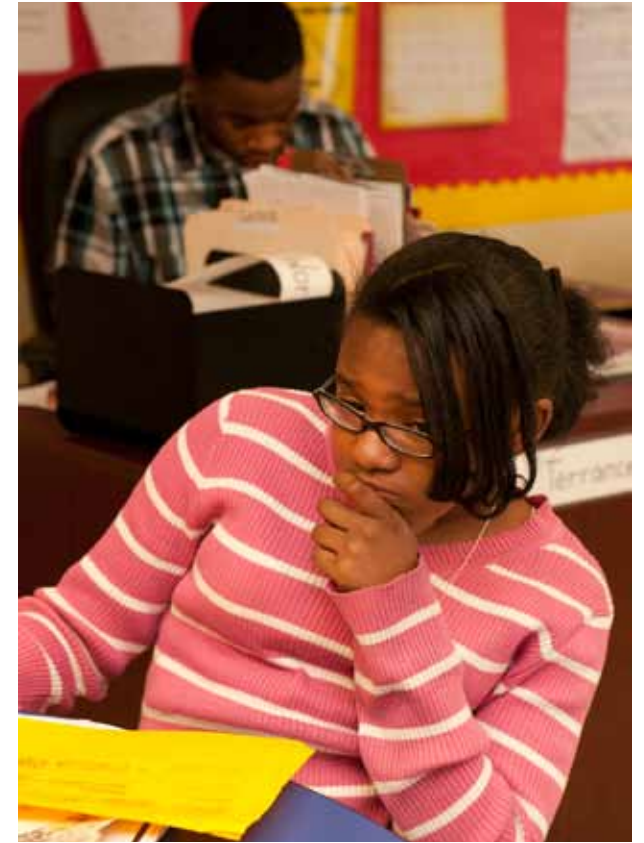
The big building on Academy Street, Norwalk, that is home to the George Washington Carver Community Center is no state of the art facility – inside or out. But there is something welcoming and inspiring about its brightly painted walls covered with colorful

pictures. A painting of George Washington Carver himself, with a quote right below it, adorns the wall next to the main office’s door as a reminder that anything is possible in spite of where you have come from.

“The Carver’s helped me by preparing me academically.



Carver staff member, Benson Casimir, continually works with the local schools to enhance Carver's afterschool programs (top left). A student works on her homework at the Carver Center (top right).



They've helped me with the SATs. From when I started coming, my GPA boosted. I remember I had a 1.7 and now it's up to 2.8," says Tomar Joseph, a junior and football player at Norwalk High School. "I wouldn't be on the college track. I would've been on the track where I barely made it out of high school" without the Carver program.

Novelette Peterkin, Carver Executive Director since 2004, says that their mission is to find ways to keep kids engaged and help them become successful citizens that can contribute to the community.

Since 2005, 100 percent of Carver's high school seniors continue to graduate on time and 86 percent of them graduate college-ready. All of them go on to some form of higher education, either college or trade school. Last year, 88 percent of Carver's high school students and 82 percent of their middle school students improved their grade point average.

"When we first started out, Carver was a place that was known



A student waits in one of Carver's brightly painted hallways.



High school students discuss their homework at the Carver Center.

for poor Black kids. We have longed changed the image of Carver and Carver is now known as a diverse community,” says Peterkin. The Center now has more Hispanic students than ever before. “We serve 1,695 kids right now. Most of the kids that are involved in my program are the kids who would be hurting the school system. Some of them

would be fine, but most of them don’t have the resources in place.”

Every year, Carver has a “Breakfast with Champions” where former Carver kids and community leaders speak to the students about overcoming adversity.

“Many of the kids that were Carver kids are now lawyers,



Tutoring, inspiring, coaching & encouraging. The levels of supervision touch all aspects of Carver's connection to the students.

Learning is one of Carver's top priorities. It is built into all of their activities.





Afterschool instruction at the Norwalk High School.

graphic designers, doctors, security, media specialists, teachers – a whole range of different backgrounds,” says Jacqueline Roberson, a social worker for Carver for 33 years. “[They speak] to encourage [kids] to be persistent and determined to be successful and not allow your neighborhood or your family circumstances to define who you are and where you can go with your future.”

