

# The Beautiful Town of West Hartford

(U.S. Educational Tour 2011)

Leonardo

In order to achieve its teaching objective, they attaches great importance to curriculum setup and curriculum development. It highlights four principles in curriculum design, namely the principle of being student-oriented, the principle of reflecting the development of new technology in time, the principle of adapting to changes of the surrounding social environment and the principle of multiculturalism. The way to implement these principles is to combine compulsory and elective courses.



## The Beautiful Town of West Hartford

The fourth leg of our tour is the City of Hartford and the Town of Hartford, Connecticut. Due to that every time we visited the U.S. we always stayed at Columbia University in New York, what we saw, discussed and thought were basically education in big cities and gifted education in the U.S. The main purpose of our trip is to learn about education in small and medium-sized cities and balance of basic education in the U.S.

We took the train to New Haven and then took another train to Hartford. It takes only a few minutes from Hartford to the Town of West Hartford by taxi. The hospital taxi driver struck up a warm conversation with us and told us the geographical locations of Hartford and West Hartford and famous historical stories that everybody knows. We soon arrived at the Town Hall of the Town of West Hartford.

Wow, the town is so beautiful. After getting out of the car, we were at once exhilarated by what we saw. The Town of West Hartford town is a beautiful small town with fascinating natural and cultural landscapes. Looking ahead from the middle of the road of the small town, we saw well-arranged and brightly and warmly colored streets, shops and storied buildings. A peal of church bells ringing out in the distance and vehicles coming and going show the vibrant life of the small town. Fresh, bright and clean, the whole town is simply a beautiful work of art hung on the wall.

After we entered the Town Hall, the staff treated us as foreign friends from afar with particular earnestness and enthusiasm. Three gentlemen including the mayor of the town, head of the town government office and a reporter from a local newspaper office received us. After knowing what we came for, they began to introduce to us their proud past, present and future.

Connecticut has modern cities as well as forest-covered mountains and quiet villages dotted with 17th and 18th century-style buildings. The state has 65% of its total area covered by forest, is punctuated by lakes and has a mild and rainy climate with four distinct seasons. The state is divided into five geographic regions and has a population of 3.5 million, of which white Americans accounted for 77.5%, Hispanic Americans 9.4%, African Americans 9.1%, Asian Americans 2.4%, aboriginals 0.3% and mixed-race people 2.2%. Although there is no large city in the state, it is a highly industrialized state with the highest per capita income in the country. Its manufacturing industry is very flourishing and many new industrial products in the U.S. are first put into production here. Good employment opportunities and educational institutions and a beautiful living environment have attracted more immigrants.

The capital of Connecticut: Hartford Major cities include Bridgeport, New Haven and Waterbury. The state's population divided by religion: Roman Catholic 50%, Protestant 34%, Other Christian 1% , Other Religions 3%, Non-Religious 6% .

Highways crisscross densely populated coastal areas and the Connecticut Valley. The total length of roads is more than 6400 km. The railway line spans up to 1,500 km. Built in the north of Hartford is Bradley International Airport. New Haven is the second largest seaport in New England. New London is the main base for the U.S. Coast Guard. Hartford is situated in the middle between New York and Boston. The distance from Hartford to New York south of it is the same as the distance from Hartford to Boston north of it is about two hour drive.

Connecticut has many U.S. —ifsts”: it set up the first U.S. public high school in 1640, built the first toll highway, constructed the first 16-gun ship-of-the-line in the U.S. Cromwell, developed the first anesthetic, awarded the first Ph.D. (at Yale University), built the first telephone switchboard and the first steamboat and made the first lollipops and hamburger. In 1639, the state first established the Basic Fundamental Orders to determine that every citizen has the right to vote. This basic law has been recognized as the world's oldest written constitution.

The former residence of famous American novelist and humorist Mark Twain is located in the Town of

West Hartford, Hartford City. The Yale University Art Gallery and the Peabody Museum are located in New Haven. The Barnum Museum is in Bridgeport City. The Mystic Seaport Museum is located in Mystic, Connecticut.

Connecticut has about 25 universities and 15 community colleges, such as Yale University, University of Connecticut, University of Hartford and Southern Connecticut State University. Since its inception 300 years ago, Yale University has been enjoying high reputation at home and abroad with its excellent teaching strength. It has been listed as one of the most international universities in the U.S. News rankings 2003.

