

# *New Haven Public Schools*

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## TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON VARIOUS BILLS

Senator Gaffey, Rep. Fleischmann, members of the Education Committee, my name is Susan Weisselberg, School Construction Coordinator for New Haven Public Schools, and my testimony today on behalf of Dr. Reginald Mayo addresses several bills before you.

In general, we support **Senate Bill No. 1142**, AAC Relief of State Mandates on School Districts. The delay of the in-school suspension mandate in Section 1 will be helpful. We are working to reduce our out-of-school suspensions. This year we are tracking them at a lower rate than last year, and last year's rate was lower than the 2006-2007 rate. We worked with a variety of interest groups and organizations on homework procedures for students suspended three days or more, including parental notification, and soon we will be adopting a code of conduct for students concerning suspensions. We are working with our administrators and staff on alternatives to suspension in such categories as motivational, administrative interventions, therapeutic interventions and rewards. We support the remaining provisions in the bill, except for Section 3, which states that "grant payments shall be adjusted in accordance with reports of space availability in accredited school readiness programs for eligible children submitted to the commissioner every other month." It does not spell out the frequency and timing of the adjustments, and, given the ever-shifting funding situations in the school readiness area, this could create a real hardship. If parents lose subsidies or their circumstances change and several slots are lost, the staffing and administrative costs to the school district generally remain the same. We request a further review of this section, as it could have a fiscal impact that would shift staffing burden costs to the city and board of education.

We support **House Bill No. 6688**, AAC Education Grants, and thank you for listening to so many of us in deleting the 25% reduction in the definition of "total need students" for resident students in full-time interdistrict magnet schools in Section 2 of the bill. We also support the changes in Section 3, which help receiving districts in educating out-of-district students in interdistrict magnet schools; these changes bring the fiscal support closer to the real costs and will help keep dynamic educational opportunities viable. We are proud of our voluntary interdistrict magnet school program, with nearly 2,000 students from 30 towns; they are an outstanding example of regional cooperation and education. Please come visit our schools and see for yourselves how well they work.

We support most provisions in **House Bill 6687**, AAC Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes, except for Section 5 concerning the qualifications of school nurses. Our school nurses have many backgrounds, and not all of them have four-year degrees. Many nurses turn to school nursing after they have already been in practice. They may have children or other changes in circumstance and, with the added requirements, they may be deterred from choosing a career change into school nursing. Ultimately, changing the requirement will limit the pool of potential nurses and result in higher local costs.

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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.