Carver addresses the achievement gap by providing opportunity and access to disadvantaged youth through educational, social, and recreational programs during the after-school hours in a safe and fun environment. Its free-base programs include a junior and senior Youth Development Program (YDP), the CASPER club for younger kids, and high-impact initiatives in six of Norwalk’s public schools.

“Without the Carver Program, students would not have the opportunity to get extra help, study for tests, quizzes, do homework, participate in extra-curricular activities such as self-esteem sessions,” says Dr. Lynne Moore, principal of West Rocks Middle School, Norwalk. “We have seen an increase in student success with both of our Carver programs.”

The Carver program supplements student education with project-base learning workshops and broadens their horizons with

college tours. But what makes the program so successful is its approach to education and community involvement. The Carver is now known as a community leader and advocate for youth voice.

“The vision was that we would create a liaison between the Carver student, the school, and the parent. We had an issue where, at the time, 81 percent of the kids were from single-parent households,” explains Peterkin. “It’s much tougher for a parent to be present at the school when they are working two jobs or they have several kids that they are caring for. So, part of my push with the Board [of Trustees] was that kids who don’t have active parents also deserve to have the support as well.”

Carver programs thrive by ensuring that each student’s needs are met, but keeping everyone on the same page can be a challenging task.

“Communication is the biggest challenge – being all on one page as far as the parent, the child, and the school,” says Benson Casimir, Carver’s Youth Development Program manager. “Being a voice for the parent or the teacher – that in-betweenness. And having the kids see past right now, them understanding that what you do today will affect



Students listen to career ideas at the Career Day Fair.



you tomorrow, believe it or not.”

Casimir is in the schools on a constant basis, stopping by, checking on grades, watching basketball games, and attending parent/teacher conferences.

“That’s part of our job – constantly being there for the kid and for the parents,” he says.

A “Don’t Quit” scroll hangs above his desk in his office. It acts as a parallel to the Carver “No Excuse” philosophy, which reinforces the fact that a student’s background does not excuse him from achieving and succeeding.

“It’s kind of like Nike, just do it. It’s simple, but it means so much. Perseverance is everything. The mentality of never giving up will get you where you want to be,” says Casimir.

He says that the best part of his job is “seeing the progression, or seeing a quiet freshman with no hope turn into a senior getting into

One of the biggest events that Carver Center organizes is the Career Fair. It is held every year. The fair invites students and families from the entire community. Exhibitors include educators, local businesses, artists, professionals, and other community organizations. All share their knowledge and expertise with the attendees. It is a day filled with fun and allows the students to connect with professionals that can help them think about future careers.





The Career Fair at the Carver Center.



Throughout the year, the Carver Center arranges visits to local museums and community centers. The Marine Aquarium is a place the students always enjoy visiting. The students are always escorted by a Carver staff member. The visit also includes a lecture by the Aquarium's staff.



Virginia State University or into UConn, and then excelling and doing well. The day-to-day growth – improving in basketball, or football, or in their social skills. Seeing a kid grow from zero to a hundred with hard work, determination, and discipline.”

With care and commitment, Carver gives children the direction and structure they need to reach their goals. It keeps them off the streets during the hours that kids are at the most risk of engaging in negative behavior.

“We are finding that a lot more youth is involved in really serious criminal activity – attempted robbery, youngsters involved in narcotics activities. We need to reach them at a much younger age. We need to let them know that we are there to offer help,” says Lt. Shawn WongWon of the Norwalk Department of Police Services, who is in charge of Community Policing and works close with the housing complexes known as the “projects.” He says that unsupervised kids hanging around is one of their main problems.

Like many other inner cities, Norwalk has been struggling with a youth gang activity problem that has led to many problems, including shootings, in the area.

Statistically, the hours between 3-6 p.m. are peak for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and sex.

“I think what the Carver Center is doing is great. The Carver Center has become a staple in the community for learning, and for education, and for positive activity,” says Lt. WongWon. “Some of these kids are from broken homes, and some of them don’t have the proper guidance because one or both of the parents are working, so there’s going to be issues that need to be dealt with.”