There are historical records of young Chinese children who studied in the U.S. living in Hartford and West Hartford of Connecticut during the Qing Dynasty. In 1872, the first group of 30 young Chinese children first set foot on U.S. soil to embark on a long-term study abroad. Later the young children studying in the U.S. arrived here in batches. The Qing government sent young children to study in the U.S. not because it really desired to enrich the country and increase its military force and concentrate on learning advanced Western science and technology, but because it had no alternative. After 1840, invaded by Western powers with strong warships and formidable guns, China was subjected to humiliation and lost its sovereignty and had to cede territory and pay indemnities. In the process of dealing with foreigners, the lack of diplomatic personnel and foreign language was a big headache for the Qing government. The ideological trend of westernization quietly burgeoning in the 1860s began to put the work of sending students to study abroad on a large scale at public expense on the agenda.

The Asylum Hill Congregational Church where the schoolchildren congregated is still here today. The schoolchildren studied in Hartford High School and spent their weekends or summer vacations in the small town Kubuluke. It is a place of high mountains and deep forests, has a cool climate and is a good place to spend summer holidays. The railway already reached the vicinity of Kubuluke at the time. Residents of Kubuluke were particularly fond of Chinese boys and treated them like their own children. So the schoolchildren played together with their peers, helped adults in work and went to church together with them in this town to become gradually integrated into the lives of American children. Historical records show that of these schoolchildren studying in the U.S., 22 graduated from Yale University, eight graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston, three graduated from Columbia University, one graduated from Harvard University, etc.

Yung Wing who returned home after graduating from Yale University in 1854 is a pioneer among Chinese people studying abroad. The reason he returned home after completing his studies is because he hoped that more Chinese young people “travel across vast oceans to experience cultural education” and to “make China gradually join the ranks of civilized, prosperous and strong nations engraft by instilling Western learning into China”. Yung Wing was very much aware of the importance of studying abroad for China's modernization. When assisting Tseng Kuo-fan and Li Hung-chang in undertaking the Westernization Movement after returning home, he seized the opportune moment to put forward the “the government selects outstanding youth to be sent to study abroad” plan. Yung Wing’s idea soon received strong support from Tseng Kuo-fan and Li Hung-chang. They formally proposed to send children to study abroad at the government’s expense in a memorial to the throne.

Yung Wing and his descendants were buried in Asylum Hill Congregational Church. In the mountainous Kubuluke on the border of Connecticut was buried Tan Yaoxun, a schoolboy studying in the U.S. who died a premature death. Tan Yaoxun came from Xiangshan, Guangdong and was only eleven years old when he and a few buildings there are historical witnesses to young Chinese children studying in the U.S. in the early days. Standing on the lane in the woods, with a profound silence prevailing over the cemetery nearby under a shining sun, one can not help feeling that one hundred years have elapsed. It seems as though everything before one’s eyes just happened yesterday. The only store of the town has remained unchanged until now since 1830. The store sells daily necessities and also sells foods. The Historical Society building was formerly an inn in the town and is as ancient as the town. There are also a post office and a church with a lofty steeple a little farther on...

The reason the Chinese Qing government's chosen Connecticut’s Hartford and West Hartford as places for

young children to study in the U.S. is due to the special geographical location, seasonal climate, economic development and other conditions of Hartford and West Hartford. Connecticut has the highest per capita assets in the U.S. Hartford city is the U.S. financial and insurance center and has brought together the headquarters of many financial and insurance companies. Hartford City is located halfway between New York and Boston, two most economically, culturally and educationally developed cosmopolises, and is only a 45 minute drive from Yale University. West Hartford is only a five minute drive from Hartford City. West Hartford features picturesque scenery and is the most suitable place for people to live. is the most beautiful place for people to live. The education level and family income level of people here are the highest in both Connecticut and the U.S.

For many years the Town of West Hartford has been named as one of the top ten cities most suitable for the growth of children in the U.S. Primary and secondary education in the Town of West Hartford and Hartford City has been rated as the best education in the U.S.

