

Testimony of Hartford Superintendent

Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto

Education Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

Friday, February 15, 2013

Co-Chairs Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, Vice-Chairs Senator Bye and Representative McCrory, Ranking Members Senator Boucher and Rep. Ackert, and distinguished members of the Education Committee.

My name is Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto, Superintendent of Hartford Public Schools.

Hartford Public Schools wishes to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to testify on an important topic that affects a large portion of our student population and, by extension, the district's success rates.

Governor Dannel Malloy and Commissioner Stefan Pryor continue to set forth a bold package of educational excellence, using reform strategies that have proved successful in Hartford. Hartford is a very different district than it was six years ago.

Due to the significant size of our English Language Learner population, 17.7% of the total (3,700 students), Hartford Public Schools ("HPS") has developed a strong body of research on the delivery of adequate services.

Our experience over several decades, demonstrates that certain changes in law would create a fairer standard for assessing student growth and help close the Achievement gap. Here are some simple yet significant recommendations:

- Federal guidelines permit states to exempt recently arrived ELLs from administration of their reading/language arts assessment for as much as one year. **Change Connecticut's current 10 month exemption for reading and writing to 30 months in all CMT/CAPT subsets.** ELL students would benefit from extending the amount of time they are in school before they are mandated to take the state assessment. Of the 1,266 ELL students currently eligible to take the CMTs, 344 (27%) students have less than 20 months in Hartford schools.
- **Provide an opportunity for standardized testing in students' native language.** This would be a better indicator of skills and knowledge. Currently California, Texas, New

York and Florida provide native language accommodations. **Connecticut – the Education state should do no less.**

LAS Links is a good English language assessment but is not a fair or adequate predictor of proficiency on the CMT/CAPT because the CMT/CAPT measures different competencies. About 39% (or 1,443) of Hartford's ELL students are proficient on the LAS Links. But it takes about three to five years for them to reach proficiency depending on the grade level and strength in one's native language

In 2011, 424 ELL students, 12 percent of the total ELL population, met exit criteria, which include LAS Links and DRA/CMT/CAPT results. This was an increase of 124 students over the previous year.

58 percent of those 424 students were in grades K-3, an alignment with our Third Grade Promise.

26 percent of Kindergarten students are ELL learners.

46 percent of ELLS moved up at least one level on the LAS Links annual assessment.

- **Provide an opportunity for modified assessments with less linguistic complexity.** This would allow us to target students' language skills by using more visuals and less complex English, a method used by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment consortium (WIDA).
- **Provide weighted funding for ELL students.** Federal and state funding for ELL students is not sufficient. Additional funding is needed for students who perform lower on the LAS Links and students in the upper grades who require more intensive instruction. Identifying ELL students in Pre-K would also help greatly.
- **Target these measures in ELL districts.** The Connecticut state ELL average is 5%. Hartford's district average is 17.7% - almost 4 times the state average. 35 schools are above the state average and 20 schools are above the district average.
- **Modify teacher training programs by creating pre-service programs that require more course work for teaching diverse learners, including ELL students.** Universities are currently not training teachers adequately to meet the demands of urban systems.

Hartford has a significant history with the ELL student population and can attest to the positive impact these recommendations would have on those students. Through our reform efforts to date, we have delivered on four consecutive years of performance gains.

In order to sustain and accelerate these gains we need to be in the best possible position to deliver high quality services to every student in the Hartford Public Schools district. We welcome the opportunity to play an active role in the dialogue around the future of ELL students in our state.