



March 4, 2013

## TESTIMONY CONCERNING SB 1002, AAC COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Good day, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Laoise King and I am Vice President of Education Initiatives for United Way of Greater New Haven. I am here today to testify on Senate Bill No. 1002, *An Act Concerning Community Schools*.

### Background

As many of you know, in 2010 New Haven launched a nationally acclaimed, comprehensive and far-reaching school reform effort, the New Haven School Change Initiative which aims to:

- close the academic achievement gap with the rest of the state;
- cut the drop-out rate in half; and
- ensure that every student has the academic ability and financial resources to go to and succeed in college.

The School Change Initiative has three key strategies: schools, talent and community. As part of the Community leg of the School Change Initiative, the Mayor and Superintendent asked United Way to partner with the City to create Boost!, the wraparound services component of the initiative. Boost! is based on the knowledge that in order for children to succeed academically, they need a range of supports and services.

### Boost! New Haven Community Schools

When the idea for Boost! was born in 2010, NHPS, the City and United Way received a technical assistance grant from JP Morgan Chase to develop and design Boost! using the Community Schools Model. Over a six month period we conducted interviews, focus groups, did site visits to numerous Community Schools Sites, and worked directly with Sarah Jonas, Director of Regional Initiatives for the Children's Aid Society National Center for Community Schools to design our model. With help from the Children's Aid Society and the National Center we were able to design a custom Community Schools model that works for New Haven. Boost! is currently a member of the National Coalition of Community Schools, we participate in monthly meetings of the Coalition, and recently invited to be members of the Community Schools Leadership Network.

Like the model proposed in SB 1002, *Boost!* helps broker, monitor, and enhance a wide variety of school-level partnerships. *Boost!* facilitates partnerships ranging from local arts organizations providing after-school enrichment opportunities to local mental health clinics providing critical social, emotional and behavioral supports to students during the school day. The exact combination of services varies from school to school and is tailored to respond to the unique needs identified by parents, teachers, school leaders, school support staff, and other community stakeholders.



Central to these partnerships is the philosophy that, in order for students to meet academic goals, NHPS must increase focus and accountability around quality wraparound supports and services within the schools. *Boost!* complements NHPS School Improvement Plans by “wrapping around” the school day with programs and services that have been shown to contribute to academic success, enhance students’ ability to focus and learn inside the classroom, and directly support student learning outside of the classroom. These services may be provided by the school system, other public agencies, community-based, faith-based, non-profit organizations and/or other community partners.

Boost! provides a crucial leverage point in ensuring that the work of outside agencies and organizations is aligned to educational efforts of the public schools. Boost! is designed to improve coordination and facilitate access to critical support services for youth and families, improve the quality of services, promote best practices, make most efficient use of existing and new resources in schools and in the community, and use data to leverage citywide policy and systems change -- all aimed at giving New Haven’s youth the educational foundation they need to escape the cycle of poverty.

Each Boost! School has identified 50% of a current school staff member’s time to act as Boost! Coordinator to facilitate this process. During the pilot year of the program, we learned that one half time person was not enough to tackle the huge needs in the schools. Beginning in the summer of 2011, Boost! partnered with Americorps/Vista, to add additional staff capacity to schools to manage coordination of wraparound supports, and the Boost! Service Corps was launched. The Boost! Service Corps expanded in 2012 and is currently comprised of 6 Vistas, 3 Public Allies and 2 members of the Episcopal Service Corps.

Boost! provides schools with data on how their students are doing in the areas of physical health and wellness; emotionally and behaviorally, how engaged they are in school and how involved their parents are in their education. Using this information, Boost then helps the school leadership team, made up of the principal, teachers and parents, together conduct a needs assessment to determine the areas of greatest need. The team then completes an "asset map" of all of the current resources they have aimed at addressing the identified needs. Once this is completed the team identifies where they have gaps in services. Boost then shares this information with the wider non-profit community. In the first year of implementation, 72 non-profit organizations responded to this request. Approximately 50% of the organizations responding had the current capacity to come into the school and provide a needed service. The remaining 50% had the ability to provide the services, but needed some additional funding to be able to implement the program. Boost! then supplied each school with a small "leverage fund" to use to bring in new programs. The school and the new program then had one school year to find a sustainable funding source to keep the program running in the future. Boost! then helps schools track the effectiveness of each program, to ensure that students are benefiting from the services provided.

Boost! launched in five pilot Schools in 2011, and expanded to six more in 2012. Boost will continue to expand at a rate of five to ten schools per year, until it is in place in all 47 NHPS schools.