To help change the negative image of Norwalk and remind people that there are still a lot of positive things happening in the community, the Carver Center led the initiative for Norwalk to be named among the “100 best communities for young people.” They won it two years in a row. They have also been holding a series of Youth Forums addressing the achievement gap and other community issues.

“We are addressing youth violence by having a safe place where kids can come in and do positive things,” says Tremain Gilmore, Carver’s Teen Center Manager and a security guard in Norwalk public schools. “I think just keeping the kids involved in the community





Students listen to a presentation given by the aquarium's staff and enjoy the many exhibits.



helps address the problems that are in the community – if we make them a part of the solution, we are headed in the right direction.”

Carver’s main location, on Academy Street, has a drop-in center where kids from the community can go to relax and be off the streets. They can play pool, listen to music, or watch television there. Kids who come into the Teen Center drunk or high or refuse to follow Carver rules are suspended and kicked out of the Carver Center.

Marcus Hooks is a “Carver kid” – a term used endearingly by the Carver staff and its students.

“When I first came here, Miss Novelette [Peterkin] really took me under her wing. She saw how shy I was and brought me up to this fun person now,” says Hooks, a junior at Brian McMahan High School who started the program in sixth grade. “College was



Carver kids check out the jellyfish tank at the Maritimer Aquarium in Norwalk.

like the lowest thing on my list. It was more a trade school or NCC [Norwalk Community College], but now with the Carver, I know I am going to college and they are helping me try to get a scholarship.”

Hooks now hopes to give back to others as well.

“At the Carver, I see how Miss Novelette is, how Mr. Benson is, and even Mr. Allert, is and it showed me that if I go to college, and get

a degree, then maybe I can end up being like them and I can change lives like they’ve changed mine,” says Hooks.

Brian A. Allert is Carver’s deputy executive director in charge of coordinating its programs.

In 2011 alone, Carver serviced nearly 5,000 students in Norwalk and the surrounding area, with kids coming from Stamford, New



Canaan, Darien, Greenwich, and even from Bridgeport.

“Another really good thing about the program is that, initially, the kids had tokens to take the city bus. But now, Novelette [Peterkin] has included a piece where a bus comes and picks the kids up and takes them directly to their own community,” says Debbie Bell-Johnson, Assistant Principal at Nathan Hale Middle School. “Having the bus gives a lot more kids the opportunity to be involved, because that was one of the main concerns for parents – having their kids take the city buses because you have other adults on the bus.”

Having fun is another key component of the program. After finishing their homework, students have free time to play basketball, board games, watch television, or go on the computer. They also have a basketball league, teen socials known as “Teen Explosion” nights, Career Fairs, and field trips to places like the Maritime Aquarium, the Museum of Natural History, and Six Flags.

Christopher Hayes is a junior at Norwalk High School and a part of the Carver program. He says that his favorite part of the Carver program is playing basketball and going to Rap Tuesdays and on college tours.

“[Carver] is keeping me organized, it gives me after school help for homework and stuff, they’ve taken me to over 20 colleges over two years in the East Coast,” Hayes says.

On the college tour, it was Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Georgia that really stood out to him. Hayes has been thinking about going into animation. Carver Counselor Anthony Pryor helped him figure out what he is good at.

“Chris [Hayes] was always a very quiet kid, but now he loves to talk. He wants to achieve, he wants to have good grades,” says Pryor. “Before, I think he didn’t really care, but now he cares about his grades and he wants to be an artist. To watch him blossom is another great thing. I used to draw myself and he used to borrow my sketchbook to look at my sketches and try to analyze them to make himself better.”

On “Rap Tuesdays,” teens write down topics they want to discuss, or questions they may have, and put them into a box. One topic is randomly chosen per session and no one is allowed to discuss

it outside of that specific Rap Tuesday.

