

New Haven Public Schools

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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON
RAISED H.B. 7047,
AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY
& RAISED H.B. 1110,
AN ACT CONCERNING SECURITY ASSISTANCE FOR
EDUCATION**

Senator Gaffey, Rep. Fleischman, Members of the Education Committee, we are here on behalf of Superintendent of Schools Dr. Reginald Mayo and the New Haven Public Schools to speak in support of a raised bill that would provide increased financial help to school districts upgrading their school security infrastructure. Our experience in New Haven has shown that a comprehensive program to improve security in public schools is costly and deserves the full support of the state. We also are here to raise some concerns we have with Raised House Bill No. 7047 regarding school district accountability. Our message today is that any state funds channeled toward underperforming schools be invested in strategies that have proven effective.

An Act Concerning School District Accountability

With regard to Raised Bill No. 7047, An Act Concerning School District Accountability, we strongly urge that any state funding or resources for low performing schools be targeted to instructional strategies that ARE working. We are alarmed by some of the provisions of this proposed bill that would take control of failing schools out of the realm of the local public school district. Instead, we would argue that the state has a responsibility to look at districts where strategies are working and to consider increasing investment in those areas.

New Haven is experiencing improvements in academic achievement at all grade levels, including in several low performing schools. We are very pleased to report to this committee that our bilingual students have made tremendous process. In fourth grade math, we have virtually closed the achievement gap between regular education and ELL students and we have seen gains at other grade levels for our English Language Learners.

Other schools on the state's watch list have made progress. For example, Katherine Brennan School in West Rock made impressive gains on the CMT in all three subject areas at the fourth grade – reading, writing and math. The school increased the percentage of fourth graders proficient in reading by 22% and the percentage proficient in writing by 34%. Another school, King/Robinson, also on the list of low performers, made tremendous gains at all grade levels.



What made the difference for these schools? Effective instructional leadership, effective coaching support for teachers and the personnel needed to deliver “just in time” interventions for students, such as paraprofessionals and tutors.

The use of instructional coaches, in particular, is helping our teachers to improve instruction and deserves to be expanded. Currently, New Haven has 31 literacy coaches and 7 math coaches in our elementary and middle schools. Ideally, two literacy coaches and one math coach at each of New Haven’s K-8 and elementary/middle schools would be a solid investment. Also, an additional high school math coordinator and high school literacy coordinator would improve the ability of our teachers use data to improve instruction and student learning.

In addition, while we have paraprofessional coverage in all kindergarten and first grades, the stringent requirements of No Child Left Behind resulted this year in the layoff of 76 paraprofessionals. We need the resources to increase our paraprofessional hires and to staff our second grade classrooms. Tutors for students, during and after the school day, additional guidance support for high schools and K-8 schools and the support of additional psychologists and social workers would help even more.

Security Assistance for Education

In New Haven, we work very hard to maintain safe, orderly schools. We train our principals and administrative teams continually on how to handle every kind of school incident. Our students practice crisis response drills regularly and, thanks to the receipt of a federal grant, our district has led the way with three large-scale crisis drills to date involving scores of emergency personnel from our region. We employ school resource officers in our schools and work closely with our students to make sure they understand our code of behavior.

In the same spirit, this year, for the first time, we expanded the use of metal detectors and/or hand-held detecting wands to every high school and funded numerous other security improvements. Our school system completed a comprehensive assessment of additional needed security improvements to determine where and how to upgrade and then prioritized that list.

Some examples of our expenses include \$31,400 for metal detectors and wands; approximately \$16,000 to pay for buzzer systems; and \$130,000 for video cameras to tighten security and cut down on vandalism. The cost to put in buzzer systems in all K-8 and elementary schools that do not currently have these systems will be approximately \$250,000. The cost to put in video camera systems, or enhance existing camera systems, where they are most needed will cost approximately \$1 million.

Finally, many of our high schools and our larger K-8 schools need appropriate outside door hardware to be vandalism-proof and to stand up to the heavy wear and tear of middle school and high school student use. If appropriate doors are not used, they become vulnerable to unauthorized

entry. Many of our schools need to be retrofitted with these doors so that the building perimeters can be secured.

So I am here today to add my strong support to a bill being raised that would allocate reimbursement grants to towns based on eligible expenses for school security improvements. This bill would provide dollars and support for added measures such as surveillance cameras, increased training of school personnel, the ability to add security measures to new school construction and other related expenses, all with the goal of providing a safe learning environment for students and staff. We fully support this bill.