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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## State Delegation Attends White House Computer Science Education Conference

In January, President Obama announced a new $4 billion national initiative, CS For All (Computer Science For All), to improve offerings of computer science classes in K-12 schools across the country.

Most recently, a group of Connecticut educators and administrators, represented Connecticut at the White House Symposium on State Implementation of CS For All, in Washington, D.C.

The October 28th summit brought together educators and researchers from 17 states to trade best practices, learn about initiatives in other states, and jumpstart specific programs to improve offerings of computer science throughout the United States.

Among the most important topics discussed included how to get computer science recognized as a discipline, such as math, science and English, in K-12 education and how educators can help students at all grade levels gain computer science literacy skills.

According to the CS For All program, in 2015, there were more than 600,000 open high-paying tech jobs across the United States. The program predicts that by 2018, more than half of all STEM jobs will be in computer science-related fields.

"It's one thing to say you're going to have computer science for all," Amit Savkar, Associate Professor in Residence of Mathematics and Director of Assessment & Teaching at the University of Connecticut says, "But how do you actually get it for all? You need teacher training, policies, funding, and assessments. It's highly complex."

Now, with federal grant money administered through the non-profit Expanding Computing Education Pathways, Savkar recently joined a team comprising of Chinma Uche, Ph.D., Math and Computer Science Teacher at Hartford's Academy of Aerospace and Engineering High School; Seth Freeman, Associate Professor of Business and Technology at Capital Community College; and Gary S. Mala, Superintendent of Schools for the Avon Public Schools, who have been working on computer science education initiatives. The group is assessing the current state of computer science in Connecticut and planning pathways to improve it.

Connecticut was one of 17 states represented at the conference, and one of three, along with Indiana and Texas, that received national funding in August to explore ways to improve computer science education.

At the summit, the Connecticut Computer Science for All delegation learned from U.S. Chief Technology Officer Megan Smith that despite the fact that more and more students are interested in computer science at the college level, the number of women and underrepresented minority students studying computer science – both nationally and in Connecticut – have not improved over time.

*Amit Savkar, Associate Professor in Residence of Mathematics at the University of Connecticut, Chinma Uche, Math and Computer Science Teacher at Hartford's Academy of Aerospace and Engineering High School; Seth Freeman, Associate Professor of Business and Technology at Capital Community College; and Gary S. Mala, Superintendent of Avon Public Schools in the White House Indian Treaty Room of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. (Photo courtesy Amit Savkar)*

The Connecticut team called these statistics "alarming" and pointed to increasing participation among these groups as a top priority to be integrated into Connecticut's computer science education policies.

The team's immediate goal is to create a collaboration of university, school district and policy leaders to increase teacher training for in-service and pre-service throughout the state, with the ultimate goal of enabling each Connecticut school district to offer computer science in their elementary, middle and high schools in the immediate future, perhaps as early as the next calendar year.

Moving forward, Associate Professor Savkar and his colleagues plan on collecting information on various computer science initiatives around the state and assess what shared resources and services can be created to bolster these projects and create new ones to meet this goal.

The group also seeks to collaborate with researchers at UConn to help assess these new K-12 initiatives, and to form partnerships with colleagues in the Neag School of Education and the School of Engineering. The group also hopes that their work will motivate state policymakers to take notice, and perhaps create a position statement on the work.

The team will apply for further federal funding to implement their goals with a $95 million proposals request through CS For All.

**Note: Credit for the information and wording in this article go to Christine Buckley, UConn College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, November 2016.**

CONTACT:     Gary S. Mala
                    Superintendent of Schools
                    Avon Board of Education
                    Avon Public Schools
                    (860) 404-4700