



Testimony by Dr. Stanley Battle, President
Southern Connecticut State University
Before the Education Committee
February 28, 2011

Good morning, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. For the record I am Dr. Stanley Battle, Interim President of Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) in New Haven. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 6432, *An Act Concerning Closing the Academic Achievement Gap*.

In Connecticut, one of our greatest strengths is our diversity. And yet in the midst of this diversity, the achievement gap is one of our greatest challenges. This disparity in academic success among ethnic and socioeconomic groups is obviously closely connected to the overall well-being of the populations that reside within our urban, low-income areas.

There are many challenges to educating our young students in New Haven and Connecticut's other cities. Poverty in our state is on the rise, according to U.S. Census data that was released recently. In New Haven, the median household income last year was just \$38,279. And the city's poverty rate is the second-highest – at 26.7 percent – among the state's largest cities. Across the state, we have more than 95,000 children under the age of 18 living in poor households.

As an urban-based institution of public higher education, Southern Connecticut State University has a responsibility to reach out to its neighbors in New Haven and help all children receive the education that they deserve. A university can and should be an instrument of change, providing access and hope for a better future.

Communities often do a good job of supporting students who are doing well in school. But the real challenge is with the under-achievers: raising their academic and social skills to the point where high school graduation – and a college degree – are not impossible dreams.

At Southern we are key players in this process. The Galileo Project, for example, involves faculty working with teachers from New Haven and other urban school districts to reduce the need for college students to take remedial courses in math and English composition. Our longstanding summer prep programs have prepared hundreds of academically struggling students to enter higher education. And, as the state's largest producer of certified teachers, we train educators for urban schools in key demand areas such as math, the sciences, special education and English as a second language.

New initiatives will help ensure that city school children receive the tools to succeed at an early age. This is critical, because if these children don't grasp the essentials of reading and writing and math at the elementary level, they will truly struggle in their later school years.

Our new dean of the School of Education, Michael Sampson - a nationally recognized expert in reading - is planning a literacy camp for elementary school students and their teachers next summer. His school will also host a conference for New Haven teachers focusing on classroom support and featuring master teachers from around the country.

Our faculty and New Haven teachers are working together to write new a curriculum that will better meet the needs of urban learners. And in the fall of 2011, Southern faculty and student teachers will be infused into three New Haven elementary schools. This is a pilot program that we plan on expanding throughout the schools of New Haven in the coming years. Our overarching goal is to require all of our education students to be in the field, working in the schools, throughout the time they are doing coursework with us. Research has shown that teachers who are trained in a field based model have greater impact on student learning when they become teachers.

Another new initiative is the Southern Academy that we are developing for middle and high school students. Beginning next June it will help them enhance their learning skills in key areas, from reading to calculus – again, tackling the achievement gap in the developmental years.

Part of the initiative behind the Academy comes from the recent visit to New Haven of the well-known comedian and activist Bill Cosby. Mr. Cosby and I have worked together on education-based projects during my previous presidencies in Baltimore and Greensboro, North Carolina. And when he walked the streets of Newhallville – one of New Haven's toughest neighborhoods – the response was overwhelming. He spoke with parents and children about the importance of staying in school and earning an education. And people of all ages thronged around him as he extended a message of hope and shared responsibility that too rarely extends into urban neighborhoods.

Bill Cosby exhibits a passion for education that is unparalleled. And his message resonates with our efforts at Southern and in the city of New Haven to bridge the achievement gap and help children in grades K-12 realize that college is truly an attainable dream.

The implications are wide-ranging. A recent state report for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights concluded that: "Transforming a single high school dropout to a high school graduate could potentially save the public one million dollars over the course of his/her lifetime – in eliminated criminal justice and health care costs as well as earnings from state and federal tax revenues." We have a lot to gain by keeping our children in school and seeing that they succeed.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.