



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MARCH 10, 2008

**TESTIMONY OF
MARK K. MCQUILLAN, COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION**

ON

RAISED BILL 5820

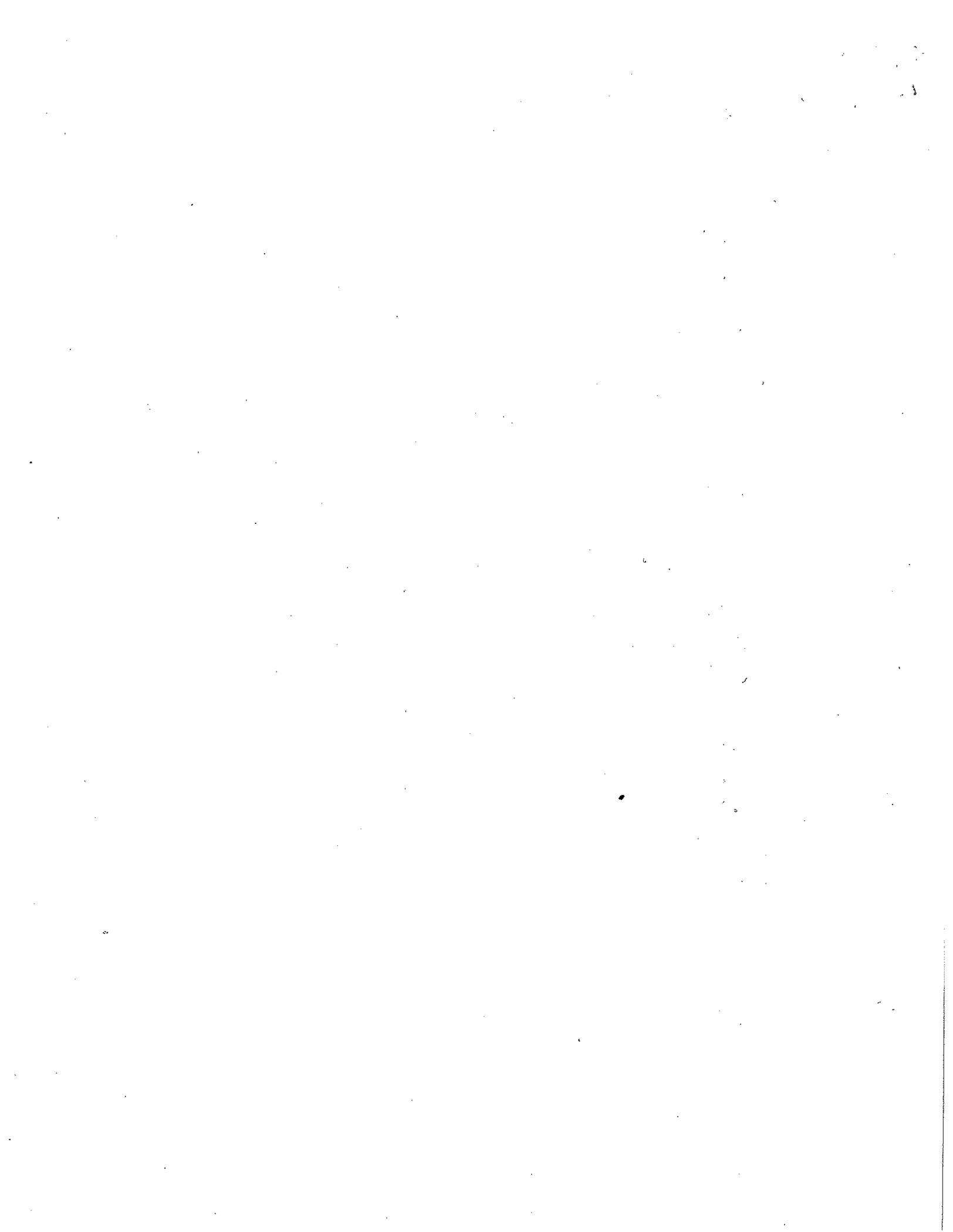
BILL 5026

RAISED BILL 5821

RAISED BILL 5824

RAISED BILL 5871

RAISED BILL 5826





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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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MARCH 10, 2008

**TESTIMONY OF
MARK K. MCQUILLAN, COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION**

**ON
RAISED BILL 5820
AN ACT CONCERNING HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT FOR PRIVATE WORLD LANGUAGE
COURSES**

AND

**RAISED BILL 5821
AN ACT CONCERNING DISTANCE LEARNING**

Connecticut's scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that Connecticut no longer leads the country in mathematics and reading, as it once did in the early 1990s. Many states have caught up with Connecticut, and others, like Massachusetts, have surpassed us. Higher percentages of Connecticut's high school graduates are requiring remedial coursework when they enter college, the purchasing power of a high school degree is no longer enough to support a family of four, and too many high school students are dropping out and enrolling in adult education programs. Briefly summarized, student achievement in the state has remained flat since 2002. We have seen almost no significant improvement on national tests since that time, and the achievement gaps between Whites and Blacks and Whites and Hispanics have grown rather than narrowed. Literacy achievement, in particular, appears to be in decline.

In light of these facts, the State Board of Education last summer formed an ad hoc committee to study secondary school reform. That committee, composed of representatives of elementary, secondary and higher education and the business community, has spent a number of months studying a broad range of issues related to reforming the state's middle and high schools, and I have been traveling around the state to meet with various groups to discuss the outline of the committee's recommendations. One issue that has emerged from this endeavor is the need to provide more flexibility in the awarding of credits for high school graduation. Consequently, the Department of Education is very interested in Raised Bill 5820 which proposes that students to be awarded graduation credits based on proficiency in a world language without regard to hours spent in a public school classroom. However, we believe that Raised Bill 5820 may be too narrow and should not be limited to one particular subject area. Rather, we propose that you consider allowing the Commissioner of Education to identify and approve subject area proficiency examinations which, if passed by any student, would allow the student's district to grant high school credit without requiring that a certain number of hours be spent in a public school classroom.

