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Child
Advocacy
Coalition**

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Mobilizing for Children

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TESTIMONY

before

GENERAL ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Monday, March 10, 2008

Greetings, Chairmen and Members of the Education Committee. We appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Marilyn Ondrasik and I am the Executive Director of the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC), a coalition of 80 nonprofits, churches and community and civic organizations in the greater Bridgeport region.

My testimony today will focus in two areas: **The inadequacy of the ECS increase for 2008-09 and changes that will make the ECS formula stronger and update it to the 21st century and the students in our public schools.**

We urge the General Assembly to approve an important change in the ECS formula this year focusing on ELL students, or students from homes in which English is not spoken. These are truly the “lost students” of Connecticut.

Here is why this change is so important. In Bridgeport public schools, there are 70 different languages spoken because Bridgeport is a refugee resettlement center. Connecticut’s other urban school districts also have ELL students as a significant percentage of their student enrollment. In Hartford, ELL students make up nearly half of the student enrollment.

Attached to my testimony are bar charts showing how ELL students score on CMT tests compared to poor students and special education students, the three urban district student demographics.

I think you will be very, very surprised to see the differences in how poor students, ELL students and special education students score on the CMTs. ELL student test scores are much, much, lower than those of poor students, scoring only about a third to half as high as poor students in math. In reading, Connecticut ELL student CMT scores are the same or *even less* than the scores for students receiving special education services.

Yet the ECS formula weights poor students at 33% and ELL students at 10%. Based on the state’s own data on average test scores for poor and ELL students across the state, ELL student weighting should be 87-95% weighting.

This weighting would go a long way to helping urban school districts improve educational outcomes. Everyone applauds charter schools for their high test scores for urban students. Well, what you may not know is that the charter schools in our three largest cities *do not* educate ELL students. In Bridgeport, ELL students make up 40% of the student body, but last year at New Beginnings and Park City Prep charter schools, there were no ELL students. In Hartford, ELL students make up 46% of the student body, but there were no ELL students in Jumoke charter school last year. And in New Haven, where ELL students make up 29% of the student body, there were no ELL students in Amistad and Elm City Prep charter schools last year. While some of these charter schools have had a very small percentage of ELL students in earlier years, they have been reducing their percentage of ELL and special ed students over the years.

The fundamental flaw in how our state has allowed charter schools to organize themselves is that many of the charter schools considered high performing do not educate a representative group of students from the urban school district in which they are located, but educate only the highest performing urban students.

And because the urban district charter schools do not educate ELL students, ELL students become more and more concentrated in our city's public schools. And their test scores are very low because English is not their home language. To help our urban districts address the challenges of educating ELL students, we urge you to make this change in the ECS formula **this year**.

I think there is broad recognition, including by the Governor, that the Bridgeport schools have been most impacted by inequities in ECS funding. The Bridgeport schools have made \$24 million in cuts over the last 4 years. Our Board of Education's proposed budget for 2008-09 calls for an increase of \$14 million: \$8.2 million to pay for contractual increases, health benefits increase and higher energy costs and inflation; \$2.2 million to pay the added costs just to open the four new schools that have been a long time coming; and \$3.6 million to pay for critical needs to repair Bridgeport's

crumbling schools, hire 2 security guards, 2 social workers and 2 guidance counselors to help make our schools safe, create a state mandated in-school suspension program to accommodate more than 12,000 suspensions a year, and hire the additional 3 administrators State Education Department wants the Bridgeport school district to hire so they can work more closely with Bridgeport's failing schools.

Yet, the new ECS funding will provide only \$5.6 million of the \$14 million needed. What should be cut? How does a district make these choices? The 3 new administrators that State Ed wants – or heat the schools – or repair our crumbling schools – or make our schools safe – or comply with the new in-school suspension law? That is what we are facing in Bridgeport without additional state funding.

