

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 addresses several bills before you.

We support **House Bill No. 6644**, AAC Authorization of State Grant Commitments for School Building Projects and Concerning Changes to the Statutes Concerning School Building Projects. We thank you for your support of the school construction program in New Haven and statewide. We believe that school building projects, when coupled with other interventions, make a real difference in students' lives and learning. The buildings also contribute to improvements in neighborhoods and the construction work provides jobs for Connecticut residents and companies. We have opened 29 new and rebuilt schools in New Haven since 1998 and we have five more in construction and four more in planning and design. As noted in the February 2008 Final Quality Review Report by Cambridge Education to the State Department of Education: "The ambitious capital improvement program aims at ensuring that the district's schools are of the highest standard and that they offer students a range of options in pursuing their academic interests. Without exception, the new buildings provide an outstanding learning environment, bringing together the latest technology and resources for students and teachers. The transformation of a number of schools has already resulted in some promising gains in student achievement."

We support **HB 6655**, AAC the Inclusion of Students on Local and Regional Boards of Education and a Study of Bullying Issues. We appreciate the effort to include at least one student from each high school in a district as a non-voting member of the Board of Education. However, we have 10 high schools in New Haven plus several transitional programs. We respectfully request that Section 1 be amended to include either a cap on the number of students or to set forth some form of ratio, perhaps involving number of high school students overall, per non-voting membership. We believe that 10 is not a manageable number in this instance. We also are interested in the study of school districts' approach to combating bullying, as it is such a difficult issue.

We support **HB 6656**, AAC Special Education, as it concerns special education reimbursements for out-of-district placements. Certainly we try to keep costs down, but it is difficult given the special education mandates under state and federal law.

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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.