

**Testimony of Dr. Margie B. Gillis, Research Affiliate, Haskins Laboratories  
and President of Literacy How, in support of  
Raised Senate Bill No. 928, An Act Concerning Teacher Preparation  
February 16, 2011**

Representative Willis, Senator Bye, and Members of the Education Committee, I respectfully request that you accept the following testimony in support of SB No. 928, An Act Concerning Teacher Preparation. The purpose of the bill is to “to require a study of issues concerning teacher preparation and training requirements and alternative routes to certification in early childhood education.”

Connecticut has the largest achievement gap in the country. Eighty percent of disadvantaged students perform below grade level on 4<sup>th</sup> 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 2009, the State Board of Education passed a policy that requires all general education pre-service PreK through 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to pass a dedicated reading test in order to be licensed to teach in CT. Six months later the CT Mirror 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 bill’s study period will consider training requirements for higher education teachers employed by the public institutions in Connecticut. In doing so, I urge the committee to examine the monitoring and accountability of Continuing Education Units (CEUs). All practicing teachers in the state are required to take 90 hours of coursework over a period of five years in order to maintain certification as an educator or to become recertified. The regulations that govern the administration of CEUs and the activities of CEU providers have not been explicit enough or enforced to ensure that teachers are learning content that will have an impact on student achievement. Likewise, the efficacy of the system has not been evaluated or monitored to ensure that the content provided in these CEU courses includes clear objectives and that educators demonstrate proficiency in the content area through an appropriate assessment.

Since CEUs are the currency of the practicing teacher’s professional development experience, it is imperative that state agencies work collaboratively to ensure that teachers are provided with the highest quality opportunities to expand their knowledge of evidence-based practices and content. If student outcomes do not show improvement with the current CEU offerings, the State board of Education may increase the 90 hour requirement to as many as 150 hours. While a quantitative increase in the number of hours may be helpful, the additional hours must include professional development activities matched to students’ needs and based on what teachers are lacking in terms of knowledge and skills. There must be assurances that teachers are receiving quality training that will enhance their teaching in order to increase student achievement.

I applaud the Higher Education Committee for proposing a bill to study certification regulations to ensure that higher education teachers receive appropriate training in research-based reading instruction. The children of Connecticut deserve the highest quality education, a goal that will not be achieved until and unless all teachers are highly-trained and skilled professionals.

Respectfully submitted,

