

New Haven Public Schools

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Dr. Reginald Mayo
Superintendent
Administrative Offices
Gateway Center
54 Meadow Street 8th floor
New Haven, CT
203-946-8888

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON RAISED BILL No. 6686 AN ACT CONCERNING THE TEACHER EDUCATION AND MENTORING PROGRAM

Senator Gaffey, Rep. Fleischmann, members of the Education Committee, my name is Donna Aiello, Coordinator of Staff Development for New Haven Public Schools, and District Facilitator for the CSDE BEST Program, here today speaking on **House Bill No. 6686**, AAC the Teacher Education and Mentoring Program.

We applaud the Education Committee and the State Department of Education for addressing the issues of the Teacher Education and Mentoring Program. Teacher quality is critical to a successful educational experience and in closing the achievement gap. Improving teacher retention and quality is a fundamental component of New Haven Public Schools' District Improvement Plan. The current support plan for new teachers and mentors in New Haven is a very detailed program and plan with mentors and new teachers. This support has led to an increase in teacher retention over the last three years. We had less hires last year than the previous three years.

To that end, there are many components in the Raised Bill No. 6686 concerning teacher education and mentoring program that we support.

We support provisions in the Bill to organize significant partnerships among the CSDE, the RESC Alliance, and our LEAs. These relationships can provide the infrastructure to support not only the retaining of high quality beginning teachers in our areas of greatest need, but also the creation and stabilization of a mentor pool critical to the success of those teachers.

Furthermore, RESC support in the specific content areas can provide a platform for strong support of current mentor shortages. Responsibilities of local and regional boards of education in Section 1(a)(4) of the Bill, while essential to the success of a new teacher induction program, will require high levels of collaboration among these partnerships. For example, the development of a specific recruitment plan for mentors is paramount to the successful implementation of the Bill, and will require the joint efforts of the LEAs and the RESCs. In New Haven alone, the expected attrition rate for June 2010 will be great due to the end of the existing teacher contract.

Without a strong design for a new teacher training and mentorship support program we will not be able to provide the amount of mentors needed to work with our newly hired teachers as outlined in this Bill, most specifically in the shortage areas of science and math. This is most important at a time when we need teachers with strong teaching skills in these already difficult to fill shortage areas.

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Also paramount to the successful implementation of the Bill will be the data systems generated and maintained by the CSDE and EASTCONN, supported by the RESC Alliance, and utilized by the LEAs. These systems will allow us to coordinate our teacher education and mentoring program efforts. Cooperation between the local areas RESCs and districts will ensure that new teachers entering the field are competent to provide students with the highest quality education possible. Finally, collaborative efforts such as the data system and resource collection can generate uniformity and consistency in the program which will be necessary to address the retention of all newly hired teachers across the state.

There are several provisions or gaps of concern to us.

While allocation of funds associated with stipends for mentors may create a difficulty in recruitment efforts, without the passage of this Bill and allocation of funds therein, districts will be left with zero resources to support beginning teachers during their most critical and vulnerable period. Research clearly indicates that 30% of teachers leave the profession within the first 3-5 years of teaching. One of the most common reasons for their departure from the profession is a perceived lack of support.

Section 1(f) requires mentors to be assigned to two or three beginning teachers, with fifty contact hours per beginning teacher, at ten hours per module. The stipend is \$500. Each teacher is required to do two modules the first year. The stipend amount remains the same, no matter how many teachers a mentor takes. In fact, in our experience, this works best when a mentor has one or two beginning teachers, but not three. It is difficult to get good mentors, and we do try and have them in the same building as the beginning teacher, but this is not always possible. A sliding scale may work better for mentors, depending upon how many beginning teachers they have.

Another concern which will create a severe financial and scheduling hardship for large districts such as New Haven, in schools with a high population of beginning teachers, is the requirement in Section 1(a)(4)(E) to "ensure substitute teacher coverage for mentors and beginning teacher to participate in the activities and modules required in the three-year teacher education and mentoring plan;" it is already a huge challenge to find substitutes on a regular basis to cover the routine absences on a daily basis. This new requirement will make it almost impossible to ensure this obligation to mentors and mentees on a consistent basis.

In addition, Section 1(g) provides that these provisions take effect for the school year commencing July 1, 2010. In the meantime, we have the 2009-2010 school year. Do we continue with the BEST program, or do nothing for new teachers that year, or roll the requirements for new 2009-2010 teachers into the 2010-2011 school year? If the latter, then we will need double the mentors because we will have double the teachers – and that is a huge administrative burden for us, especially since so many veteran teachers will be retiring in June 2010 as their contract ends. To avoid this gap and help continue to mentor new teachers, we would urge one last year of the BEST program, including funding.