As part of this change, we would also recommend that the high school graduation requirements statute be amended to specify that districts may grant credit for the completion of on-line courses offered by the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium referenced in Raised Bill 5821. However, please note that while we support student participation in these on-line courses, it is not clear to us what is meant by the last sentence being added in Raised Bill 5821, which states that school districts shall participate as part of the consortium. If it means that all school districts must provide opportunities for students to participate in the courses offered by this consortium, we are supportive.



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**TESTIMONY OF
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ON

**RAISED BILL 5871
AN ACT CONCERNING THE BEST PROGRAM**

The Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program is a program for the induction of educators in Connecticut and is an extremely important activity. It plays a critical role in the development of effective teaching practices leading to student learning.

As you may know, the BEST program was put into place 20 years ago. Since its inception, it has become a nationally-recognized model of a comprehensive induction program providing school and state-based support through mentoring and professional development. In addition, it provides a standards-based performance assessment through a content-specific teaching portfolio.

When the BEST program was established, it was part of a much larger package of state-funded initiatives designed to raise standards for the teaching profession and to more effectively recruit, develop, retain and recognize teachers. In addition to the BEST program, this continuum of initiatives raised teachers' salaries, introduced a three-tiered certification system, provided financial incentives for veteran teachers to become mentors and cooperating teachers, and instituted comprehensive professional development through summer institutes. However, in the years since these initiatives were put into place, state funding for a number of them was eliminated or significantly reduced.

In light of the changes to the BEST program that have occurred over time, we are aware that modifications are needed if it is to meet the goals of a strong teacher induction program, i.e., to improve the quality of teaching, reduce teacher turnover and result in positive gains in student achievement. However, because of our belief in the importance of educator induction and the need for changes that can be sustained over a long period of time, we request that no legislative action regarding the BEST program be taken this session. We are currently in the process of developing new models for mentoring and supervision and hope to have these models completed by this fall. Our plan is to involve a wide array of constituents, including teachers and administrators, national experts in teacher induction programs and the State Board of Education in thoroughly studying the BEST program and reporting to the General Assembly on models for mentoring and supervision for consideration by the General Assembly in 2009.



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EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MARCH 10, 2008

**TESTIMONY OF
MARK K. MCQUILLAN, COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION**

ON

**BILL 5026
AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS
REGARDING EDUCATION**

The Department of Education supports Raised Bill 5026, which is the Governor's bill to implement her budget recommendations regarding education. Section 1 of the bill clarifies provisions that were enacted last year concerning interdistrict magnet school tuition. Section 2 of the bill amends last year's new school district accountability legislation for schools in need of improvement. This section specifies that certain funds to be spent by towns in need of improvement this current year to implement school improvement plans will continue to be available for expenditure by those towns for those purposes during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2009. This change is necessary to allow those towns to continue to implement their plans under the supervision and direction of the State Board of Education.

Sections 4 and 6 clarify provisions concerning grants for kindergarten and preschool programs and academic support for students participating in the interdistrict student attendance program and concerning collaborative planning for the establishment of additional interdistrict magnet schools. These provisions are currently too restrictive and need to include programs for students in a larger geographic area.

Section 3 adjusts school readiness funding to reflect historical experience, and Section 5 clarifies the per child cost for school readiness programs so that it more accurately reflects the current rate for providing school readiness services for a full-day and full-year.

This bill will implement the Governor's budget recommendations. We urge your support.



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March 10, 2008



**TESTIMONY OF
MARK K. MCQUILLAN, COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION**

ON

**RAISED BILL 5824
AN ACT CONCERNING THE ACCREDITATION OF SCHOOL
READINESS PROGRAMS**

Current law prohibits the Department of Education from providing school readiness funding to school readiness programs that are not accredited, except that if a program is a new provider, it must become accredited within three years of having first entered into a contract with a town to provide school readiness services. A majority of the programs receiving school readiness funding are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a very high-quality organization that accredits programs nationwide. Unfortunately, since NAEYC has recently made significant changes to the criteria by which programs are accredited, the state's statutory provisions that require school readiness programs to be accredited create significant short-term problems for some programs.

For instance, NAEYC was closed to all applicants from June 2005 to December 2005 and programs could not apply during that time period. Consequently, the accreditation process was slowed down so that school readiness programs due for accreditation and re-accreditation in the second half of 2008 and into 2009 are at a disadvantage in completing the process in the required timeframe. For a few programs NAEYC accreditation has been delayed or revoked because of procedural issues such as missed mailing deadlines or the

submission of incomplete paperwork. Additionally, there have been a very few programs in which events have prompted Department of Public Health involvement and consequently the revocation of NAEYC accreditation. In these cases, the DPH issues were resolved. However, under NAEYC's new accreditation system programs are required to submit all DPH records as part of the accreditation review. This has created a dissonance between DPH's licensing system and the national system. Unfortunately, in some of these situations, NAEYC accreditation is lost and it can take 6 to 12 months for the program to become reaccredited. If the Department of Education cannot make payments to programs that have lost their accreditation under circumstances such as these, there will be a great deal of disruption of school readiness services and programs may have to close.

In light of circumstances such as those described above, Raised Bill 5824 makes the statutory requirements more flexible, while at the same time ensuring that there is Department of Education oversight, e.g., an on-site assessment and a corrective action plan prescribed and monitored by the Commissioner of Education, so that the high quality of the programs is maintained. We support these changes.



