

JAG Comes to CT: Ready-Made Graduation and Career Solution

**Liz Dupont-Diehl,
Director, JAG, CT**

"I was that student [who] teachers secretly didn't want in their class."

The young man who said that, before an audience that included Congressman **John Larson** and his high school principal, was a changed person from the boy who signed up for **Patty Damiani's** Jobs for American's Graduates (JAG) class at **East Hartford High School** three months earlier.

JAG's small class sizes, combined with a proven professional skills curriculum and personalized attention from a dedicated Specialist, helped the student, **John Drew**, transform from one who was happy to get by with Ds to one who now gives his all in each class, getting As and Bs, envisioning a brighter future and serving as a role model to his peers in the process.

JAG is a national state-based program devoted to keeping at-risk students in school through graduation and preparing them for postsecondary and career success.

JAG serves students in 32 states, and has a 35-year history of continuous program development and improvement.

JAG program applications are also available for out-of-school youth, middle school, alternative schools and college success.

For John, the tangible JAG curriculum, and the personal attention from his Specialist, gave him the tools he needed to find his focus and apply himself. He was elected President of JAG's student-led Career Association and recently received a \$200 award from his employer

for being an outstanding worker.

JAG came to CT in late 2014 as a program of the Hartford Consortium for Higher Education (HCHE), under a contract with the state's Department of Labor and with support from partners including the state Departments of Education, Social Services, Children and Families, Economic Development, Correction and Court Support Services.

JAG CT has partnered with school districts in **New Haven, Hartford, New Britain, East Hartford and Manchester**, offering the senior year and alternative school programs. HCHE provides a full-time Specialist who works with a cohort of 35-45 students, divided into small classes. Partner districts provide a classroom, space in the master schedule, and assistance selecting students, who are seniors and who have an average of five identified "barriers to success."

JAG is offered as an elective credit, with students receiving instruction and practice in 37 proven competencies, or professional skills. All participants are members of JAG's Career Association, which elects leaders and designs and carries out community service projects, to reinforce and practice skills learned. They also work with their Specialist on developing an individual career and postsecondary plan. Finally, students receive 12 months of continued support following graduation.

JAG's state affiliates are expected to meet ambitious national goals for graduation, job placement, further education, and showing a positive outcome 12 months after graduation. Independent

studies have shown JAG to double the rate of employment and triple the rate of full-time employment for its at-risk students.

JAG's supporters include national placement agencies and corporations, and the vast majority of employers who have hired JAG students say they would do so again.

JAG strives to be a true resource to partner districts. JAG's national board includes top education officials from several states, as well as Governors and leaders from labor departments and state legislatures. Many state JAG affiliates have school superintendents on their Boards of Directors, as educators see the value in this unique program.

"We have been very happy to partner with JAG," said East Hartford Superintendent **Nate Quesnel**. "Not only is the program great for the students who are in it, it has had a positive impact on the entire school environment."

JAG also offers students the chance to visit Washington D.C., for leadership training, and meet and compete against their peers from around the country. John, who attends East Hartford High School, won second place in December for his performance in the Employability Skills competition, which required him to prepare a resume and job application and to take part in a mock interview.

A core JAG event, at the beginning of each school year, is an "Initiation and Installation" ceremony, in which the elected leaders and all student members of JAG's Career Association are honored and sworn in. Students and their Specialist

work to invite school officials, elected and community leaders, and families.

In East Hartford the event took place in the school library, with many family members and school leaders turning out and student leaders joining Congressman Larson in delivering remarks.

"JAG has made me realize the definition of hard work," John said. "It's made me realize that when you put 100 percent effort into everything you do, good outcomes will result... Before I was that one kid in the back of the class who would do nothing and cause disruptions... JAG is what unlocked that special part of my brain and made me realize that good things aren't going to just come to me. If I want to pursue a successful future, the beginning of that road starts now."

"JAG has figured out how to deliver and reinforce the knowledge and behavior, and the 'habits of mind,' that employers require, and that students need to be successful in postsecondary education and in an organization," explained **Steve Pyun**, a retired New Haven school principal and member of JAG CT's Advisory Board. "There is no need for schools to go back and figure out exactly how to impart this to students. JAG knows how to do this, and can quickly and effectively change the trajectory for these students and deliver adults who can succeed in the workplace."

For more information, contact JAG CT Director **Liz Dupont-Diehl** at lddiehl@metrohartford.com, or visit JAG National's web site, jag.org, or JAG CT's web site, jagct.org.