Our hosts said that primary education in the West Hartford ranks among the top 10 in the U.S. and it is known for its high level of education. The town has a total of 11 public primary schools (grade 1 - 5). They implement small-class teaching and a class has only a dozen students. The ways to educate students are original, the teacher-student relationship is very heartwarming and teachers and parents are in close contact with each other; classroom desks and chairs are placed rather randomly; the homework burden is not heavy. In the classroom, students are trained to check materials out and find books to read themselves, cultivation of hands-on abilities is emphasized and students are trained to make reports and talk about what they have learned as a group. Educational methods are flexible and diversified.

The schools here are as beautiful as the city and are well-equipped. In addition to the classroom, there are an assembly hall where teachers and students of the school hold meetings, a spacious outdoor playground and parking lot. Parents are welcome to visit the school at any time and can get in touch with teachers, attend classes, take pictures and so on.

For primary schools in West Hartford, the means of transportation from home to school is invariably school bus. The general impression is that school buses in the U.S. seem to have the same color—yellow and drivers are neatly dressed in a uniform manner. Every morning, the first task children have after getting up is taking a bath, followed by eating breakfast; the breakfast is very simple, usually made up of spicy instant noodles, plus scrambled eggs and hot milk. If in a hurry, they often have to set out without having time for scrambled eggs. Children have to depart from their homes at around half past seven and walk about one hundred meters; the school bus arrives on time, they have to get on the bus immediately, for it waits for no one. When the school bus arrives, it sticks out two signs from the front and back and flashes its lights. Thereupon passing vehicles in front of and behind it will wait quietly from 20 to 30 meters away. Only after the signs are withdrawn and the school bus starts can passing vehicles continue to travel. If any vehicle ignores the signs and continues to go ahead in the parking process of the school bus, a traffic offence is constituted. The driver will record the vehicle's license plate number and the police will impose a fine of at least 200 U.S. dollars. In the afternoon, children usually return home on time at 3:45. After children get familiar with the roads, they usually need not be accompanied by adults, which is an aspect of U.S. emphasis on developing a spirit of independence from childhood.

In West Hartford, after entering primary school, each child is required by the school to master one musical instrument, such as piano and violin. By requiring children to master musical instruments, the school does not mean to require them to engage in the music profession in future, for playing a variety of musical instruments can cultivate one's taste and train one's concentration from childhood; besides exercising one's memory, playing musical instruments can fully exercise one's fingers. Moreover, training in musical instruments should be carried out from childhood to create a very good cultural atmosphere.

Primary schools often hold small concerts at schools or in churches for children, parents attend the concerts dressed in splendid attire and children give a report-back performance at the concert. Those who make advances in performance will be praised. Despite their age, children give a complete performance, giving

both parents and children a sense of accomplishment. This sense of accomplishment is very important for children's growth. As they grow older, children's music literacy is continuously developed and improved. The school also holds solo concerts for them, they can become members of the school band and a spirit of teamwork and cooperation will be learned and improved as they grow older.

Due to the favorable economic conditions and high level of literacy of residents of West Hartford, almighty all their children perform excellently in primary schools. Good family education and good school education make almost every child an outstanding student after they enter high school.

The Town of West Hartford has three public junior high schools (grade 6 - 8), two public high schools (grade 9 - 12). The principle of attending nearby schools is implemented for the schools. Junior high schools and high schools are not divided into key and non-key schools. Education in West Hartford is education in a typical American school district, education in the whole town is centrally managed by West Hartford School District (similar to a district/county-level education bureau in China'). Setting of the number of primary and secondary schools in the school district, teacher allocation and management and implementation of teaching are all carried out under the district. The school district is responsible for recruiting teachers needed in the school district from across the country and around the world, training and post allocation. The school district can also maximize the integration and make full use of educational resources in the school district to make students in various residential areas attend nearby schools and reduce the difference between the quality of education of schools to a minimum.

A very typical example is two high schools in the town, William H. Hall High School and Conard High School. They share teachers with each other. According to the class hours for the subjects each teacher teaches, a teacher may mainly teach at one school, then he basically works at this school; when a teacher's class hours at one school are not sufficient to make up the required workload, he has to teach at both schools and divide his time between the two schools in a week. Teachers are under the jurisdiction of the school district rather than schools and teachers can move between schools freely, fully reflecting the educational balance.