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ON

RAISED BILL 5826 AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION GRANTS

Section 1 of Raised Bill 5826 specifies that school construction change orders be submitted to the Department of Education for code and grant eligibility review within six months of issuance to be considered eligible for state grant assistance. There is currently no law concerning when change orders must be submitted, and there are occasions when school districts, and the construction managers they hire, wait until the end of a construction project to submit change orders to the Department. Occasionally change orders for one project are delivered in multiple boxes. When this happens, the department's review of change orders for other projects is slowed down considerably. By requiring that change orders be submitted within six months of execution, the flow of change orders submitted to the Department will be steadier and there will not be unexpected delays. Consequently, we support Section 1 of this bill.

Under current law if state reimbursement for the acquisition, purchase or construction of a building was for 100% of the eligible costs of such acquisition, purchase or construction, and the building ceases to be used for the purpose for which the grant was provided within 20 years of the date of approval by the General Assembly of the project, title to the building reverts to the state, unless the Commissioner of Education decides otherwise

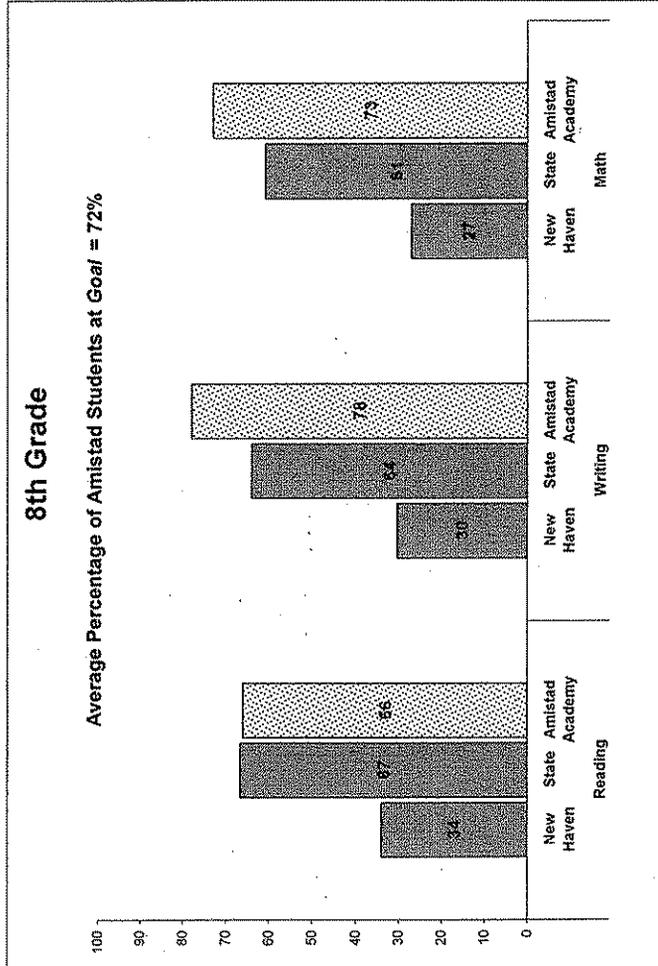
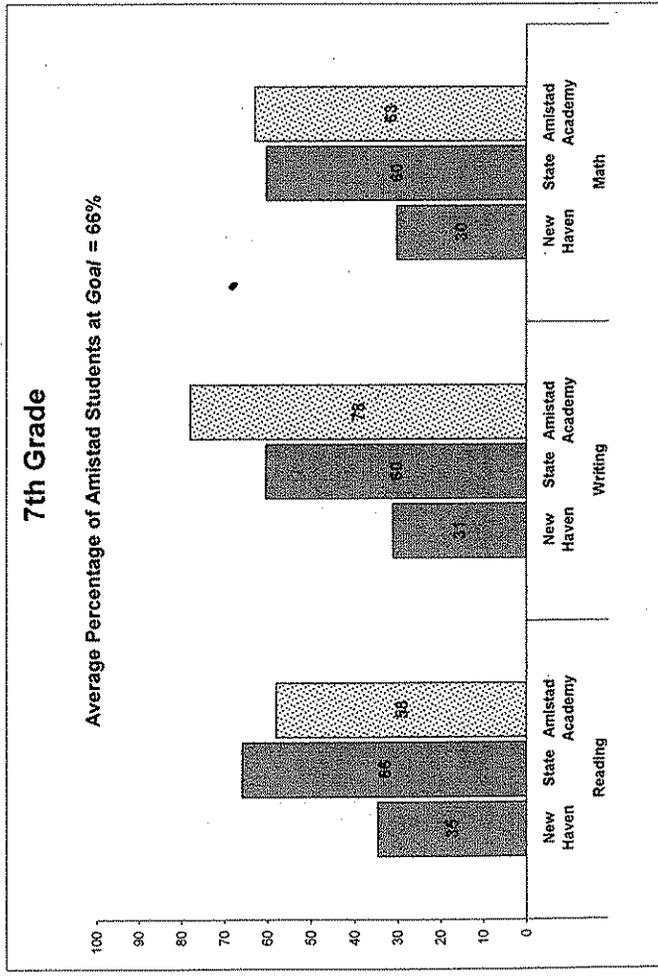
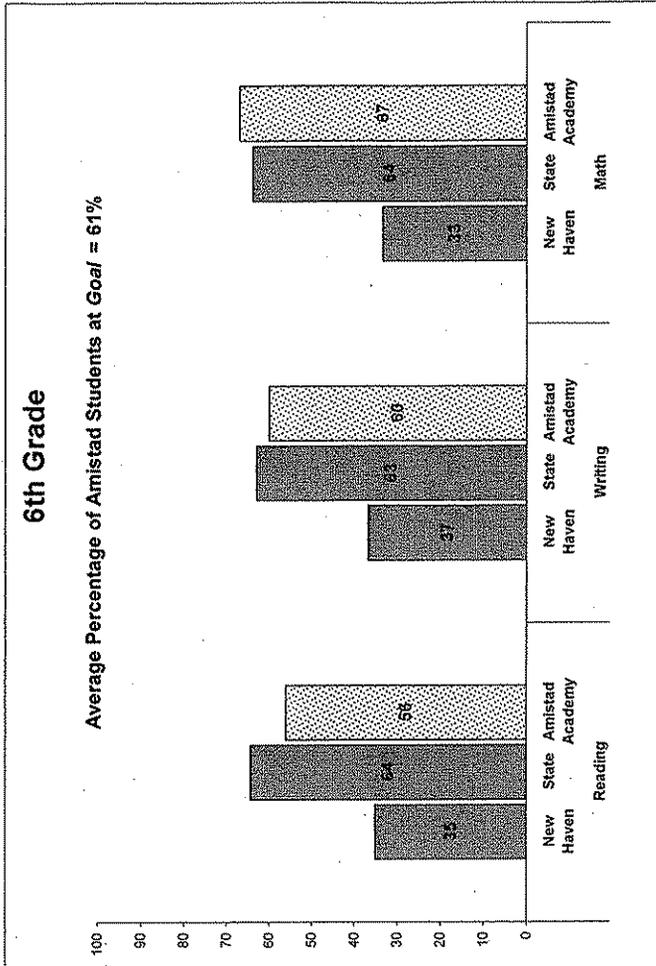
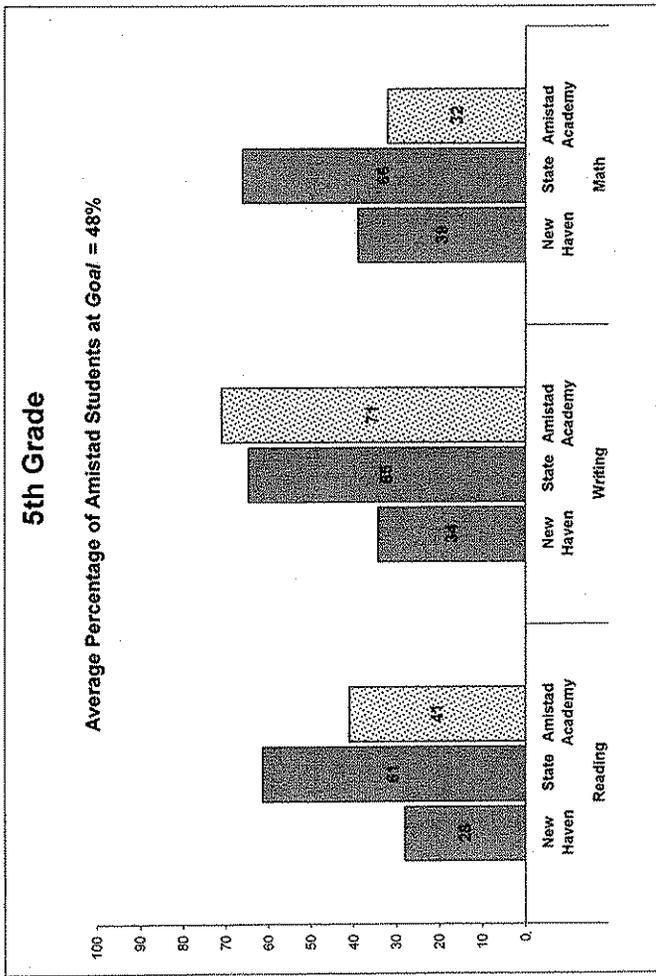
for good cause. Section 2 of this bill specifies that the provisions concerning title reversion, described above, apply not just to projects for which state reimbursement is 100%, but to projects for which state reimbursement is 95% or greater.

