

**UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT
NEAG SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

**A Testimony Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly
Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement**

**Regarding Raised Bill No. 1405 (LCO No. 5388)
An Act Concerning the Intervention for Schools in Need of Improvement and
Concerning Urban Education**

Monday, March 12, 2007

The Honorable Senator Gaffey, the Honorable Representative Fleischmann, and the Members of the Committee:

My name is Richard Schwab and I serve as Dean of the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut. On behalf of the school, I wish to express sincere appreciation for the consideration of Raised Bill 1405 - An Act Concerning the Intervention for Schools in Need of Improvement and Concerning Urban Education. The Neag School is proud to be one of the founding partners of the Connecticut Alliance for Improving Teaching and Learning. The partners in the alliance include: the American Federation of Teachers - Connecticut, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, the Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents, the Connecticut Education Association, the Connecticut Federation of School Administrators and the Neag School of Education. This is a unique coalition of the primary stakeholders involved in making our schools work. This is my tenth year as dean of the Neag School, and to my knowledge, this coalition, and the Urban Initiative we are proposing, is the most comprehensive effort to date that addresses the complex issues facing our urban schools. Our Alliance is currently reviewing the legislation and will be sharing our concerns and suggestions with the committee. We look forward to working with the committee to refine the legislation as the Alliance is very supportive of the intent of this bill.

The Connecticut Alliance for Improving Teaching and Learning grew out of frustration with the lack of progress we have been making in addressing the complex problems facing our urban schools. Knowing that quick fixes or finger pointing have not improved education, the CEA, AFT-CT, CAPSS, CAUS and CFSA set out to identify research-based practices that work within our public school arena. This group found solid evidence of success in the Pilot School model developed in Boston, and in several programs that the Neag School has supported and received national recognition for. The Pilot Schools are located within the Boston School District yet operate with a high level of autonomy in making decisions, from curriculum to staffing, that directly effect student learning. The particular Neag School programs that the group found had a research base for success with urban schools were the National Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, the Accelerated Schools Plus program programs directed by the National

Public Hearing Testimony

Speaker:

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Date: 2/12/07

Bill Number:

1405

Research Center on Gifted and Talented, and other grant-funded programs focused on subject areas like literacy instruction.

One common component of these successful programs was having an independent center to support the major reform efforts. In Boston, the Pilot schools are supported by the Center for Collaborative Education. Research has shown that without such a support center, the effort would not succeed or flourish. This center serves as the research, support and problem solving arm for the Pilot Schools project.

As a result of their review of the key ingredients in the success of these programs, the team of teacher unions and administrative organizations asked that the Neag School join the partnership and build a center to support systemic change in Connecticut's urban schools and broaden the responsibility to conduct research on sponsored projects so that best practices can be transferred to other schools in Connecticut. The Alliance's research has found that this center needs to be a neutral rather than a regulatory agency in order to have open, frank dialog.

The Neag School is uniquely positioned to help our urban districts. During the ten years I have served as dean, we have hired more than 80% of our current faculty based on a comprehensive strategic plan. We invested resources strategically in selected centers of excellence that support systemic school reform. Our ability to attract some of the top researchers in the country was enhanced by the generosity of Raymond and Carole Neag, who endowed our school with a 21 million dollar gift, and the State of Connecticut, which provided 4 million dollars in matching state funds. We recruited top talent in such fields as creating positive and safe learning environments, literacy, educational technology, educational measurement, mathematics education, gifted and talented education and school governance. The proposed Urban Education Center would bring these scholars together to serve as the research engine for driving the changes needed while we will hire outstanding field-based staff to support the translation of that research into classroom practice.

We envision the Urban Center would initially focus on three core activities:

Establishment of the CommPACT Schools Effort: Building upon lessons learned from projects like the Pilot School program in Boston, the Urban Center will support the establishment of up to twelve (12) CommPACT Schools within urban districts. These schools would be selected by the governance council. Preference would be given to schools that have active district level commitments from leadership of both the administration and the teacher's union for support and potential expansion of the initiative across their district. The CommPACT schools would operate within their existing school districts and have the following characteristics.

- Site Autonomy: Each school would operate as an independent entity under the management of a collaborative partnership comprised of school district administrators, school representatives, CEA/AFT leaders, parent/community members, and higher education partner

- Congruence and Coherence: The school would be managed in such a way that ensures best practices permeate the school by emphasizing:
 - i. Community and parent involvement
 - ii. Empirically supported instructional and behavior support practices
 - iii. Establishing and maintaining a positive school climate
 - iv. Clearly articulated values and expectations
 - v. Active and involved leadership that is supported through external coaching
 - vi. An effective mentoring and induction process for new teachers
 - vii. Evidence-based curricula and instructional services that are tailored services and training to each school's unique needs
 - viii. Pre-assessment and continuous progress monitoring of school needs
 - ix. Effective use of new empirically supported learning technologies
 - x. Continuous professional development that stresses research and practical applications for classroom-level instruction
 - xi. Continuous assessment to measure student academic achievement and school performance and guide decision making.
 - xii. Professional development would be job embedded and delivered on site as well as at central locations (e.g., face to face, on line and in seminars)
 - xiii. Professional Development may include such areas as:
 1. Research proven practice
 2. Assessment based strategic planning
 3. Subject area seminars by content experts
 4. Facilitative leadership training
 5. Effective faculty governance
 6. Formative and summative program evaluation
 7. Data management and data based decision making

Mentorship and Induction: Research has affirmed the link between a high quality induction with strong support for new teachers and their willingness to continue in teaching. The Urban Center would adopt, design, and field test new ways to provide induction programs. In addition to providing on site professional development and online support, a cadre of newly retired classroom teachers with demonstrated teaching excellence would be recruited and trained to be effective mentors for new teachers in challenging schools. Results of research efforts can assist the Connecticut State Department of Education in identifying ways to enhance the BEST program for all Connecticut Schools. The Urban Center would actively solicit opportunities for collaboration with institutions of higher education, technical assistance and research units, agencies and resources, etc. across Connecticut who share the vision, values, perspectives, and expectations of this initiative.

Research and Dissemination: The Urban Center would conduct systematic research on the impact the transformation efforts have on student achievement, teacher enhancement,

and systems reform. The information on best practices that emerge from this research would be disseminated to other districts across the state and nation to help influence broad based reform, especially with respect to enhancing teacher quality in challenged urban contexts. Similarly, the Urban Center would hold itself to the same standards of evidence and best practice being required of schools, and as such, would develop and conduct rigorous evaluations that identify effective practices and target areas for quality and outcome improvement.

In closing, this historic initiative will only work if a sustainable funding stream can be identified. Research has shown that schools need an average of three years to internalize changes and produce significant results. We are requesting 5 million dollars for the first year and additional funds to handle the scale-up to additional districts if year one is the success we expect it to be.

We thank you for your consideration of this bill, and please know the Neag School is ready to help make a difference in Connecticut's most challenging schools. As one of the top ranked Land Grant Carnegie Research Extensive schools of education in the country, we feel it is our responsibility to do all that we can to support K-12 school reform. In many ways, this effort is a form of payback to the citizens of Connecticut and our generous donors who have helped support our transformation.

Respectfully submitted,

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