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Date: 2/29/08 Bill Number: 5593

Hello and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Sherri Prendergast and I am an Internal Literacy Facilitator at KT Murphy Elementary School, a K-5 school in Stamford. I share the Committee's concern regarding the need to track and report on student progress under the Early Reading Success Grants, given the significant state resources that are committed to the program. I would like to applaud the Committee's focus on "measurable outcomes and accountability provisions" in HB 5593 and provide a report on what we are doing in Stamford using a nationally recognized early literacy assessment that allows us to track students' growth on phonics and comprehensions measures. The assessment uses handheld technology which makes capturing, summarizing, and reporting data very easy and we have found that it is a highly effective tool for monitoring and reporting on student progress.

I believe that the work that we are doing in Stamford with this assessment system can be a model for other Connecticut districts.

At KT Murphy Elementary School in Stamford, we started screening and progress monitoring our students in grades K-3 four years ago. Initially we used paper-based assessments, but this year we moved to an innovative system that uses a handheld computer to provide real-time reports that are not only useful for accountability purposes, but provide teachers with feedback that is used to help improve and tailor instruction to each student. Using the web, we can track our students' progress over time at individual, class, and school levels. As a literacy facilitator this means I can examine the progress of individual students and look across classrooms and schools to see how students are doing. I can help teachers to adjust their instruction, and I can direct resources the classrooms that need them most. The handouts you have in front of you illustrate the kinds of reports that this system generates every day.

When we first administered the assessment we found that 15% of Kindergarten students scored seriously below the benchmark goal and needed an intensive level of support. By the middle of the year, that number had decreased by 5%. We also know that overall, 50% of all students at KT Murphy made adequate progress between the beginning and middle benchmark.

Certainly, these results are a direct result of our teachers' commitment to providing the best possible instruction to our students. But this same level of teacher commitment has always existed at KT Murphy. In my mind the difference was the use of a balanced literacy assessment, coupled with technology that made it easy to administer consistently. Using the handheld assessment system, we can identify, for example, that a child can hear sounds, but can't blend sounds together. And it's exactly this kind of information that is so critical in guiding how we teach these students.

I share all of the data from the online reports with the principal so that he has the opportunity to see overall progress at a student, classroom, and school level. All of this data is real-time, so we can make adjustments in the classroom throughout the school year – before students fall even further behind. Many of our teachers use these same reports to show parents how their children are progressing over time.

Our principal can share with our Superintendent the reports that reflect progress at our schools and I have heard that in other states, these reports are used for district-level reporting to their State Departments. There is meaningful year over year growth data available.

I commend your support of formative assessment for Connecticut's priority schools. Based on our very positive experience we would strongly encourage the committee to consider continuing the Early Reading Success Grant funding, but also allowing priority schools to use assessments like the one we have been using under the grant. Since the law was first passed, new tools have been developed to provide better real-time reporting for teachers and decision-makers. Such tools go a long way toward meeting the legislature's requirement for Results Based Accountability.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.