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*TESTIMONY OF MARY LOFTUS LEVINE
DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
ON BEHALF OF THE COMPACT SCHOOL ALLIANCE
ON
FUNDING FOR COMPACT SCHOOLS
MARCH 11, 2010*

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Mary Loftus Levine and I am the Director of Policy and Professional Practice for the Connecticut Education Association. I am here on behalf of the CommPACT Schools Alliance which began three years ago because of our concern that there is limited support to help schools implement reform that reflects research-based practices within existing urban school districts.

We began conversations with the NEAG School of Education at UConn, AFT CT and school administrators' organizations to explore ways to collaborate in urban school improvement. The beauty of CommPACT Schools is that we all joined hands as stakeholders to reform schools from within. From these discussions, the Neag School, the Connecticut Education Association, the Connecticut Federation of Teachers, the

Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, the Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents, and Connecticut Federation of School Administrators formed a partnership – the first of its kind in the state and the nation -- to improve urban schools, and established the CommPACT (COMMunity, Parents, Administrators, Children, Teachers) School Alliance. In 2009 the State of Connecticut joined our collaborative effort by providing \$475,000 for FY 2009 and \$450,000 for 2010. We have worked hard since that time to expand our partnership to eight public schools in Connecticut in 5 Connecticut cities and have raised more than two times the state's investment in outside funds to support CommPACT Schools.

The CommPACT Schools Initiative is unique because it involves all of the aforementioned major educational stakeholders and has the full support of the Commissioners of Higher Education and State Department of Education. There are many indicators of the uniqueness of this effort. Last year the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) selected the CommPACT project as a national model for higher education's engagement in K-12 school reform. NCATE is the national accreditation agency for teacher education with over 700 member institutions. In addition, Connecticut's *Race to the Top* federal grant proposal submitted by Education Commissioner Mark McQuillan includes CommPACT Schools as one of the approved reform models for turning around our urban schools.

The CommPACT initiative works with existing neighborhood schools and converts them into CommPACT Schools by engaging community, parents, teachers, administrators, and students in

the reform process. Consequently, the major stakeholders own the process which research has shown to be a critical factor in sustaining educational reform. With this research in mind, the schools had to apply to become a CommPACT School and agree to the following:

1. The local teachers unions (CEA or AFT) and the school district had to agree to support the transformation of a school into a CommPACT school.
2. At least 90% of the teachers and the principal had to support the application to become a CommPACT school. CommPACT schools are still accountable to the school district, but they are operated cooperatively and inclusively.
3. The school district had to commit to supporting site-level decision making on major school improvement strategies.
4. Parents had to agree to adopt the CommPACT School model.
5. The school had to agree to be held accountable for a range of student outcomes including achievement, behavior and community engagement measures.

In the spring of 2008, twelve schools applied and eight were selected by the CommPACT Alliance Board of Directors. The schools selected were M.D. Fox School in Hartford, Davis Street School and Hill Central School in New Haven, Washington School and West Side Middle School in Waterbury, Barnum School and Longfellow School in Bridgeport, and the Shoreline Academy in New London. All but one of the schools selected were on the NCLB watch list.

The Neag School of Education coordinates three levels of supports for these schools, both within and across the network. By conducting audits of the school, surveying the administrators, teachers, students and parents to identify the school's target needs, the Neag School provides each CommPACT school with a menu of research-proven programs to close achievement gaps. The three levels of support coordinated by the Neag School are:

1. **CORE SUPPORT** - provided to all network schools and to address common conditions of urban schooling. Through professional development, coaching, and consultation for leadership teams, core supports focus on: creating a professional learning community focused on instructional improvement, establishing systems that enhance a positive school culture, organizing proactive academic and social service supports for students, integrating technology into teaching and learning, and analyzing student data to define instructional and professional development goals. Core supports are designed to help put in place robust structures that accelerate student achievement.
2. **CUSTOMIZED SUPPORT** - are tailored to the specific needs of each school as determined by the school community in consultation with the Neag School. The Neag School facilitates professional development and coaching in leadership, governance, instructional practice and content areas. Customized supports are designed to concentrate on improving teaching and student learning at the classroom,

grade, or school level. The framework for customized supports is based on the unique strengths and needs of each individual school community.

3. **RECIPROCAL SUPPORT** - are contributions that individual schools give back to the network for the benefit of other participating schools. These supports emerge from the strengths, successes, and experiences of each network school and may be demonstrated in a variety of forms including: interschool visits and walkthroughs, workshops designed by a team of teachers, peer coaching, contributing to documentation of network "lessons learned," providing technical assistance, and holding network-wide conferences.

