Finding Our Common Ground
By Shannan Harzarik, Teacher at Chase Elementary School

As a 5th grade teacher at a Lighthouse School, I walked away from Common Ground 2015 excited and filled with ideas for a classroom where every student will have a device. This year was a great year to focus on transitioning my room into a student centered learning environment. As I visited poster sessions and presentations, I was able to gather more ideas and fine tune what I had in place when I returned from the conference. I also learned many strategies when planning and implementing a technology infused lesson with the steps of SAMR, infographics, and group activities for students.

The highlight of the conference was when I was able to present our group project during a poster session. Our Team consisted of Megan Akers (my grade level partner), Christina Martinez (Library Media Specialist), Andrea Chryst (Special Educator), and Colleen Banks (Assistant Principal). Together we collaborated on a project that would have a memorable impact on our 5th grade students for years to come. In groups, students researched a specific colonial topic to find factual information to share with their classmates. They shared all the new learning through the use of Green Screen Technology. Students were able to choose backgrounds and create authentic scripts based on the information they researched. In the Video, Food in Colonial Days, students were able to teach their classmates about period food and drinks and even wore colonial attire. In the Green Screen Handout you will find the process we followed and technology that was utilized.

This whole experience provided an opportunity for my colleagues and me to bond/collaborate closely before, during, and after Common Ground. We were able to using a cross curricula approach and also plan for students that may need a little extra support or encouragement. It allowed us to let students take control of their learning and make their own choices. We were all so excited when other educators walked away inspired to try this technology enhanced approach.

Distracting Students from their Distractions
By Scott Sheeler, Learning Resource Teacher at Lansdowne High School

My poster session “Distracting Students from their Distractions” was designed to provide educators with resources to help fight our students’ many distractions with creative, engaging and assessable lessons. My poster and the accompanying website (http://scottjsheeler.wix.com/distracting) allowed educators to ask a few questions and leave with the resources on their phone via QR code, text message or URL.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the Common Ground conference. It was my first time at the Common Ground conference and my first time presenting at any conference. The challenge for me was to present knowledge and resources to a wide variety of educators. I felt like my poster had enough resources on it that most visitors could take away a resource or two to their schools and their districts. I also really enjoyed talking with other BCPS educators, as well as teachers from districts I’ve never even heard of! There are a lot of counties in Maryland.
Raising the Bar: The Journey to a Rigorous Learner Centered Environment
By Shelby Wood, Angela Moskunas, & Marcus Wimberly; Teachers at Halstead Academy

Five years ago, Halstead Academy was deemed a “School in Need.” Today when you walk into our building, you will see teachers using “next” practices, student centered learning environments embedded with rigor, and a data driven professional learning community. This journey has been both challenging and enlightening. These changes have impacted our students, teachers and families in a way we never envisioned. Molding a 21st century learner is a difficult task. Our poster session took educators on a learning adventure as we shared our ups, downs, reflections, support system, resources, strategies and tools for success. Our session handout can be accessed for more information.

Establishing a Culture that Values 21st Century Professional Learning
Nicole Fiorito, S.T.A.T. Teacher, & Jennifer Mullenax, Principal, of Halstead Academy

Five years ago, Halstead Academy was one of the lowest performing schools in Baltimore County. Teachers were working in isolation and did not accept or understand the correlation between professional learning and student achievement. In order to change the mentality of teachers and create a true professional learning community, the leadership team created professional learning experiences that aimed to break down the four walls of the classroom. Such learning opportunities included: learning walks, lesson studies, mandatory professional learning time, and grade level meetings.

Halstead Academy is now a true example of a professional learning community, one that welcomes learning experiences that challenge current instructional practices. The professional learning opportunities that are presented to teachers mirror the expectations of the 21st Century classroom: opportunities to collaborate, communicate, create, and think critically about implementation and student achievement. The leadership team formulates opportunities for individual, small group, and whole group professional development opportunities.