When these title reversion provisions were originally written, magnet schools, regional vocational-agriculture centers and regional special education centers were eligible for 100% state school construction grant funding. Since that time, state grant participation for these types of facilities was reduced to 95%, but the title reversion statute was not updated to conform to this reduction. This bill will update that statute to require application of the reversion provision to the projects currently authorized at 95% state grant participation as well as the older projects with 100% state grant participation. We support this change.

Section 3 of this bill requires a school construction grant applicant to secure a site for a school construction project before applying for a school construction grant. While we agree with the concept of this proposal, we have a few concerns about the wording of this section that we would like to discuss with the committee.

Amistad Academy 2007 CMT Results

Percentage of Students At or Above Goal



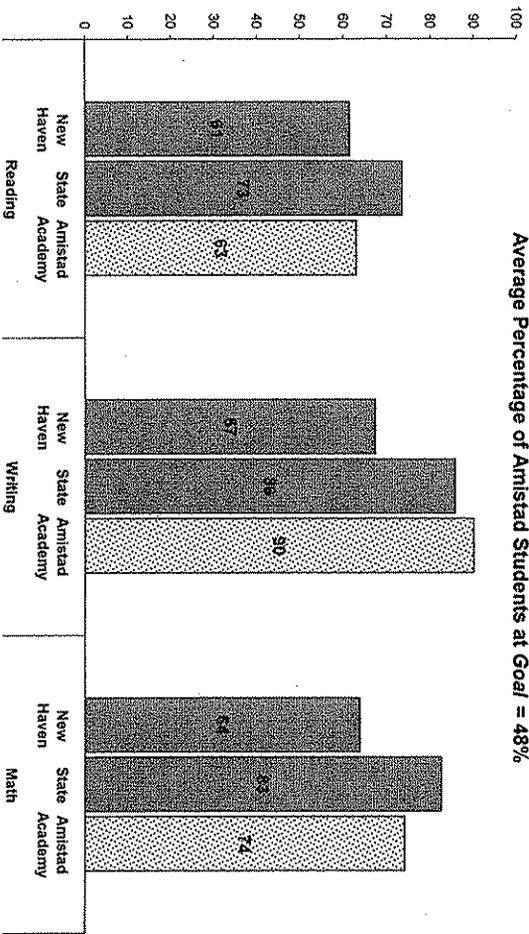
Note: In 2007, Amistad served grades K and 5-8. Students in grades 5-8 entered Amistad in grade 5.