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Our school district's commitment to retaining and supporting new teachers is a team effort and already evident in the daily practice of how we support the new teachers in our district. We have had major accomplishments in the retention of new teachers in New Haven. We have seen a significant decrease in the number of teachers leaving New Haven in the last two years. Last year we had a lower rate of new hires than we had in many years. I equate this to the concentrated, individual support we provide to all teachers holding DSAP or Initial teaching certificates.

From the moment a teacher is hired, we immediately assign a mentor within the first 10 days of their hiring and provide a school support team as well. We use quarterly logs completed and submitted to The Office of Staff Development to monitor mentoring activities and meetings for every teacher/mentor relationship. We also provide additional support from new teacher coaches who visit and provide on-site support to all new (K-12) teachers monthly to conference, coach and model lessons right in their classrooms. In addition to the regular on-site support they provide, coaches are available as needed by phone and email communication to support some of the teachers with more challenging classroom management issues and classroom improvements. For second and third year teachers who are working on the development of their portfolios, we provide monthly content specific support in collaboration with the CSDE to assist teachers in completing their portfolios. All support sessions are designed and provided by trained portfolio scorers in their relative content specific areas and conducted from October through April. We also provide surveys and questionnaires to mentors and teachers to monitor, guide and improve our own efforts in the mentoring model we have designed in New Haven.

We appreciate your support for our efforts to recruit and retain the most highly qualified teachers and mentors in New Haven. We cannot do it alone and we have so much more to do. Strong teachers and mentors are needed at every school. We must continue to support new teachers in every classroom, in their most critical first three years of entering the profession. We want to continue to improve – dramatically so – and cannot do so without State support.

Thank you. We would be happy to answer any questions.

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Facts about New Haven Public Schools:

- 20,000 students attend New Haven Public Schools; 1,987 of these students are from 30 towns; there are 17 interdistrict magnet schools, 4 intra-district magnets for New Haven students, and 3 lighthouse schools. A total of 7,325 students attend magnet schools in New Haven. We had nearly 7,000 applications for our magnet program; the lottery took place March 5th. In December, two New Haven high schools were among just 16 high schools across Connecticut that were awarded US News & World Report's Silver designation, and one New Haven high school was among the five awarded a Bronze designation; all three are interdistrict magnet schools. And, John C. Daniels School of International Communication has been awarded the status of 2009 Magnet School of Excellence by Magnet Schools of America, which selects 75 magnet schools in the nation for this top category.
- 23 of 31 schools are K-8 or pre-K-8. New Haven was #1 in its district reference group for the CMT in many areas, including math, reading and science. Grade to grade cohorts showed increases at every grade level in reading and math, and many schools had double digit gains.
- Nine schools made Safe Harbor; three of them were in Restructuring.
- We have a literacy and math coach in every school and they work with students and teachers in smaller group settings.
- Positive behavior support program is being piloted in five schools and the Comer School Reform model is being implemented in seven schools.
- Suspensions decreased by 1,228 students last year, the four-year dropout rate is 15.3% and school attendance is up.
- Curriculum is being strengthened as is work on effective use of instructional time.
- High schools posted the best gains in the district CAPT scores since the administration of CAPT began: 9% in reading and 11% in writing.
- Over 500 students took AP courses, with a 73% increase since 2003 for those scoring 3 or higher.
- There has been a 21 point increase in SAT scores since 2003. In 2008, 1,003 students graduated and 82.3% went on to 146 two- or four-year colleges. UCONN accepted 140 students.
- We have numerous partnerships with higher education institutions and others.
- New Haven is the largest school-based pre-school provider in the State and 79% of pre-school teachers have a 2-year college degree.
- The school construction program has resulted in 29 new and renovated schools opened since 1998 with five more in construction and four more in planning and design; they contribute to an improved learning environment, as noted in the Cambridge Report.
- State designation as the #1 Wellness Policy which reflects the Physical Activity and Wellness (PAW) programs (funded through private grants), and a variety of healthy education initiatives that are being employed across the District with our student population.
- Successful transition to in-house Food Service Program with dramatic transition in healthy menu choices for children, increased student participation and federal reimbursements and successful awards of numerous grants related to fresh fruits and vegetable and breakfast programs and recognitions for the efforts to increase healthy eating and awareness and decreasing obesity. Utilization of updated computerized systems to track purchasing and consumption which has served to more efficiently track costs and manage the system more effectively.