



The Fitch Academy

(A Pilot Program)

A Program of Darien High School

Benjamin Fitch - long time Darien Resident

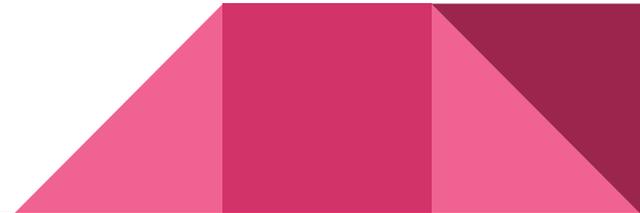
On July 4, 1864, Benjamin Fitch dedicated Fitch's Home for Soldiers and Their Orphans in Noroton Heights.

David Drury of the Hartford Courant wrote, "War orphans - as many as 80 at a time - made up the majority of the home's residents in the early years, and the school established for their education became recognized as the town's finest."

"I cheerfully recommend the Institution you have founded to the good will and solid support of all our countrymen, as I know the sympathies and beneficence of all good men must be given to so great and worthy a charity," Lt. Gen. Ulysses Grant wrote to Fitch on Nov. 7, 1865.

Beginning the dialogue

.....it began as a conversation on how we can best support all Darien High School students, specifically students whose needs may be unique and require a less traditional structure and setting.....



Committee

Dan Brenner

Dennis Cabrera

Susie Da Silva

Ellen Dunn

Meghan Emanuelson

Susie Flaherty

Shirley Klein

Scott McCarthy

Jeromy Nelson

Matt Pavia

Shelley Somers

Lynda Sorensen

Mike Sullivan

Fred Vital

Eileen Whalen



Identifying a Need

The first task for the Committee was to explore the population of students that could best be served by an alternative program. The following needs were identified:

Students who are experiencing health issues/hospitalizations

Students who require homebound instruction

Students with attendance issues

Students who are overwhelmed by a large high school setting

How are general education students' needs currently addressed?

Adjusted schedules

Shortened school day

Reduced course load

Pass/No credit

Home Instruction

Involvement with school counselors, school psychologists, social worker,
administration

Committee Research

Questions about programs were developed by the committee and other school district programs were identified

Committee members visited programs and reported back to committee

Common themes were identified

Community

Staff motivated to work with this population

Separate location

Flexibility



Committee Research

Various Alternative Sites (structures) were identified

Committee members made visits to various programs and shared learning with larger committee

Common themes and best practices were identified

Community

Staff motivated to work with this population

Separate location

Flexibility

Transcript and diploma consistent with DHS

Curriculum aligned for possible reentry



Our Vision

Emotional needs of students prioritized

Focus on targeted population — don't try to be something for everyone

Establish a staff with an allegiance to the program

Create a strong sense of community/belonging

Provide small group and individualized instruction

Offer creative, interdisciplinary curriculum

Allow for a flexible schedule

Encourage participation in clubs/sports/activities at DHS

Goals of the Program

Rebuild student confidence/resilience/ readiness for future

Allow for creativity and flexibility in design

Create real-life applications through work/internship opportunities

Make interdisciplinary connections through problem-based curriculum

Enrollment up to 12 students in year one, not to exceed 25

Graduate HS and be prepared for college and/or workplace

The Personal Connection

Small group and individualized instruction

Relationships with a small team of teachers and support staff

Community of students who support one another

Community service projects that build students' confidence and foster connections and citizenship

Regular meetings with families

Weekly communication with families regarding progress/attendance

Students encouraged to pursue personal areas of interest/project-based

Curriculum

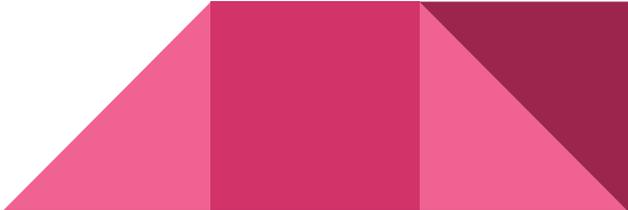
DHS courses delivered in a more personalized manner

Allow for transition back to main campus

Project based: opportunities to work individually and with classmates

Interdisciplinary: high level of cooperation among teachers
Personalized learning plan: students will have their own “personalized learning plan” regardless of whether or not they have an IEP

Students receive a traditional DHS diploma, credits and transcripts



Schedule

A day

8:30-10:00 — Block 1

10:05- 10:35 — Community

10:40 -12:10 — Block 2

12:15 - 12:45 — Lunch

12:50 - 2:20— Block 3

B day

8:30-10:00 — Block 4

10:05 - 10:35 — Community

10:40 -12:10 — Block 5

12:15 -12:45— Lunch

12:50 -2:20 — Block 6



Why is this a “program” and not a “school?”

Students who attend a “program” of DHS receive a DHS diploma/transcript.

Students who are part of DHS may also avail themselves of:

Athletics

After school activities/clubs

The arts

Additional teacher support

All special education services associated with DHS

A “school” is a stand alone entity that must provide all of the above and has no association to the home school.

Requirements

Voluntary placement

Research is clear that the success of the program is hinged on both teachers and students being placed voluntarily.

Entrance by application

In order to maintain the integrity of the program, students must apply with supporting data indicating they are a good match.

Commit to at least one semester

Students can be accepted at any point during the year but can only exit at the end of a semester. While the expectation is that many students will choose to stay in the program; for those who wish to return to the larger high school, the semester break allows for a seamless transition.

Staffing

- Equivalent of two full time staff members
 - Minimum of .5 dedicated mental health staff--psychologist or CSW
 - One of the teachers acts as teacher leader
- Staff/Student ratio approximately 6 or 7 to 1
- Teachers shared between DHS and Fitch Academy
 - As is the case with MMS and DHS
- Voluntary assignment
- Gen. education teachers certified to teach in their content area

Location

Darien Library

Established and vibrant environment--Teen Lounge as base

Welcomed by Library staff

Access to rich resources

Access to a variety of learning environments with the facility

Connection within our broader community

One year arrangement with Library

Associated Costs

2 full time equivalent (FTE) teachers: \$148,000

Staffing realized through efficiency from contract provisions

Yearly rent: \$24,000

Custodial, nursing, transportation: no additional costs

Absorbed into current staffing

Average Day Placement Cost for *outplaced* student:

CES = \$57,892

Spire = \$66,000