Amistad Academy 2007 CMT Results

Percentage of Students At or Above Proficiency

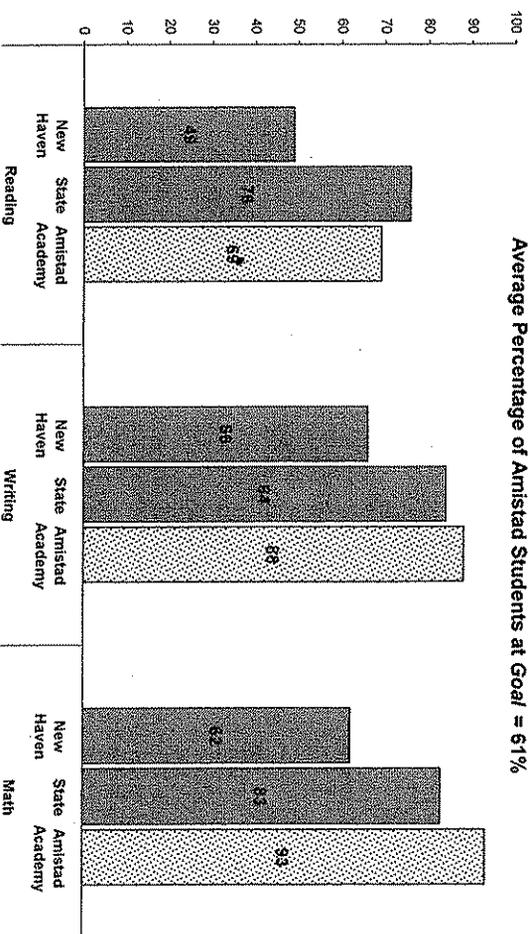
5th Grade

Average Percentage of Amistad Students at Proficiency = 76%
Average Percentage of Amistad Students at Goal = 48%



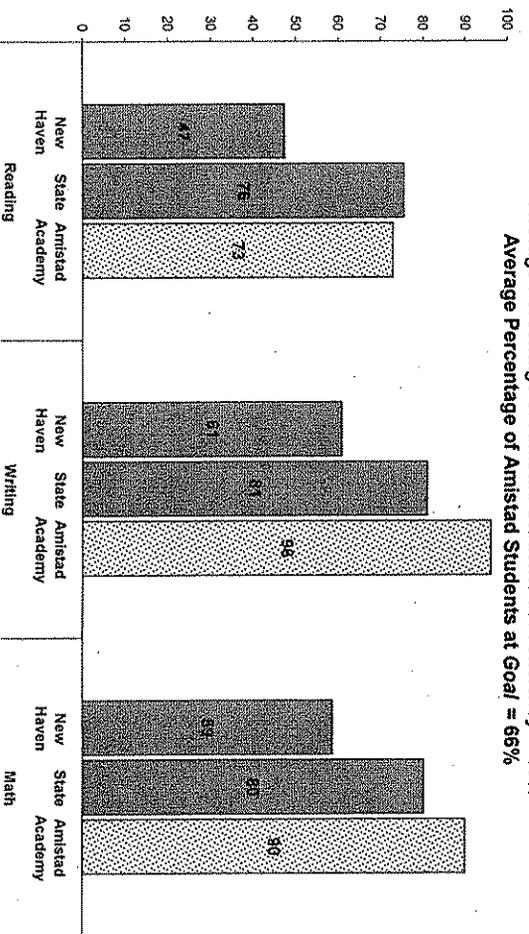
6th Grade

Average Percentage of Amistad Students at Proficiency = 83%
Average Percentage of Amistad Students at Goal = 61%



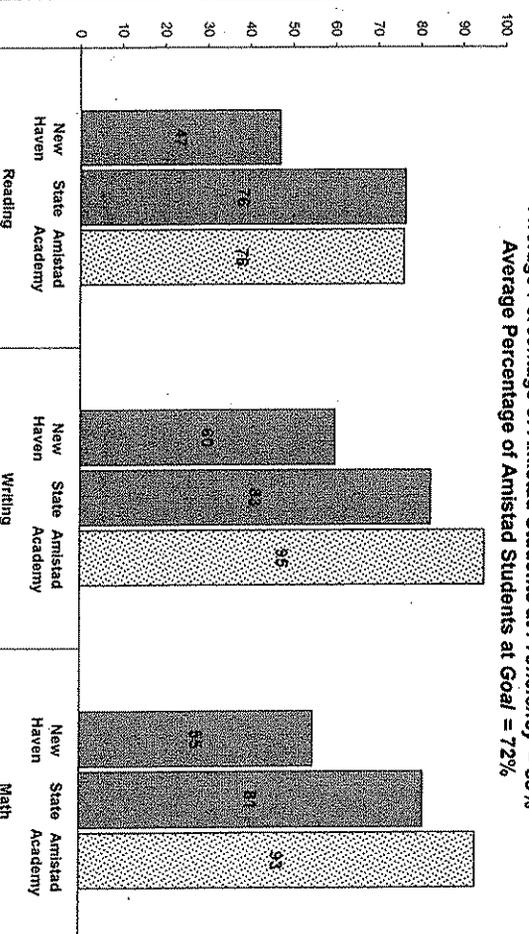
7th Grade

Average Percentage of Amistad Students at Proficiency = 86%
Average Percentage of Amistad Students at Goal = 65%



