



March 15, 2010

Senator Gaffey
Representative Fleischmann
Members of the Committee

For 110 years the Connecticut Parent Teacher Association has been working with school and communities to increase family engagement for the benefit and success of our students. What we have known for 110 years is now backed up by 30 years of research. Family engagement raises student achievement, improves student behavior, decreases the dropout rate and is cost effective. And it does this regardless of the parent's education level, ethnicity or socioeconomic background. Schools where families are engaged and where there is a high level of trust with parents also report greater teacher retention.

We cannot turn around schools or close the achievement gap without engaging families. We must make them equal partners in all of the efforts to increase student success.

HB 5491 An Act Concerning Certain School District Reforms to Reduce the Achievement Gap in Connecticut contains provisions that support that family engagement. Additionally we have submitted recommended changes that would further strengthen those goals for family engagement.

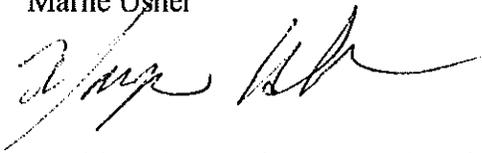
One of the changes we feel is most important is the inclusion of professional development, training and technical assistance to teachers and principals in research-based models of family engagement. If we are going to truly commit to family engagement as outlined in the Connecticut State Board of Education Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships for Student Success, we need to be sure that we are providing educators with the tools they need to be effective.

Additionally, if we are also going to truly commit to closing the achievement gap we need data that accurately measures success using multiple assessments. The annual report of CMT scores in our local newspapers is not a sufficient measurement of how well our students are performing. HB440 provides us with a mechanism for better measuring student progress and linking these measures to educator evaluations.

If student achievement in Connecticut is going to improve and the achievement gap is going to close family engagement must be systemic. It must be woven through the very fabric of our education system. The Connecticut Parent Teacher Association supports legislation that recognizes that vital and necessary component of student success.

Thank- you,

Marne Usher

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marne Usher', written in a cursive style.

President-Connecticut Parent Teacher Association

March 15, 2010

Recommended Changes to **Connecticut General Assembly Bill No. 5491**

Submitted by: Connecticut Parent Teacher Association

Dear Representative Bartlett,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit recommended changes to Bill No. 5491. We recommend the following changes to the legislative language in order to strengthen the impact of family engagement on student achievement.

- 1) **Recommendation:** Insert "parent organizations" after "teacher groups." Parents are key stakeholders in supporting their children's academic performance and should be engaged in reviewing student performance in order to drive instructional decision-making and hold their schools accountable. (Section 1 (C) (2) (L), page 2)
- 2) **Recommendation:** Insert "how student academic growth data and indicators will be shared with parents," as part of the teacher evaluation program. Sharing data with parents improves student achievement by providing opportunities to support and reinforce student learning at home. (Section 3 (c) (6)), page 7)
- 3) **Recommendation:** Insert "and be shared with parents and students in a manner they can understand;" The templates that will outline the teacher evaluation program need to be understandable by both parents and students if parents are to fully support student learning and assist their students in understanding expectations. (Section 3 (B), page 7)
- 4) **Recommendation:** Insert "parents" after "processes and systems". Having parent representation on this advisory council is in keeping with the Connecticut State Board of Education Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships for Student Success "Standard 5 –Decision making and advocacy– Provide opportunities for families to develop and strengthen their leadership roles in school decisions, especially those related to student performance and school improvement." (Section 4, page 8)
- 5) **Recommendation:** Insert a new Section 5 to read, "The Department of Education shall provide professional development, training, and technical assistance to teachers and principals in research-based models of family engagement. The Department of Education may contract with the state Parental Information and Resource Center and additional community-based organizations, including parent organizations, to develop and implement pre-service and in-service trainings for teachers and principals that support the goals of increasing student academic growth and teacher performance as outlined in this Act." Research has demonstrated that building teacher skill and knowledge in effectively engaging families is critical to recruiting and retaining high quality teachers and school leaders. (page 9)

- 6) **Recommendation:** Insert “including providing technical assistance to students and families in supporting the successful completion of the program.” after “credit recovery program”.
Providing parents and students with technical assistance will support the success of the program and increase the completion rate. (Section 6, page 11)
- 7) **Recommendation:** Change date “September 1,1998” to “September 1,2010” and insert “and shared responsibility for student achievement.” after “encourage parent –teacher communication”. Additionally, insert “ the inclusion of shared expectations for student attendance, and behavior, including the provision of positive classroom behavioral supports in student-parent compacts required under the No Child Left Behind Act, P.L. 107-110, the hiring of dedicated engagement staff,” after “ home visits”. In keeping with both federal law and the Connecticut State Board of Education Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships for Student Success, families should be engaged as active participants in efforts to increase student achievement and local and regional policies should be updated to reflect this shared responsibility. (Section 7 (f) page 11)
- 8) **Recommendation:** Insert “The Department of Education shall establish a family engagement grant award program for the purpose of providing grant awards to schools in which the majority of teachers agree to strengthen the communication between parents and teachers as a means of improving pupil academic achievement.” Providing incentives for local schools and districts to develop innovative approaches to engaging families will help local communities develop, implement, and replicate promising practices that raise student achievement. (Section 7 (f))
- 9) **Recommendation:** Replace “parental involvement” with “family engagement”. This change in terminology is in keeping with the broader definition of adult support for students as laid out in the Connecticut State Board of Education Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships for Student Success. (Section 8 (4) page 11)