By all measures the CommPACT schools have made tremendous progress in the year and half they have been operating. The following are a few of the examples of this progress:

1. Each school has a Comprehensive School Level Improvement Plan with ownership by parents, teachers, community members and administrators.
 - a. All sites created school level leadership teams which included parents, teachers, administrators and community members. Led by UConn site facilitators, schools created school improvement plans based upon data and research-based practices. All decision making is shared, which leads to a shared vision, mission and ownership, and in turn, enhances the teaching and learning experience for all of those involved. Teachers and building level leaders are empowered to make decisions and held accountable for those decisions.
 - b. Site based teacher-led teams have studied research based practices in literacy, numeracy and social/behavioral and are implementing concrete changes to improve schools.
2. Each school has implemented a comprehensive assessment/evaluation system to ensure accountability.
 - a. Research teams from UConn designed/implemented comprehensive evaluation systems to monitor student growth academically, behaviorally and socially. First year findings have been shared with schools and have informed strategic planning.
3. The following are in place to report on performance standards in May 2011:
 - a. Student Achievement - Growth curve models have been implemented in each school. In order to use growth curve models, at a minimum, three separate measures must be assessed over at least a year. Tests include Connecticut Mastery Test scores as well as other valid and reliable literacy and numeracy measures.
 - b. Student Behavior- six of the eight schools have selected the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support program as a school-wide approach to climate improvement. Measures specific to PBS interventions are being tracked in those

- schools. Initial results have been very favorable with significant declines in office referrals and suspensions.
- c. Various other measures of academic attitudes, expectations, and perceptions of their teachers and schools are being tracked and reported.
4. Parent engagement has increased in all schools.
 5. Staff and community morale has improved toward their school.
 6. New programs in preparing urban teachers and administrators are being established in CommPACT sites in Hartford and Waterbury to ensure graduation of new teachers and principals with the skills and knowledge to lead reform efforts in other Connecticut schools.
 7. State funds used to leverage federal and private foundation support
 - a. FY- 2009
 - i. State of CT- \$475,000
 - ii. UConn- \$220,000
 - iii. Outside grants (4)-\$ 305,000
 - b. FY- 2010
 - i. State of CT- \$450,000
 - ii. UConn- \$220,000
 - iii. Outside grants (5)- \$485,000
 8. All stakeholders have contributed to school reform.
 - a. While each school is unique, the following have happened in schools:
 - i. Collective bargaining contracts have been adjusted to support increased instructional and planning time.
 - ii. School districts have allowed teachers to choose literacy and numeracy programs/interventions different from the district-wide plan.
 - iii. Data have been reported publicly to ensure accountability.
 - iv. UConn has redirected federal research grants to support CommPACT Schools.
 - v. All schools are ready to implement significant school-wide reforms in FY 2010-2011.

The Future. Funding levels from the State of Connecticut for year 2010 are slated for \$450,000. This reduction has seriously hurt the speed of reform as money allocated for site based professional development and curricular change has been eliminated. Even if funding continues at the \$450,000 level we will need to eliminate at least one full time School Facilitator and stop serving at least two of the eight schools. If Governor Rell's current proposal to eliminate money already allocated and spent on the work and her recent proposal to fully eliminate funding for next year occurs, we will be forced to end the CommPACT School program just as it is beginning to pay off in eight of most challenged schools directly resulting in the following:

1. Two years of planning and implementation efforts will be wasted just when the effort is about to yield results.
2. Urban educators who have worked tirelessly to make major changes to help their students will have the rug pulled out from under them once again.
3. External funds that were raised on the promise of matching state investments will have to be returned.
4. Outstanding new demonstration sites for offering clinical experiences for future urban teachers and administrators will be lost.
5. The nation's first collaborative effort among a major research university and all major stakeholders to address one of the most challenging problems facing our nation-- closing the steadily increasing achievement gap-- will end just when partners are forging new constructive working relationships.
6. One of the most cost effective school reform programs in the country will be lost. The current program serves 4,198 students, (over 90% of whom are Title 1 and from minority backgrounds) and 418 teachers. In addition, CommPACT serves all students and does not use selective factors or lotteries to determine which students have access to the program. Based upon the projected \$450,000 allocation for 2010, the State of Connecticut contribution on a per pupil basis is \$107. This is considerably less than state costs for other state supported educational reform efforts.

As the legislature has seen the necessity to fund other reform models and their expansion, we hope you see the cost effectiveness and wisdom to do the same for our most challenged urban public schools. Thank you.