8th Grade

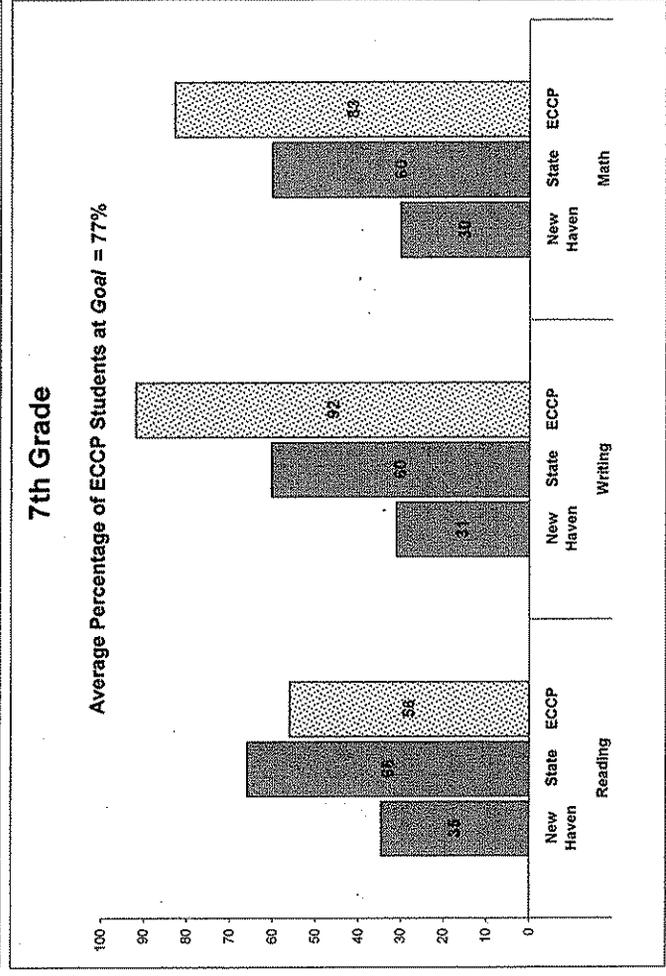
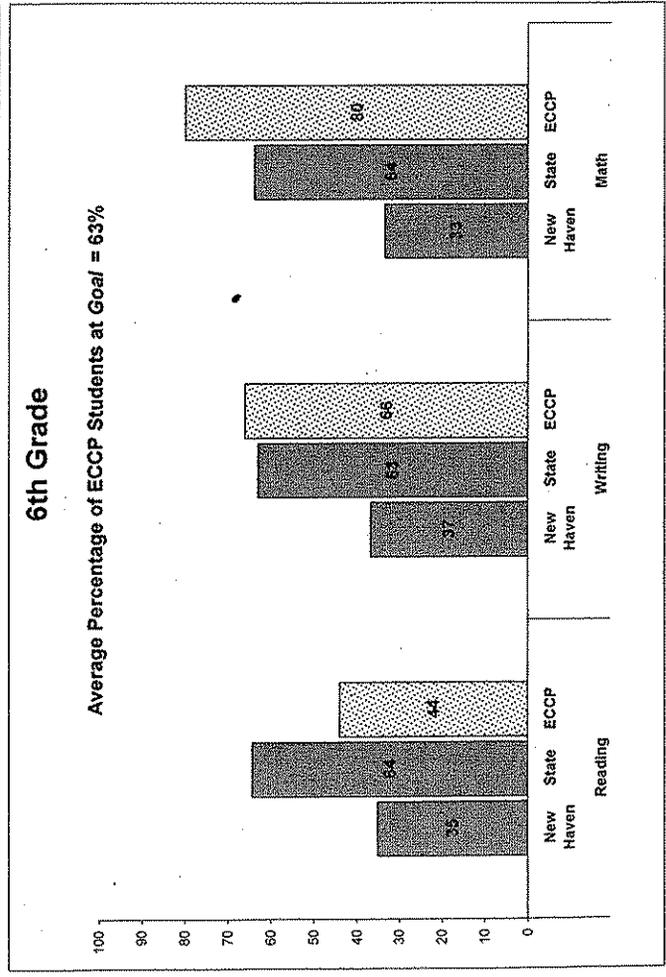
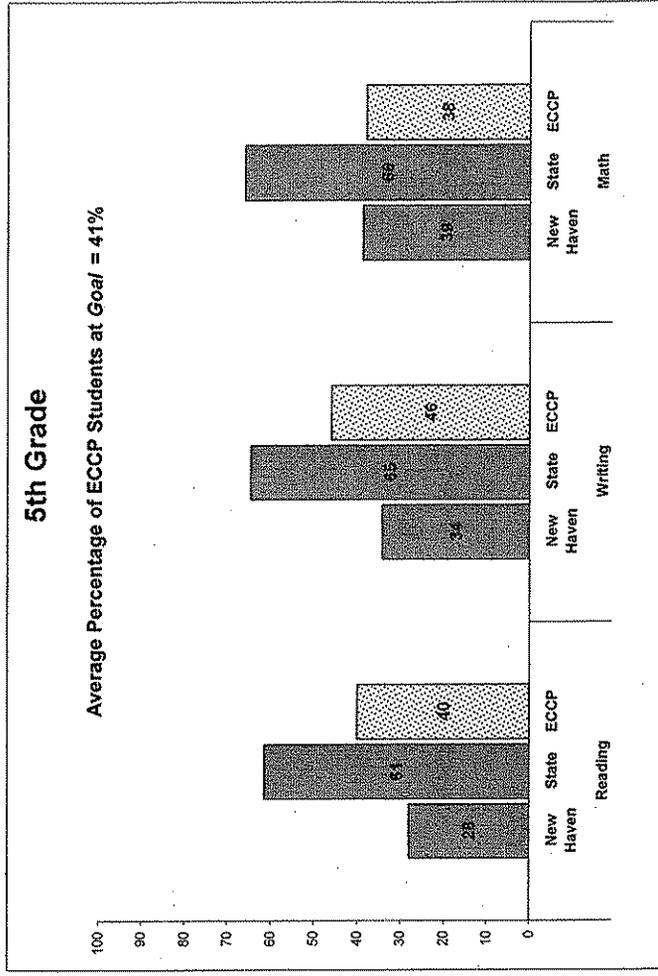
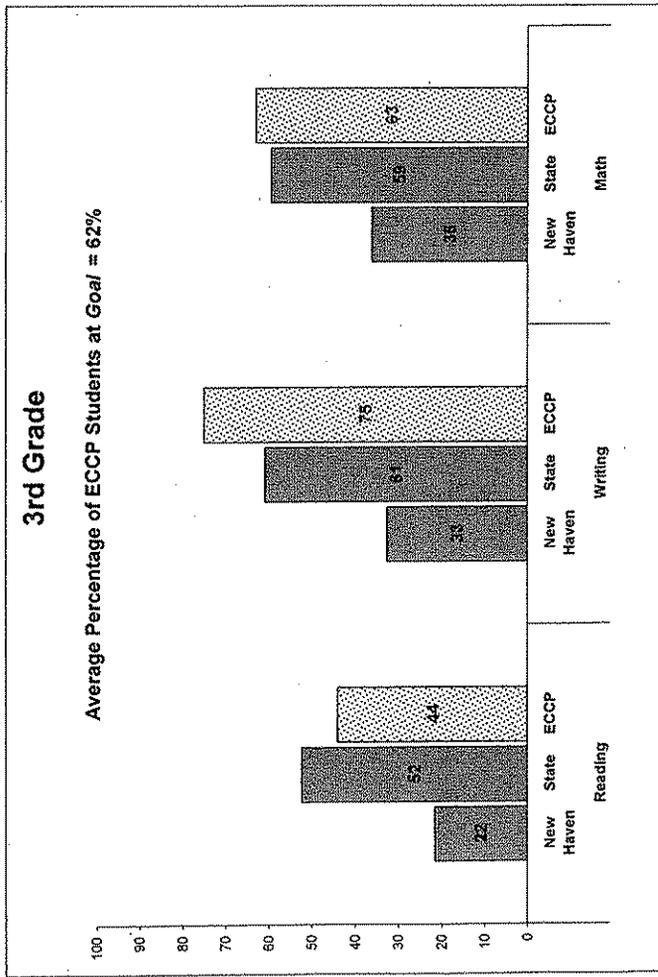
Average Percentage of Amistad Students at Proficiency = 88%
Average Percentage of Amistad Students at Goal = 72%