In the spirit of customizing and personalizing learning experiences for students, we established a personalized professional development plan for teachers known as Halstead 2.0. This plan mirrors Action Research. Teachers pose a question concerning their instructional practices. They devise a plan of action through the use of a preplanned menu of professional development experiences, such as: book studies, peer observations, and coaching opportunities. Through these experiences teachers can begin to answer their question and establish a “promising practice." The new learning about teaching and learning is then communicated to the Halstead Professional Community to promote further investigation about our instructional practices and the impact our decisions have on student achievement.
Web 2.0 Charlotte Danielson Style  
By Jennifer Dingle, S.T.A.T. Teacher at Stoneleigh Elementary School

I am so happy to have had the opportunity to participate and present at Common Ground this year. Common Ground always provides an excellent opportunity to network and learn about new technology tips, resources and products available. I have attended the conference on and off for the past 10 years and always find it to be beneficial to my professional growth.

I have presented four times over the years and was excited when my presentation, with Justin Hennaut, was accepted this year. When I look for presentations to attend, I always look for ones that will provide me with tips and resources that I can take back to my school and use tomorrow. For that reason, this year we decided to present web 2.0 tools that align with the Charlotte Danielson Teaching and Learning Framework.

Our presentation included online tools for each of the four domains. You can find a link to our presentation here: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1HKe5YvOQ_Cd_4M1oL_0sJLGrjkK3SVSRn0rJp26moY/edit. If you have any questions about any of the resources please feel free to email me at jdingle@bcps.org.

I truly enjoyed the experience and look forward to next year!

Making STEM Fair Projects Manageable with Collaboration  
By Dana Novotny, Resource Teacher & Flo Falatko, Teacher, of Cromwell Valley Regional Magnet School of Technology

“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much” – Helen Keller

We begin each new school year planning a project (sometimes a few) that we can facilitate together and with our colleague Jill Wright. We find that collaborating with colleagues to complete projects is beneficial to students and to us. Collaborative projects allow us to draw on each other’s strengths and different areas of expertise, share ideas, share duties such as teaching different lessons, creating assignments, communicating with parents and students, and assessing student progress. We are able to pull resources and provide students with objective, reflective feedback that sometimes is not possible if an individual is assessing.

During our initial planning meeting for the 2014 school year, we decided that we wanted to reformat the way our students complete STEM Fair projects. In the past, students participated in lessons that introduced the parts of the scientific method that are embedded in the BCPS science curriculum for 4th and 5th grades. The STEM Fair project was a project that was completed at home and monitored at school. We hypothesized that by creating lessons that would delve into the scientific method and dedicating time in school during enrichment and science classes; that students would develop a deeper understanding of the process. Now that the project is complete, we know from student work and feedback and parent feedback, that our hypothesis was correct.

During our Common Ground 2015 presentation, Making STEM Fair Projects Manageable with Collaboration, we shared how we managed this collaborative project. We shared resources that are aligned with CCSS and BCPS’ science curriculum. The presentation and resources can be accessed via Cromwell Valley’s webpage. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.
General Conference Reflections

Adult Presentation Techniques
By Katie Cox, S.T.A.T. Teacher, Mays Chapel Elementary School

My big take away from Common Ground 2015 was that when it comes to engaging adult learners, it's all about presentation techniques. It's a fine line that presenters balance on as they work their way through a presentation. You want to be relatable, passionate, energetic, funny, and engaging to keep participants motivated and focused on the topic; however, at the same time you have to watch that you don't overdo it and turn your audience off or give them a reason to tune out and check e-mail. Here are some of the effective techniques that I observed in the sessions that I attended at Common Ground 2015.

Take Aways: Having something tangible that I can take away with me after a session allows me to revisit the topic later. Whether it is a QR code, resources available online through an app, make and take opportunities, or even just a flyer that I can put with my notes, I feel like I am more likely to retain and revisit the information in order to apply it.

Concrete Examples: Videos, samples of student work, demonstrations, hands on exploration, and one session even included the actual students sharing their experiences! Most people can't really process everything when someone is talking "at" them. I find that anytime I have the option to see it and try it for myself that I get more out of a session.

Energy and humor with practical applications: High energy presentations draw me in, and I like when a presenter can weave in a few laughs here and there to keep things exciting; however, when both are combined with high quality content it's going to be a complete success.

As a STAT teacher I have learned over the course of this year that I have to incorporate a variety of presentation formats and techniques to keep my teachers interested and to fit their different learning styles. I definitely picked up a few new techniques to add to my repertoire as I start planning for my next round of presentations.