

**Testimony of Dr. Margie B. Gillis, Senior Scientist, Haskins Laboratories
and President of Literacy How, in support of
Proposed Bill No. 440, An Act Concerning School Districts and Teacher Performance
and Proposed Bill No. 5491, An Act Concerning Certain School District Reforms to Reduce
the Achievement Gap in Connecticut**

March 15, 2010

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Gaffey, and Members of the Education Committee. I respectfully request that you accept the following testimony in support of Proposed Bill No. 440, An Act Concerning School Districts and Teacher Performance, and Proposed Bill No. 5491, An Act Concerning Certain School District Reforms to Reduce the Achievement Gap in Connecticut. Both bills strive to improve our state's schools and educational system by making sure we effectively measure our students' progress.

Connecticut has the largest achievement gap in the country. Eighty five percent of disadvantaged students perform below grade level on 4th grade national reading tests. While their peers are better readers, only 52% are on grade level. And another large gap exists. Research has demonstrated that 95% of **all** children can learn to read. This reading research also provides the blueprint for how children learn to read and what teachers need to know and be able to do to teach those skills. The National Council on Teacher Quality has also provided compelling evidence that schools of education are not incorporating this substantive body of evidence in their teacher preparation programs.

In light of this report and teacher licensure data that corroborates these findings, our state board of education passed a policy that went into effect last July. All preservice PreK-6th grade teachers must pass a dedicated reading test in order to become certified to teach in CT. The CT Mirror recently published the pass rates for fourteen CT prep programs. About one in three test-takers have failed the exam thus far. Although teaching reading has been dubbed as 'rocket science,' it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what the stats mean. Teachers want to help their students succeed but many don't know how. Most teachers have not been taught how to teach reading effectively.

The economic and moral costs are huge and incontrovertible – children who can't read well are more likely to drop out, be limited to low paying jobs and never reach their full potential. Illiteracy is common among both inmates and the unemployed. No wonder CT's percentage of incarcerated juveniles is the highest in the country! The 2005-06 average cost per inmate in CT was about \$30,500 a year. The average cost to educate a child in CT that year was less than half as much. We can't afford to ignore the mounting evidence another minute.

Both SB 440 and HB 5491 demand a better system of accountability by making the data on student and teacher performance transparent. The existing Public School Information System will be used to analyze student, teacher, school, and district data for the purposes of determining how well we're teaching our children to learn. In addition, teachers' performance will be linked to the teacher preparation programs that trained them. Many states have embraced this method of accounting for the education system's performance. In fact, nearly all of the first round finalists in the Race to the Top competition have an accountability model in place or have plans to institute a system in the near future. I urge you to consider following suit for the sake of CT's children.