

# *New Haven Public Schools*

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## **TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE ON H.B. No. 6365 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2011, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and Members of the Appropriations Committee, I am Susan Weisselberg, speaking on behalf of New Haven Superintendent of Schools Dr. Reginald Mayo on the Governor's budget recommendations regarding education. With me is Chef Tim Cipriano, who joined us last July as our Executive Food Services Director, who will talk about the impact of the proposed cuts on the meals we serve to students.

We appreciate efforts to keep ECS intact while the State and every municipality face this fiscal predicament. Our challenges are great and, in New Haven, we believe your money has been well spent. We have had major gains in State mastery test scores across the board at all levels including many double digit increases at many schools. These gains continue the momentum and steady gains across the district. Last February our Cambridge Evaluation Report highlighted many areas of achievement and solid structures within the Board of Education, noting New Haven as a model among Urban School Districts in Connecticut; we continue to work with the State and others on our District Plan of Improvement.

Our improvements are team efforts, for frequent student data assessments, academic interventions, curriculum development and implementation, professional development, tutoring, and classroom improvements. Our scores have improved. 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.

We cannot do it alone and we have much more to do. The cuts in various grants will set us back. We will have to cut summer school programs and paraprofessionals and teachers. We would love a longer school day in some of our lowest performing schools – we cannot afford it now and will never be able to afford it with the cuts.

### **Facts about New Haven Public Schools:**

- 20,000 students attend, of which 1,987 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.
- 23 of 31 schools are K-8 or pre-K-8.

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- 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.
- Literacy and math coach in every school.
- 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.
- 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, 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.

There is so much more we would like to do in every area, as we have so much work ahead of us. Strong leaders are needed at every school, and we must support the teachers in every classroom. Our assessments are helping, and so is professional development. We see more interventions as key tools to success, linked with our other efforts. Our families are increasingly stressed as the economic situation worsens, and people look to the schools to teach children and to provide activities, daytime into evening and throughout the year. Schools alone cannot provide all the answers but funding cuts make our job that much harder.

New Haven is known for its schools of choice. We are proud of our interdistrict magnet school program, which engages students based on the themes of each school – and with the strong learning base these schools provide.

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Concerning the magnets, along with other speakers and communities, we urge you to:

- Maintain Interdistrict Magnet School funding level increases for FY 10 (\$ 7,440) and FY11 (\$8,158) established by Public Act 07-3. These increases represent the third and fourth year of a four-year phased-in increase that follow a ten-year period where the State did not increase its support to Host or locally operated magnet schools. These increases are needed to maintain the high level of quality established in these schools and to protect the State's effort to provide students with high quality diverse learning environments throughout the entire State of Connecticut.
- Eliminate the 25% ECS count reduction to local school districts that have students attending interdistrict magnet schools. This reduction, if implemented, would increase the tuition burden to local school districts by approximately fifty million dollars (\$50,000,000) statewide for the 2009-2010 school year. It would also effectively eliminate the Host model magnet school agreements that have effectively operated across the State for 15 years without the necessity of supplemental funding requests to the legislature.
- Maintain the state's 95% reimbursement level for interdistrict magnet school construction projects. This incentive is critical to support the continued growth of the state's most successful program in response to the requirements of the Sheff v. O'Neill Connecticut Supreme Court decision. The construction of these schools with significant numbers of seats for "out-of district" students, represents an added burden which operating school districts could not justify to local taxpayers. The reduction of the reimbursement rate would threaten if not eliminate any future expansion of the interdistrict magnet school effort in the state.

Education funding cuts often result in a disparate, negative impact on poorer urban school districts, while pressure continues on us to close the achievement gap. We want to continue to improve – dramatically so – and cannot do so without State support.

Thank you.