

**Reverend Carl McCluster
Shiloh Baptist Church, Bridgeport
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
Governor's Proposed Education Budget
February 21, 2013**

Good Evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Carl McCluster and I am serving in my 18th year as the Senior Pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Bridgeport. I also have the privilege of serving as the Chair of the South End Neighborhood Revitalization Zone, Co-Chair of the Citywide NRZ Leadership Team and as the Economic Development Chair of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance that includes 80 churches.

I am here today to testify in support of the Governor Malloy's proposed funding for the Commissioner's Network of underperforming schools.

One immediate impact of the Commissioner's Network was that upon Curiale School in Bridgeport. A recent report from the State Department of Education shows that 89% of students have not had behavioral incidents this year school year and through the turnaround model, they've been able to extend the school day to focus more on math and reading. The measurable effect upon what was widely known as the city's lowest performing elementary school is clearly evident in the less than one year since it became one of the first to be inducted into the Commissioner's Network.

The tide has turned. Newspaper reports show that morale among teachers has never been higher. A new curriculum offered a new way to teach. New school administrators provided renewed leadership, including a higher level of transparency and community engagement.

The school has a long way to go, but for the first time in a long time, it's on the right track.

The governor's proposed budget would fund 17 additional schools in the Commissioner's Network. That's throwing a lifeline to 17 more schools, their communities, and their cities that are desperately in need of a new educational lease on life. That's offering thousands of more children what they need and deserve: a better chance at success.

Each and every Commissioner's Network school must have turnaround plan approved by the Department of Education. This collaborative oversight is the right partnership formula for success. They can lead our way out of a dark and troubled past and ensure that no student or school be left behind.

In Bridgeport, and in every community observing these efforts, we appreciate that EVERY dollar of the Commissioner's Network funds is tied to improvement. EVERY dollar is contingent upon an approved turnaround plan. That's how, as taxpayers, we know that we are getting our money's worth. We know that state is making good on it's promise to educator all of our children.

Without Commissioner's Network funding and support, failing schools might well otherwise shutter their windows and lock their doors. Their students, or should we more appropriately say OUR students, would otherwise fall through the cracks.

More funding for Commissioner's Network schools is a demonstration that those children will not be forgotten or forsaken. It's a clear statement that you will keep the promise you made last year when you created the Commissioner's Network.

An investment in this program is an investment in our children. Funding the Commissioner's Network is an investment in the future of Connecticut.