The school district and schools provides a variety of spaces and possibilities for the students' development. Due to that the educational quality in all schools is similar, students attend nearby schools and cases in which students choose schools not in their areas are virtually nonexistent. But West Hartford School District has no special schools training gifted talents such as Stuyvesant High School and the Bronx High School, yet each school may offer relevant special courses according to students' special needs. For example, as long as there is demand, a school may offer relevant AP courses; if demand is low or comes from a few students, the school can still offer the courses, so a situation where two schools share teachers for a subject may arise, thus not only meeting the development needs of students, but also making full use of educational resources in the school district.

Our hosts told us that there is a special office in their town government called Gifted & Talented Education Office, if an exceptionally excellent student has special needs and his school cannot help him, the office will show up to help by play a coordinating role. Sometimes even the school district can not provide the education they need, then West Hartford Town Hall will come forward to coordinate with schools out of the town or the three universities in the region to let these schools provide the necessary educational resources.

We specially visited one of the high schools — William H. Hall High School. The school was built in 1924. The school is not big, because it is just one of the two high schools of a small town and needs not be very big, but it looks very beautiful, very new and very stylish. West Hartford has sufficient funds to renovate schools each year. Facilities within the school are also very original and they have all the required modern teaching techniques. The school authority told us that all the students are very excellent. Family backgrounds decide children's accomplishments in various aspects. There are some differences and disparities between children, mainly differences in interests and differences in children's natural gifts. School almost did not let teachers "headache" problem students. Almost 100 percent of its graduates enter college, many enter famous universities in the U.S. such as Yale University, Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Columbia University.

In addition to public primary and secondary schools, West Hartford also has some private schools, independent schools and schools with religious customs, as well as several institutions of higher education. They are: Kingswood - Oxford School, Renbrook School, St. Joseph College, Mount St. Joseph College,

Northwest Catholic High School, Hartford College for Women, University of Hartford, a branch of the University of Connecticut, Hartford Children's Museum, the Connecticut Science Center, American School for the Deaf (ASD), etc.

Hartford has a special public high school called Hartford High School of Mathematics and Science. It is a school completely different from other high schools. Students here all come from various schools in 22 towns of Connecticut. They attend class here only half a day each day and attend class at their own schools the other half of the day. For example: students in grade 9 and grade 10 attend class here from 7:30---10: 30, are then sent back to their own schools by school buses and attend class at their own schools in the afternoon; students in grade 11 and grade 12 attend class here from 12:30---4: 00 and study liberal arts and other subjects at their own schools in the morning. Only five courses mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and geography are offered here. Students can freely choose 2 - 3 of the courses.

People will, as is natural, ask why these students come here to study these courses every day or during certain days of the week? Can't they study in their own schools? What is special about this school? The school authority said that here students can learn many very specialized university courses and complete many experiments that cannot be done at ordinary schools. The point is not simply what courses students study, they already enter a research stage involving sophisticated issues such as atomic physics and aerospace. Especially experiments conducted by students deal with issues such as electronic chip, electronic circuit, automatic robot, comparison of data like the oxygen levels and PH values in rivers covered and not

covered in leaves. All the classes other than mathematics classes take place in the laboratory. In the afternoon when students do not take any elective courses, they can continue to do their experiments in the

laboratory. These courses allow students interested in mathematics – science courses to get specialized training in advance.

The school's curriculum schedule is also very special. The number of class hours and the number of classes change from day to day and from month to month. Why the curriculum schedule is arranged this way. The school authority said that sometimes long classes are needed, some of them such physics classes last one and half an hour; sometimes small classes that last only 45 minutes, just like we change clothes every day and were different clothes in winter than in summer and today than tomorrow.

The school is not responsible for students' academic status, not responsible for the teaching of basic courses for students and not responsible for students' development in cultural recreation, sports and other aspects. It is only responsible for top high school students' study of cutting-edge research issues related to mathematics - science. It has world-class research-based mathematics and science curriculum and teaching and experimental conditions. It is the solution to the problem of educational imbalance for top students across Connecticut.