“Rap Tuesday is just an opportunity for the kids to talk about whatever issue they want to bring to the table in a nonthreatening, safe environment where nobody is gonna make fun of you. They are not allowed to put you down. There is no such thing as a dumb question,” says Roberson. “There are some kids that come here in spite of their families. It’s not that their families are saying that they need to be [at Carver], it’s a place that they know that they can be heard, can be seen, somebody is gonna talk to them, somebody is gonna ask them how their day was, somebody is gonna give them a pat on the back if they need one, somebody is gonna give them a listening ear.”

The discussion topics for Rap Tuesdays range from unhealthy relationships to personal hygiene, sexuality, violence, abusive parents, school issues, and goal-setting.

Carver also does the “Sister-to-Sister” and “Project Male” workshops to help students transition from middle to high school, discuss basic necessities, and address self-esteem issues.

Gilmore started Project Male to fill a gap for students who did not have a father-figure in their lives and needed help addressing basic issues like hygiene. The program is now done with all of Carver’s middle school students.

“Project Male program gives them a chance to speak up,” he says.

They do six sessions ranging from fun time to talking about short- and long-term goals and how to fulfill them, to personal hygiene.

“Within hygiene, we talk about sexually-transmitted diseases and how to prevent yourself from coming into contact with those. The way we usually end it is I teach them all how to tie a tie. You wouldn’t believe how many kids are in high school and still don’t know how to tie a tie,” says Gilmore.

This is what Carver does. It motivates kids by investing in their lives and filling whatever needs they might have hygiene questions, homework help, filling out a college or financial aid application, or having someone to listen.

“In my upbringing, as an example, I could never have made it unless I had what I call, ‘caregivers’ and I feel that anybody that is



A Carver Center afterschool program at the Norwalk High School. Instructor, Donna Ellett, works with students outside on a warm sunny day.

exposed to adversity – particularly if it’s socioeconomic – somewhere along the line, you got to have a caregiver there. Someone who is going to help you, guide you, be a mentor,” says Dick Whitcomb.

Whitcomb, 77 years old, is an integral part of Carver’s fundraising efforts and its expansion. His father left his mother to care for three children when he was six months old.

“I could be the poster child for this because I was brought up by a single mother. I had a very difficult time growing up that no one ever knew about it because I never mentioned it,” says Whitcomb. “Kids aren’t getting leadership. They need to have people prove to them that they are worth something and that they can do it. I want these kids just to be well-mannered and have a great character. I

want to make [the Carver Center] a template for every inner city in Connecticut.”

An analysis of 73 after-school studies concluded that after-school programs using evidence-based approaches were consistently successful in producing multiple benefits for youth, including improvements in children’s personal, social, and academic skills, as well as their self-esteem. The research was conducted by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning in 2007.

Norwalk High School is one of the schools that participates in Carver’s school-base satellite programs. Like Carver’s other programs, it focuses on project-base learning and recreation. The recreation part of the program varies, but includes things like cooking, photography, Marine Biology, and Art. To keep children from getting bored, activities are constantly changed and rotated.

Daniel Sullivan, guidance counselor and Chairperson of the Guidance Department of Norwalk High School, cites sophomore Aquaria Strachan as a student who has become the face of the Carver program in their school.

After joining the Carver program, Strachan raised her grade point average from about 1.5 to 3.3 and started attending school regularly. Sullivan credits the program’s structure and the feeling of belonging it provides students, for contributing to this change.

“Overall, I’ve definitely seen a marked improvement and I can say that without reservation – not only with the stuff that you can measure like grades and attendance, but also with the anecdotal stuff. The way [students] are walking down the hallway with more confidence, the fact that they are happier, they are branching out to other opportunities,” says Sullivan.

“I am really, really proud of what we have done with Carver. I really do believe that it takes a community to educate a kid,” he adds.

Jason Jean-Baptiste is another one of the organization’s success stories. He joined the program in middle school when he was a “class clown” in need of changing his ways, Jean-Baptiste says. At first, it was a place where he would just go to play basketball, but eventually he joined Carver’s Youth Development Program (YDP).

“It’s really like a big family here. You see the kids grow up

in CASPER club, while you are in Junior YDP. And then you go on to Senior YDP and those kids who were in CASPER club are now in Junior YDP – it’s like your little brothers, when you see them in school, or your little sisters,” says Jean-Baptiste.