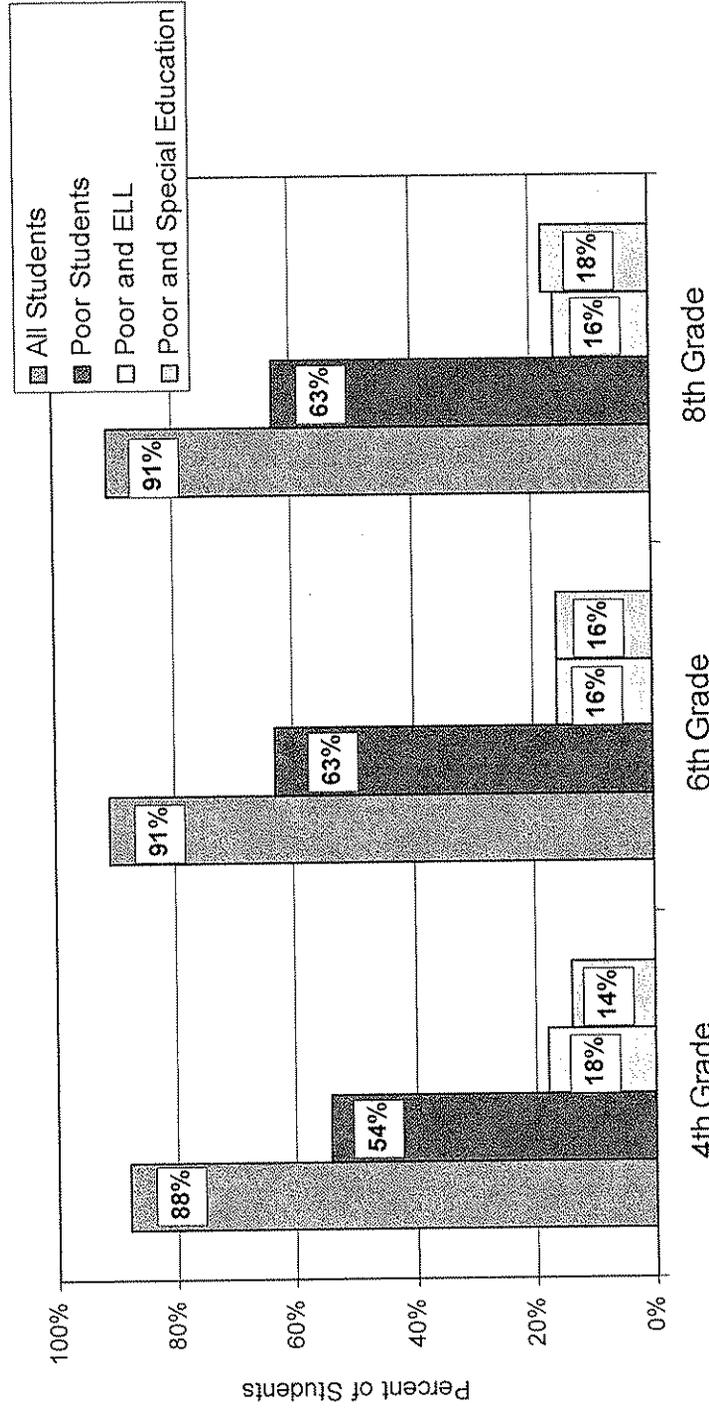
Lastly, we support restoration of the Early Reading Success Program. We support a special program to help districts implement the new in-school suspension law. And we support more funding to State Education Department's Accountability Fund that can be used to go back to the districts where the State Department of Education is asking school districts to hire more staff or spend more money – that they don't have.

We also support HB 5824, HB 5826, and SB 646, and we believe that if charter schools are to get more funding, they should be required to educate a microcosm of their home urban school district students, including appropriate percentages of ELL and special education students.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today.

*What is the Impact of
Student Demographics
on Test Scores?*

Poor Students Who are English Language Learners or in Special Education are Much Less Likely to Meet Proficiency on the CMT Test in Reading



