

Testimony

Submitted to the

Education Committee

March 9, 2009

SENATE BILL NO. 830 AN ACT CONCERNING

THE GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EDUCATION

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleishmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Anne McKernan and I serve as the principal of the Metropolitan Learning Center Magnet School operated by the Capitol Region Education Council. Accompanying me today is Executive Director of CREC Bruce Douglas and General Director of CREC Magnet Schools, Denise Gallucci.

Joining the magnet school system after a sixteen year career in urban districts and suburban districts convinced me that magnet schools are the most effective and efficient way to support the academic and social growth of our youth and specifically our most underserved students. Magnet schools are uniquely positioned to address the myriad of challenges that students from our most disenfranchised groups bring to school each day. Regrettably, Connecticut has the most significant achievement gap in the country between its poor and non-poor students in both reading and mathematics as measured by the NAEP test. An integrated quality education for Hartford students is not only desperately need, it is mandated under the Sheff v. O'Neil stipulated order. The Governor's budget does not include the Commissioner of Education's recommendation for proposed funding for magnet school. I urge you to support the Commissioner's proposal for state funding at 100%.

MLC opened as a new magnet school in 1998. In ten short years the school has become one of the most successful magnet schools in the country. In November 2008, the MLC was cited by the US Department of Education as one of the eight most successful magnet high schools in the United States. In the DOE publication, "Innovations in Education-Successful Magnet High Schools " MLC was cited for its outstanding academic rigor, the rich and unique opportunities afforded children, the ability to close the achievement gap, and the personalization of education. MLC has been recognized by Magnet Schools of America six times for excellence or distinction. In 2004, the school won the Goldman -Sachs Award for Excellence in International Education. Beyond the many awards the school has received, student success is seen daily. MLC graduated its first class in 2005. The average graduation rate for these first four classes is 99%. Likewise the college acceptance rate for these first four classes averaged 99%. For the last three years, MLC has been cited by Connecticut Can Achieve Now (ConnCAN) as being one of the state's top ten schools for African American student achievement. MLC achieves AYP as required by the No Child Left Behind standard despite its demographics which include 75% students of color and nearly 40% students from economically disadvantaged homes.

We have met with great success because of the special opportunities and personalized environment a magnet school such as MLC can offer children. MLC has a vibrant theme, a network of relationships with the like-minded organizations, and enriching opportunities available for all students. Over the past three years the school has found opportunities for over 320 students to travel and study abroad in a country of interest. Because of the network the school has created with international organizations, MLC students from even the most modest backgrounds have studied in places such as China, Thailand, Egypt, Brazil, Germany and many more places. Classes regularly engage in teleconferencing with students abroad on important topics such as child labor, the genocide in Darfur, and the role of the US in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world in 2003, MLC students held two teleconferences with students in Iraq just 16 days before the war broke out. Students regularly comment on how these opportunities motivate them to take their studies more seriously and help them to define their life's path. One of our young Hispanic students, Edgar, came to MLC reluctantly. Because of the trust he placed in adults, he started taking advantage of the opportunities the school offered. Edgar hosted a young Egyptian student in his home and then went to Egypt for three weeks at no cost to his family. What he learned while studying abroad changed him dramatically. He came back a more focused student, took advantage of his education, continued to apply for additional international opportunities including a trip to Spain and to Japan. Edgar did not have the average SAT score required at New York University's, Stearns School of Business, but was accepted. A major reason for his acceptance was his keen interest in internationalism and the unique experiences to which he availed himself. Now a junior at NYU, he spent last summer interning at a major bank in China last summer.

Success like this does not just happen, it is planned and it is purposeful. The commitment that the Legislature and the local districts has made to date, has yielded results and in some cases nationally recognized results. The greatest barrier to maintaining and extending progress toward closing the achievement gap is state funding at 100%. The burden of funding of these schools cannot rest on the towns.

Magnet schools provide opportunities for children of ALL backgrounds to engage in they very type of meaningful academic inquiry so necessary for success in our challenging global economy. Magnet schools are one of the few environments in which students have the opportunity to learn and collaborate with students from diverse points of reference – an experience critical for their success. Funding magnet schools is not just an economic imperative; it is a moral imperative and our duty as outlined in the Sheff stipulated agreement.

Thank you for allowing me to share my views with you today.