

To: Appropriations Committee
From: Margaret Beecher
CommPACT Schools Site Facilitator
Institute for Urban School Improvement
University of Connecticut, Neag School of Education
RE: CommPACT Schools

My name is Margaret Beecher. I am a CommPACT Site-Facilitator for West Side Middle School and Washington Elementary School in Waterbury, CT. I support the school's governance structure that is designed to enable all members of the school community to be actively involved in the functioning and decision making of the school. Specifically, I facilitate the process of analyzing the schools strengths and challenges and the creation of a vision. This is followed by the development of cadres or action teams that will address these challenges. Staff members are guided through an inquiry process that provides them with a clear direction. Finally, the action teams create detailed improvement plans. This work is on-going and guided by the school Steering Committee. Site-Facilitators also provide on-going support that includes the implementation of new programs and practices such as the analysis of student work and on-going achievement.

One specific program has garnered excellent results is a research-based reading program from University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education. The Schoolwide Enrichment Model for Reading (Reis,2009) is in its third year of implementation. It allows students to select their own books, have individual conferences with their teachers and write a reflective response related to their books. The concept appears simple yet it is complex and the results profound. More and more students love to read. You can enter any classroom during the Language Arts block and you will see students engrossed in books. It is not a surprise that the student achievement in reading has dramatically increased and that West Side Middle School reached Safe Harbor on last year's Connecticut Mastery Tests in large part because of the improved reading scores.

The CommPACT Program has provided a **structure for success** and the voices of the school community have been heard and action taken. The quantitative and qualitative results demonstrate clear evidence of this accomplishment. For example:

Student behavior has improved as evidenced by a decrease of 17% in suspensions from 2008-09 to 2009-10.

As a result of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model for Reading (SEM-R), students CMT scores increased from 54% in 2008-09 to 65% in 2009-10.

The parent community has become more involved in the functioning of the school and their Community Day is just one example of this valued connection.

It should be noted here that in the five years prior to West Sides participation in the CommPACT Program and SEM-R, it was merely maintaining the status quo with no improvement in student achievement.

CommPACT has created a structure of success for the schools it serves. It is now demonstrating that sustained progress over time can be achieved if the essential elements of this initiative are implemented with fidelity. We can't dismiss our young readers, writers and mathematicians by short circuiting the demonstrated achievement that has already been accomplished in the CommPACT schools.

I respectfully request your continued support for the CommPACT Program and for the benefit of our urban learners and, ultimately, the greater good of our state.