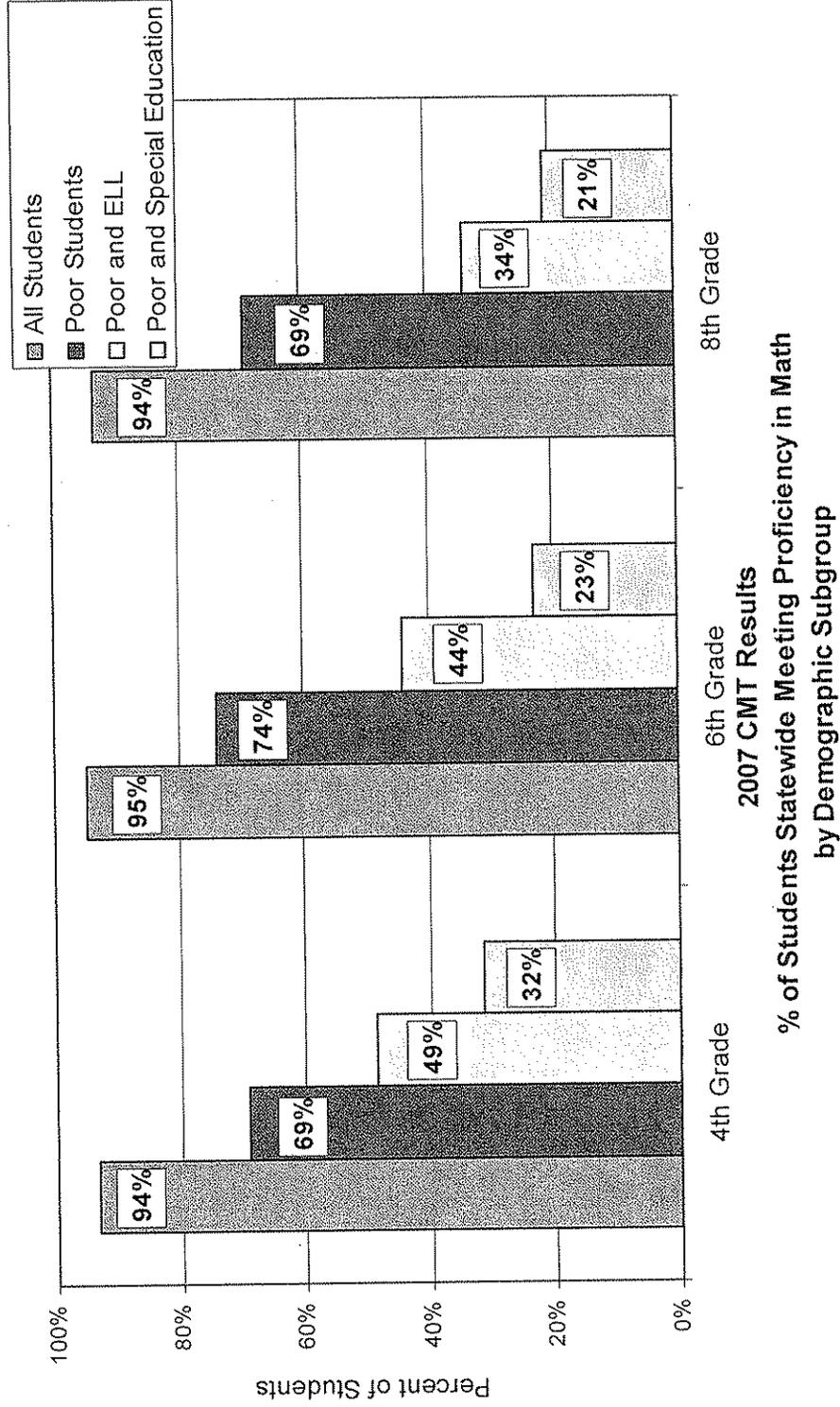
2007 CMT Results
% of Students Statewide Proficient in Reading
by Demographic Subgroup

* All Students excludes Poor Students, English Language Learners and Special Education Students

** ELL = English Language Learners

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**Poor Students Who are English Language Learners
or in Special Education are Much Less Likely to
Meet Proficiency on the CMT Test in Math**



* All students excludes Poor Students, English Language Learners and Special Education Students
 ** ELL = English Language Learners

BRIDGEPORT CHILD ADVOCACY COALITION

**K-12 Students from Homes in Which English Is Not Spoken
2006-07 School Year**

School District	Percentage of K-12 ELL Students
Hartford	45.7%
New Britain	43.7%
Bridgeport	39.7%
Danbury	36.5%
Norwalk	32.3%
Stamford	36.1%
New Haven	28.9%
Windham	29.0%
Meriden	28.6%
New London	23.5%

**IMPACT ON CMT TEST SCORES IN READING AND MATH
Grades 4, 6 and 8**

**READING: 54-63% of Poor Students Score at Proficient Level
16-18% of Poor and ELL Students Meet Proficiency**

**MATH: 69-74% of Poor Students Score at Proficient Level
34-49% of Poor and ELL Students Meet Proficiency**

