Agency hosts school officials for ‘thank you’ lunch; discuss ongoing educational collaboration, plans

WEST HAVEN (Feb. 10, 2012) - There was a standing room only crowd on hand at the Community House’s Elm Street headquarters on Friday, Feb. 3, when the agency hosted West Haven school administrators and principals for a “thank you” luncheon.

Executive Director Patty Stevens kicked off the luncheon with a hearty thank you for the more than 20 school personnel that included Supt. of Schools Neil C. Cavallaro, Assistant Supt. Dr. Anne Druzolowski and school principals, among others.

“We would like to acknowledge you and show our gratitude for having our programs in the schools, and also take this opportunity to share any issues and concerns you may have going forward,” Stevens said.

Stevens then introduced past board president Sharon Martin, Yale Board intern Justin Kolbeck, as well as school program Director Carol James, Head Start Director Abel Padro and Human Resources Director Linda Rentz, while pointing to a neat pile of Community House-branded sweatshirts that all participants were welcome “to bring back with them and wear proudly.”

James then addressed the group, outlining the Community House’s programs in the schools. “We are very grateful for the space the school system has provided,” James said. “We want to be supportive of your work and continue to support or enhance our children’s learning. My staff only have good things to say about the schools, teachers and principals. They really enjoy working with them.”

James noted that there are “always issues,” among them a waiting list for potential program clients who cannot be currently accepted in the programs due to a lack of space.

What followed was a wide-ranging discussion on topics including program space, homework help, staffing issues and possible opportunities for further collaboration including grants.

Also discussed were ways to get parents more involved. Supt. Cavallaro noted, “Parents want their kids to succeed and to do their homework but they can get frustrated and don’t know what to do. For instance, they might see a math problem that they as parents can’t solve, and get frustrated.

“For us as school administrators,” it’s very frustrating “trying to figure out new ways to engage parents” in meaningful ways, Cavallaro noted, a point that James hit on.

“For the KIN after school program, the students come on buses and they leave on buses from the school so we don’t get to see the parents,” James said. However, for clients in the Child Care program, “we do get to establish relationships with the parents,” which goes a long way in promoting and engaging parents.