**Boost! Results**

The initiative is designed to be scalable and sustainable and we are already seeing results:

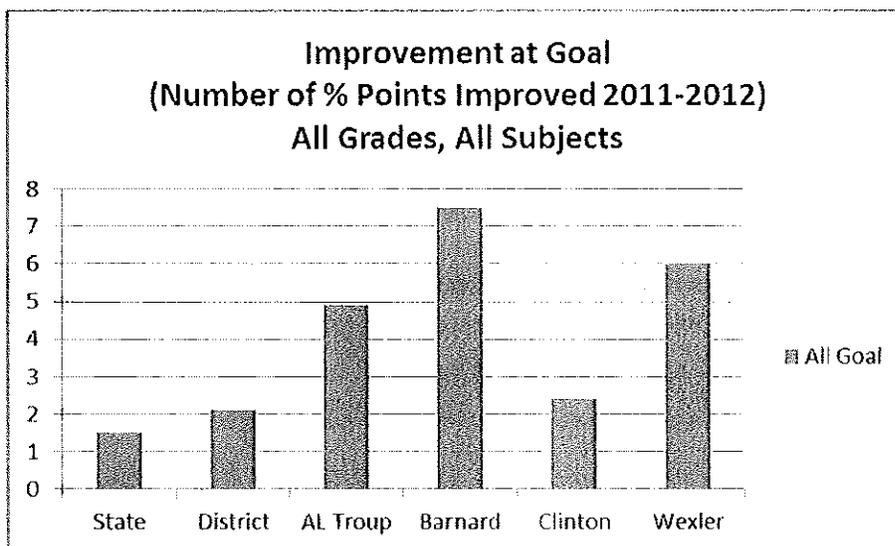
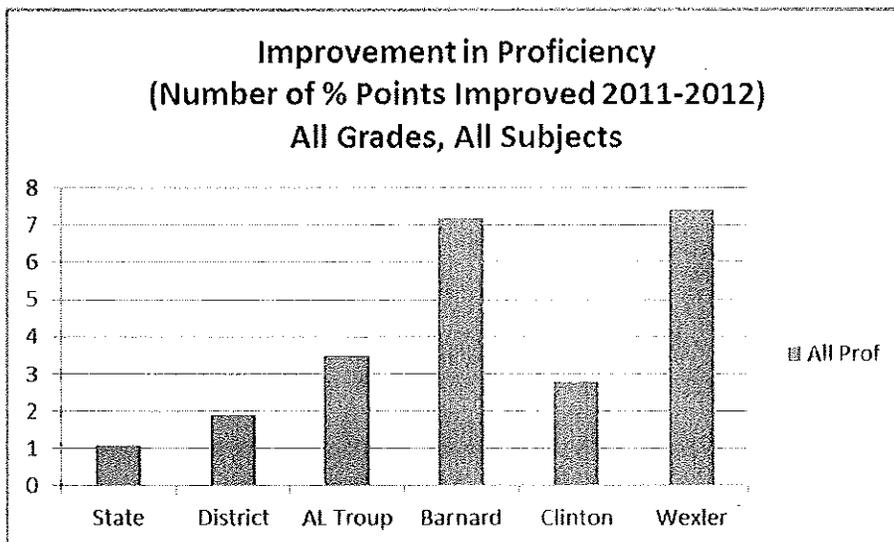
THE NUMBERS	Numbers 2011-12	Numbers 2012-13
Boost Schools	5	11
Boost Service Corps Members volunteering full time in Boost! Schools	5	11
Community Partners	59	194
Unduplicated programs and services available to Boost students	129	260
Total programs and services available to Boost students	215	388

THE RESULTS	Results 2011-12	Results 2012-13
Boost! Schools in the top 10 most improved CMTs	3	To be determined
Percentage points gained by Wexler-Grant students on the 2012 CMTs, an increase 7 times the state average and 3 times the district average	7.4	
Percentage points gained by Troup school students on the literacy portion of the CMTs	19	
Percent of MBA students participating in Boost! activities who improved their attendance	42	
Percent of Barnard students receiving counseling who had a decrease in referrals to the office	64	
Percent of parents attending Spring 2012 parent-teacher conferences at Clinton Avenue School – up from 28% in Spring 2010	64	
Percent of students at Barnard participating in enrichment activities with external partners	97	



Schools saw dramatic decreases in behavioral problems and discipline incidents, increases in family involvement, improvements in school climate as measured by the annual school learning environment surveys and increases in standardized test scores well above state and district averages.

Boost! Schools showed greater improvement than both state and district averages at both proficiency and goal. Three Boost! schools, Barnard, Troup and Wexler-Grant ranked among the top ten most improved schools district wide. Overall percentage of students reaching proficiency across all subjects at Troup increased by 3.5 percentage points, with 7.2 percent gains at Barnard and 7.4 percent gains at Wexler-Grant. Although not in the top ten - Clinton Avenue school also posted gains at more than twice the state average – and had particular success with third graders reading at goal – with an impressive increase of 44.7 percentage points.





MBA was the only Boost High School during the 2011-2012 school year. In that school year, 10<sup>th</sup> graders taking the CAPT at MBA improved performance at Goal across all subject areas by 4.9 percentage points – which is twice the average district increase (2.3 percentage points) and over 4 times the state average increase of (1.1 percentage points).