An integral part of Jean-Baptiste’s life was Richard N. Fuller, Sr., Carver’s former longtime executive director who passed away. Fuller helped him realize that he needed to stop fooling around if he wanted to succeed. He even personally assisted Jean-Baptiste with his college essay on a Saturday.

“I graduated and got that piece of paper. I know Mr. Fuller is very proud of me,” says Jean-Baptiste. “College was a great experience and without the Carver, I wouldn’t have made it that far. And now that I am finished with school, I feel like – with all the help that I was given when I was a kid – it’s only right that I do the same. That’s why when I first got out of school, the first place I came was home – which is here, at the Carver.”

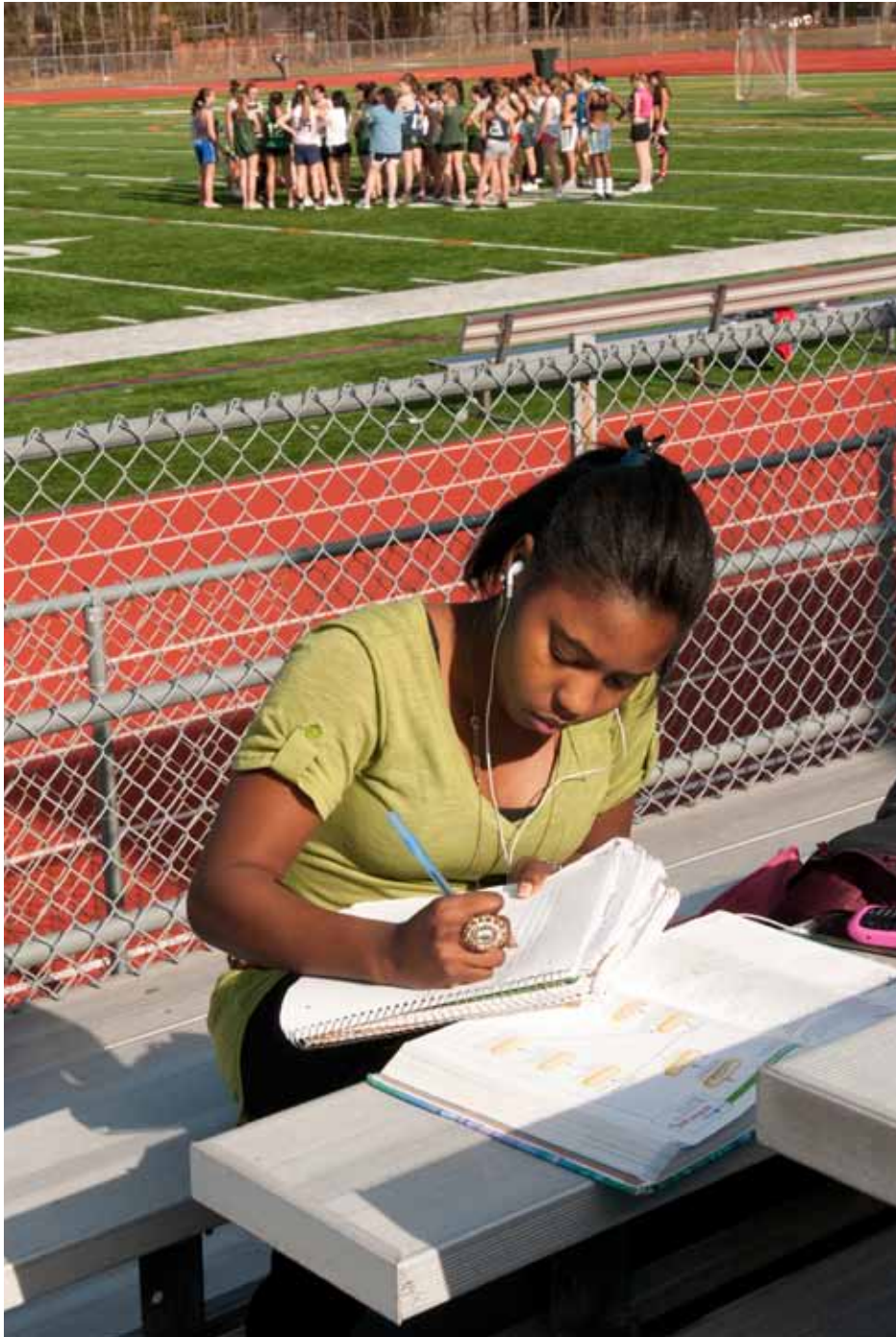
Jean-Baptiste currently works for YES! in New Haven, Conn., as a vocational case manager guiding kids that are in juvenile probation. Although he is changing lives, he says he would prefer to do it working at Carver.