Note: In 2007, Amistad served grades K and 5-8. Students in grades 5-8 entered Amistad in grade 5.

Elm City College Prep (ECCP) 2007 CMT Results

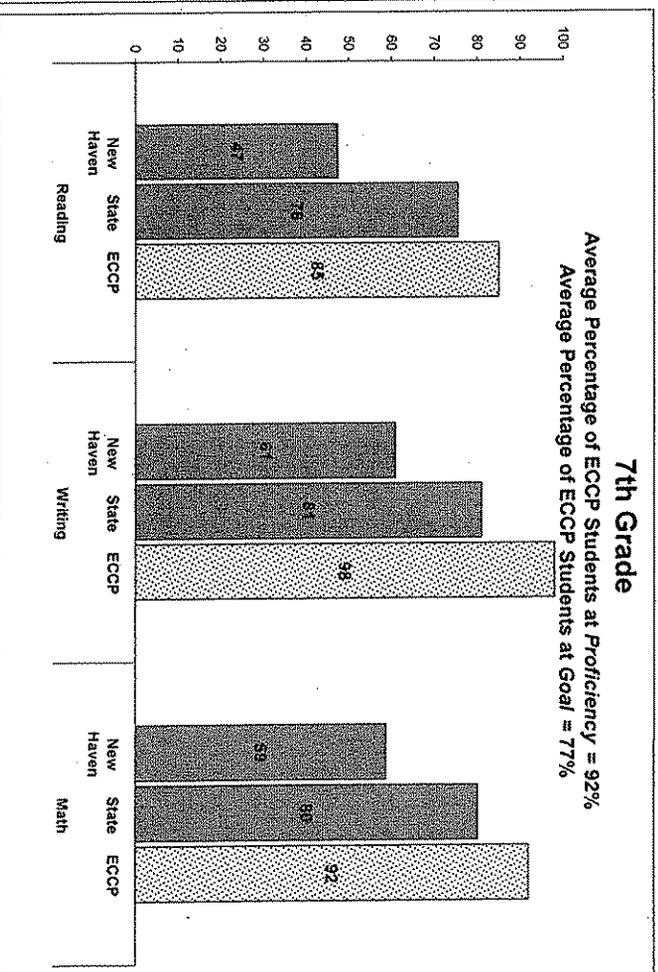
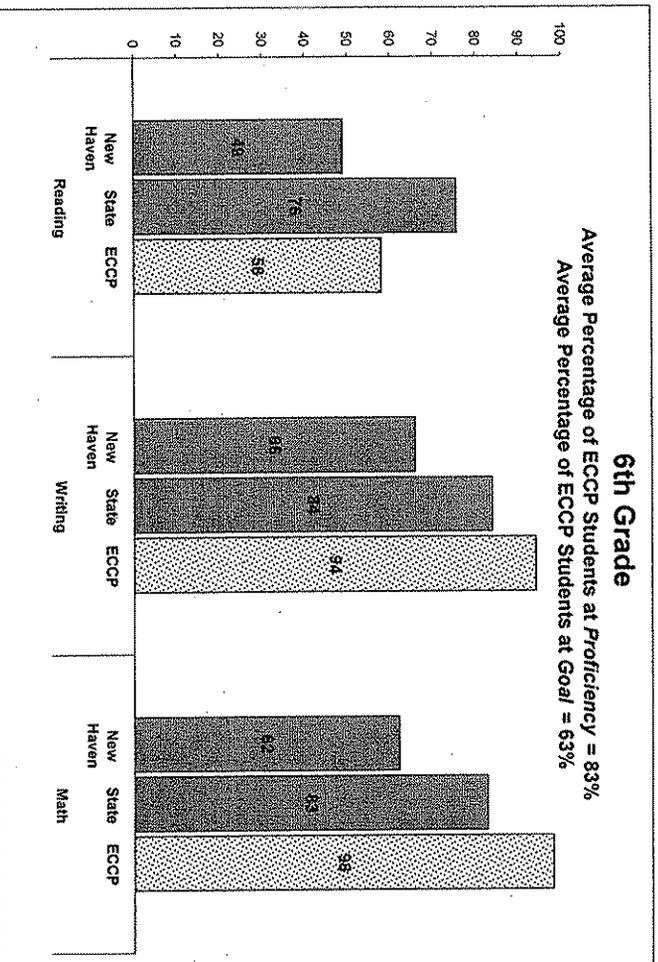
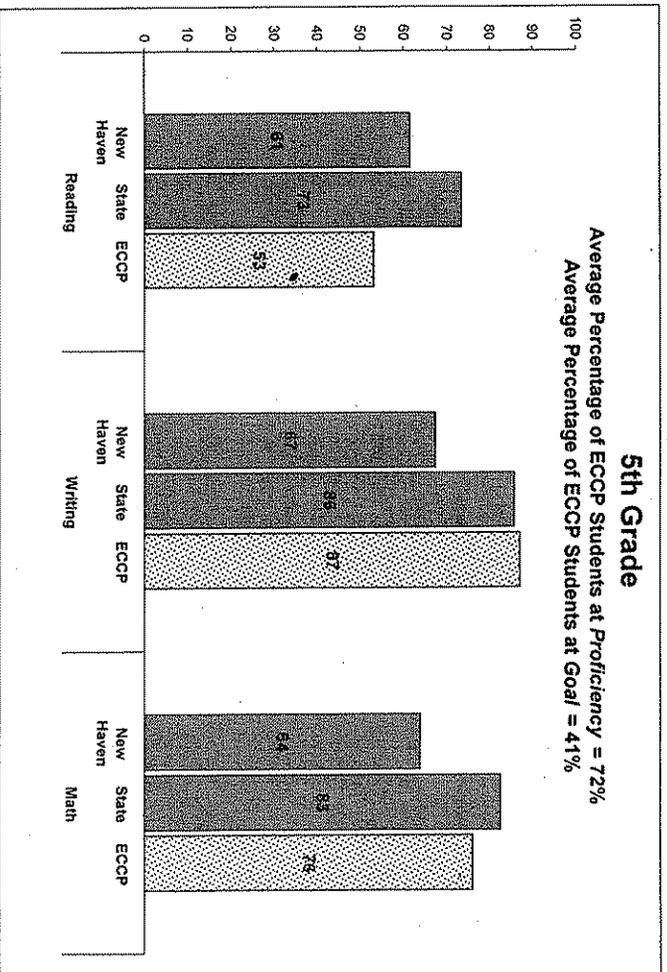
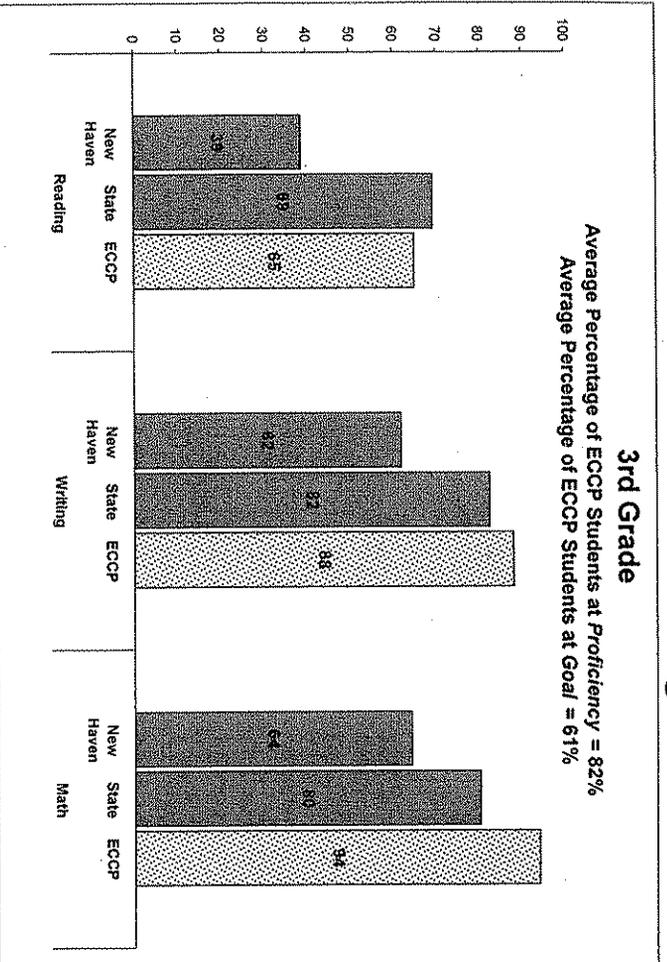
Percentage of Students At or Above Goal



Note: In 2007, ECCP served grades K-3 and 5-7. Grade 3 students entered ECCP in grade 1 and students in grades 5-7 entered in grade 5.

Elm City College Prep (ECCP) 2007 CMT Results

Percentage of Students At or Above Proficiency



Note: In 2007, ECCP served grades K-3 and 5-7. Grade 3 students entered ECCP in grade 1 and students in grades 5-7 entered in grade 5.