#### **Recommendations Regarding SB 1002**

My Boost! Partner, Susan Weisselberg from New Haven Public Schools, and I would like to highlight the differences between our model and the model in the bill. We believe that both are equally valid and important and we respectfully request that, in the bill, you allow an alternative community school model based upon what we are doing systemically in New Haven. We would be happy to work with you and provide draft language.

Our analysis of the bill and where we would seek changes:

*Sec. 1.* In the definition, under “full service community school,” we suggest that language be added to reflect our model in the definition. Also, we suggest that wraparound services not be limited to non-school hours. We are bringing some services in during the school day, and they are helping. Our work at the schools is through a single point of contact, and many of the definitions are pertinent to what we and our partners are doing in the schools.

*Sec. 2.* We would suggest that this section reference our alternative model. In addition, we like our family resource centers and are expanding their work and capacity. However, we have five family resource centers and 29 K-8, elementary and middle schools,. We request that, in the alternative model, the BOE may rather than shall be required to give priority to elementary schools with family resource centers.

*Secs. 3 and 4.* New Haven Public Schools allow for choices in enrolling in our schools, whether they are interdistrict magnets, intradistrict magnets, or neighborhood schools; we have various preferences established and then it is on a space available basis. We conduct an inventory and a version of a school operations audit. We believe that the inventory and audit are critical to the success of a systemic, deliberative approach to a wide range of services necessary for a community school. However, the local community school governance board can result in a system of competition for resources rather than coordination of them among schools. We have an advisory committee for Boost! also meet regularly with the Boost! school coordinators and the Service Corps volunteers. We suggest an alternative in Sec. 3 that allows for a districtwide community school governance advisory board, with representation from the community schools – we believe this has the potential to bring in and coordinate more resources. Many of the schools in alliance districts have needs for these services beyond the three schools identified in Sec. 2, and the districtwide board allows for more dissemination of services.

Some of the items in the community operations audit in sec. 4(d) appear to be subjective and a challenge to collect. Is it the community/city in which the school is located or is it the neighborhood within which a school is



located? If there is choice, and less than half the students at a school live in the neighborhood, how does that interplay with the notion of community here? What does access to technology mean? Access for the students, the family, or both? Is it access in the school, at home, in a library, in an after school program, in a faith-based institution, on a smart phone?

The full-time coordinator position is one model. Our model is for a relatively high level staff person at the school to spend about 50% of his/her time coordinating the Boost! services and efforts, aided by a Service Corps member from AmeriCorps, Public Allies, or Episcopal Services. And, our school Boost! coordinator works with other school staff in discussing status and issues, at a School Planning and Management Team (SPMT) meeting or a Student Staff Support Team (SSST) meeting. We believe that this model integrates well with the school. In addition, to implement the model contemplated in the bill, a full-time coordinator at 16 Boost! schools working full time on community schools would be costly in these difficult budget times. We do not want to limit our efforts to three schools – we want to expand them, as stated previously. We are in three high schools and eight elementary/K-8 schools now.

*Sec. 5.* The community resource assessment of potential resources is logical and necessary. In conducting a similar assessment in New Haven, we find that information from the schools and the community is difficult to gather quickly and cohesively. We have utilized information from grantors, such as United Way of Greater New Haven and The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, from community-based coalitions, from the City of New Haven, and from many other sources. The larger, more institutional providers, such as Boys & Girls Club or Clifford Beers Clinic, are easy to include. The smaller providers change all the time, depending upon staffing and funding, and so accurate information is a challenge to capture.

*Sec. 6.* The full service community school plan is an excellent goal. It truly will require an entire village to meet it. In putting that degree of work into one school's plan – and looking at how we define community – it still makes sense to look at this more broadly. We do not have that many community services in Dixwell/Newhallville and we utilize Boost! to bring in more. So, again, the definition of community is important and allowing for a broader range is important. The list at this stage will require an entire city and not just a community/neighborhood to be accurate and comprehensive. Otherwise the services are siloed. And putting the plan together will be a challenge that needs broad based, widespread assistance.

*Sec. 7.* Making funding available is critical to the success of the model. If this legislation passes and minimal funding is provided, it will be extremely difficult to make the community school program a success - the level of work required to implement this needs significant time, funding and collaboration. And, the reporting information without the concomitant funding will be burdensome for schools and districts.

Some additional points we think are critical to consider: Boost! is a district wide solution to the Community Schools model, which is usually limited to a small number of schools in any given district. The use of an intermediary agency (such as United Way in our case) also helps to provide schools with the tools, technical assistance, guidance and relationships to help them organize, manage and negotiate with community partners.



This is often a challenge for schools, and leaving it up to one staff member without the additional support and relationships an intermediary can bring to the table could pose a challenge.

We applaud your efforts and would like to work with you. Having embarked on this effort, albeit with a parallel but alternative model, we appreciate the challenges – and we applaud the results. We look forward to working with you so that the legislation can also incorporate our model.

Thank you.