

**Testimony Submitted to  
Education Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly**

**An Act Concerning Community Schools – Raised Bill S.B. 1002  
March 4, 2013**

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

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Hartford Partnership for Student Success, which was founded and convened by Hartford Public Schools, the City of Hartford, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut. As the most developed community school partnership in the state, we are pleased to share our experience as it relates to Raised Bill S.B. 1002. The partnership was originally convened in 2007 under the name of the School Community Partnership for the purpose of launching Community Schools in Hartford. This partnership has been broadened in scope and exists for the purposes outlined below for the greater purpose of increasing Hartford students' achievement:

- To ensure the delivery of high quality programs and services in order to support increased student achievement;
- To consider expansion in both number and type, the scope of partnership to improve outcomes for Hartford students;
- To intentionally and strategically leverage the shared strategic institutional goals of all partners to support student success.

Our seven community schools in Hartford operate according to the national best practice model promoted by the Coalition for Community Schools and the Children's Aid Society – National Center for Community Schools. We are closely aligned with and have received extensive and ongoing training, technical support and consultation since the inception of our work in Hartford from both of these organizations. Through the lead agency model, a joint team of school staff, parents, and funders receive applications from prospective partners and conduct application reviews, site visits and interviews with prospective partners to determine the best match for the school. The lead agency that is selected is responsible for hiring (in conjunction with the principal) and supervising the community school director. The community school director coordinates all partnership programs and services for the school community and takes the lead in needs assessment, gap analysis, resource identification and fundraising for the school. These activities take place in an ongoing fashion and the direction of the community school director's work is shaped by his/her participation on the School Governance Council, data teams, staff meetings, and regular meetings with the principal. This lead agency model brings youth development expertise and a range of in-kind agency social service supports to the students and parents, and is a resource development strategy for the school as community-based organizations are uniquely positioned to attract funding that schools are not eligible for.

While we are very supportive of the agenda of expanding a community schools strategy across Connecticut, we share the following information based on our expertise and experience with Community Schools in Hartford:

- **The purpose of community schools should be to raise student achievement.**

Sec. 1 (1) – We recommend that a strategic focus on improving student success be maintained as the overarching goal and purpose for all community school efforts and that school-community engagement be approached as a vehicle to support students’ school success. For example, family engagement strategies are deployed with the purpose of supporting student success. The power of a community school model is in integrating the core instructional program with the other supports offered by community partners including the expanded learning opportunities offered by community partners through after-school, summer, weekend and holiday programs; and the supports and services designed to remove barriers to learning. Based on our experience, this integration is a necessary component of an effectively functioning community school. As such, references to addressing students’ needs in the “non-school hours”, becomes an oxymoron, as school staff and community partners work together during all of the hours that students are present in the building in order to support the common goal of student success. While partnership work is integrated carefully into the school’s schedule so as not to interfere with the core instructional program, there are resources during the day available to address students’ holistic needs.

- **Existing School Governance Council structure should be used.**

Sec. 3 – The community schools model is predicated on the integration of community supports into the school in a seamless fashion. To this end, all Hartford Community Schools Directors sit as voting members on the School Governance Councils in order to fully integrate and align partnership efforts with the work of the school.

**The positions of Community School Coordinator and Family Resource Center Director are full-time positions.**

Sec. 3 – Normally, a full-time staff person supervised by a lead organization supports the coordination of resources in an effective community school. The Family Resource Center Director position most often is also a full-time position. If one person is assigned to both sets of duties, the responsibilities of both positions will likely not be as effective.

**The lead agency model should be included as one of the available structures to support community schools.**

Sec. 3 – The lead agency model in Hartford leverages community resources in support of the school in a well-aligned and integrated fashion. In Hartford, we have four different lead agencies which employ seven full-time directors across our seven community schools. In other cities across the country, universities, or other intermediaries such as the United Way take on the role of lead agency. This approach not only brings important resources into the school to support student and family success, but also leverages

funding in a way that organizes the resources of the community to support student success.

- **Needs assessment should focus on student level needs.**

**Sec. 4. (b)** The school operations audit is usually described as a needs assessment in the best practice of national community school work. This process should begin with an examination of student achievement data and also examine the other factors outlined such as school climate, chronic absenteeism, and behavioral and social needs. This should be the focus of the assessment, and partners should be identified and partnership strategies should be developed to support these identified needs.

**(c) Community resources should be aligned to support identified needs at the school.**

The community operations audit should be a focused process, conducted strategically in order to meet needs identified at the school in question and with the purpose of effectively identifying and targeting resources towards the goal of supporting student success. Utilizing national best-practice, a school-based needs assessment is typically paired with a resource inventory and gap analysis in order to plan the priorities of the community school, moving forward. The goal is to identify the major unmet needs that can be address through a school-community partnership.

The Hartford Partnership for Student Success stands ready to share our expertise from our five years of operating community schools in Hartford.

Submitted by: Hartford Partnership for Student Success

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