Connecticut has no schools like Stuyvesant High School and the Bronx High School of Science in New York, but it has Hartford High School of Mathematics and Science. They play a similar role in gifted education in high school. The school's thought on running schools is somewhat similar to that of our Future Road Teachers College In The City of Shanghai and we are striving in this direction.

In China, everyone wants to enter key high schools such as the No.2 High School Affiliated to East China Normal University in Shanghai, High School Affiliated to Fudan University, High School Affiliated to Shanghai Jiaotong University and Shanghai High School, because only by studying at such schools can students have the chance to enter Peking University, Tsinghua University, Fudan University and Jiaotong

University. Although some high schools are also called key high schools or experimental and demonstrative high schools, none of their graduates has been admitted to Fudan University and Jiaotong University after college entrance examination, not to mention those schools not tagged as key high schools or experimental and demonstrative high schools, their graduates have even less hope of entering famous universities. Not to mention those who do not focus on the experimental demonstration of high school or high school brand of

school, it is impossible to enter prestigious universities hope.

However, in the U.S. and the Town of West Hartford, people do not necessarily have to enter Stuyvesant High School and the Bronx High School of Science in New York or Hartford High School of Mathematics and Science in Connecticut, they just study in the nearby William H. Hall High School or another high school in their town —Conard High School and they can still study AP courses and can still enter Harvard University, Yale University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Columbia University.

Then, what kind of people go to Stuyvesant High School and the Bronx High School of Science in New York or Hartford High School of Mathematics and Science in Connecticut? This depends entirely on the student's interests, hobbies, and characteristics.

In fact, at world-class universities like Harvard University, Yale University and Columbia University, not everyone is a scientist and not everyone is a Nobel Prize winner, there are also a variety of outstanding talents such as writers, educators, artists and other talents. Only top students who are interested in sophisticated science and technology and invention related to mathematics—science and aspire to become mathematicians, physicists, chemists and other scientists have interest in going to Stuyvesant High School and the Bronx High School of Science in New York, but it has Hartford High School of Mathematics and Science in Connecticut. Many other students are also very outstanding, but they have no ambition to become scientists, nor have they the passion to win the Nobel Prize. Maybe they want to become educators, economists, writers and so on, then they need not go to those schools, they just study in nearby schools in their own school districts and can still achieve their dreams and aspirations.

At Stuyvesant High School and the Bronx High School of Science in New York, students from Asia and China account for as much as 70% and 72% of the students. That's not surprising because there are two reasons. One is an economic reason, both of these two schools are public schools and families of students from Asia and China are not wealthy; the second reason is that this is directly related to the cultural tradition of the Chinese nation and the values of the Chinese people. It is the aspiration of Chinese students who travel across the oceans to study in the U.S. to become scientist and win the Nobel Prize. Of course, they also educate their children with the same values and tell them to study hard to become scientist and win the Nobel Prize in future. Consequently, these children make up more than half of the limited number of students enrolled at the public schools Stuyvesant High School and the Bronx High School of Science. Although these families have come to the U.S. and are not under so much academic pressure as in China, they put no less pressure on themselves than in China.

However, Americans do not give themselves so much academic pressure as Chinese do. Especially those economically superior families above the middle class line put children's interests first so far as their Educational philosophy is concerned and advocate learning in a relaxed way and living comfortably, they measure their learning and life's core values against whether they can enter Harvard University, Yale University, Columbia University and other world-class universities rather than whether they can become scientists and invent things. They place more value on the favorable conditions for learning, comfortable learning environment and harmonious learning atmosphere the Town of West Hartford can provide for their children. Whether their children can become scientists in future is determined by their children's interests and that is not a goal in life for them as parents.

After all, the number of Chinese students in America today is still very small. In those states or cities with relatively few Chinese people such as Connecticut, there are very few Chinese people, so there are almost no Chinese Children, no matter it is at William H. Hall High School in the Town of West Hartford, or Conard High School, or Hartford High School of Mathematics and Science in Hartford City where top students study.

Our hosts' introduction was detailed and all-embracing, and we also conducted a meaningful discussion of issues we are interested in. They deserve to be the mayor of the town, the head of the town government office and a reporter, for they have a thorough knowledge of the local history, geography and culture. When leaving the town government, we expressed our thanks to our hospitable hosts and sincerely invited them to visit Shanghai when they have the opportunity.