Sophia Lubin is another Carver success story that Peterkin remembers well. Lubin was a graduate from the Carver program who had a passion for fashion design that wasn’t encouraged by her Haitian family because they couldn’t see it as a viable occupation.

Peterkin remembers her conversation with Lubin’s mom at her daughter’s college graduation.

“I went to Sophia Lubin’s graduation and her mom put her arms around me and said, ‘Miss Novelette, this is our moment.’ And I said, ‘Why would you say that?’ And she said, ‘When my Sophia told me she wanted to go to Art school, I was against it because I said you couldn’t make a living doing that.’ I said to the mom that she should follow her passion. Her passion is fashion design, so we should try to find a way for her to really develop that passion,” says Peterkin. “And when her mom said that, it hit me. This is exactly what we are about. We are about providing that pathway for a kid to go wherever their talents can take them.”

Lubin graduated two years ago from the Savannah College



Doing homework at an afterschool program at the Norwalk High School.

of Art and Design in Georgia, and is now an assistant designer for Aeropostale.

“For us, it’s never just about Carver, it’s about the community as a whole and looking at what are the challenges in the community,” says Peterkin.

Poor student performance early on affects educational progress later on – nationwide and worldwide.

According to the three-yearly Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report, the United States was ranked 14th out of 34 OECD countries for reading skills, 17th for science, and a below-average 25th for mathematics. The PISA report compares the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds in 70 countries around the world.

Whether it’s the achievement gap, the economic gap, or youth violence, it takes action to change lives and break the cycles.

“These problems don’t just go away, it’s not as simple as it seems. There needs to be an intervention – an intervention from supportive groups in the community to address it. It’s going to be a few years and everybody is going to have to work together,” says Lt. WongWon in reference to youth violence in Norwalk.

By supplementing K-12 education, after-school programs like Carver’s help prepare students for college and beyond.

For more information about the Carver Center  
you can contact them at:

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This project is a production of

## **VISION PROJECT Inc.**

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Ariane Rasmussen is a multimedia journalist. She has worked as a freelance reporter for the Connecticut Post and as a designer and copy editor for Hearst Connecticut newspapers. This is the second story she has done for Vision Project.

### **Richard Falco**

For the past thirty years, Richard Falco has worked as a photographer, filmmaker, and journalist. He has done assignments on four continents and has worked for many major magazines, including: Time, Newsweek, Geo, Life Magazine, New York Times, US News & World Report, to name a few. There are two published books of Mr. Falco's work: *Medics: A Documentation of Paramedics in the Harlem Community* and *To Bear Witness/September 11*. He is the director of the films, *Crossroads: Rural Health Care In America* and *Holding Back the Surge*. Mr. Falco also has twenty-five years of teaching experience. He has taught and lectured at a number of universities and institutions; notably, The New School for Social Research, the School of Visual Arts and Sacred Heart University. He is also the director of all of Vision Project's educational programming.

Vision Project is an organization dedicated to the development of investigative journalism, documentary photography, multimedia, film, and education.

The goal of Vision Project is to produce documentary material and educational programs that encourage understanding and awareness about a broad variety of social issues. This information and programming are made available to the general public with a particular focus on members of the younger generation.

Vision Project seeks to reinforce the social, cultural, and historical contribution that visual documentary work contributes to society. To reach these goals, we have assembled a group of talented professionals with extensive expertise in photography, web technology, journalism, video, design, and education.

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