



CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND COUNCIL

Sarah Eagan
Children's Trust Fund Council
seagan@kidscounsel.org

Written testimony submitted to Appropriations Human Services Subcommittee February 22, 2013

Senator Harp, Representative Abercrombie and distinguished members of the Human Services Subcommittee, on behalf of The Children's Trust Fund Council, we thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to you today.

We want to bring to your attention that *Family School Connection*, an evidence-based strategy to support and improve children's school performance is currently proposed for elimination in the Governor's budget.

Family School Connection Helps Close the Achievement Gap for Children.

Family School Connection, a program of the Children's Trust Fund, provides intensive home visiting services to families with elementary school children who are at-risk of school failure. Children ages 4 to 14 are referred to the program if they are experiencing school failure such as poor grades, truancy and behavior problems.

Home visiting is an evidence-based strategy borne out of critical research confirming that student achievement is tied to parental support of learning.ⁱ Family School Connection works directly with parents to provide them strategies that can help close the achievement gap for their children. Current school reform efforts targeting class sizes, teacher training and improved curricula do not address the critical component of how a child's family life impacts his or her education. Family School Connection fills that systems gap by working directly with parents to improve their ability to support their children's educational needs.

Family School Connection Is Low Cost and Effective

Data from Family School Connection programs at five public schools across the stateⁱⁱ show that the program achieves the following outcomes:

- Increasing parental involvement in children's education
- Reducing truancy, and
- Improving children's school performance.

In New Haven, for example, there was **over 50% reduction in overall absences** or tardiness and most importantly, **over 97% of children showed improvements in academics and behavior**. Family School Connection is also promising practice for reducing the risk of child abuse and neglect across all schools.¹

Family School Connection is a Critical Component of the State's Plan to Reduce the Achievement Gap.

If we want to really make strides in bridging the achievement gap, we must start thinking outside the walls of school buildings and work with those who have the most at stake in the future of their children: their parents.ⁱⁱⁱ *Family School Connection* does this with impressive results. We respectfully suggest that this program supports the Federal Early Learning intent to build the capacity of quality programs. We hope you will agree that *Family School Connection* should be a valuable component of Connecticut's newly formed Office of Early Childhood and not eliminated from our state.

ⁱ Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (available for download at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>)

ⁱⁱ The program is being implemented in partnership with five school districts at the following schools: Betances in Hartford, Bielefield School in Middletown, Fair Haven School in New Haven, Wequonnoc School in Norwich and W.B. Sweeney School in Willimantic

ⁱⁱⁱ Kirkland, K., & Mitchell-Herzfeld, S. (2012). *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Home Visiting Services in Promoting Children's Adjustment in School*. New York, NY: State Office of Children and Family Services, Bureau of Evaluation and Research showing that working with children *and* their parents in their homes not only builds children's skills, but also families' skills and knowledge so that they can support their children as they move through school.

¹ Please see supporting materials regarding Family School Connection program components and evaluation data, appended to this testimony.