



March 4, 2013

TESTIMONY ON SB 1002, AAC COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Good day, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 1002, *An Act Concerning Community Schools*. My name is Susan Weisselberg, and I am the Chief of Wraparound Services for New Haven Public Schools.

In New Haven, as in many cities and towns in Connecticut, we struggle to provide adequate assessments and services for children with social, emotional, behavioral and physical health needs. As Chief of Wraparound Services for New Haven Public Schools, I work with many providers and others to utilize a framework that will improve our service delivery in a fashion consistent with school change and needs in the schools, families and community. And, much of what we are doing is consistent with a community schools model.

Background

We rebuilt nearly all our schools, led the way in healthy school foods and a district-wide wellness plan and, in 2009, reached an historic agreement with our teachers and administrators that took school change to another level.

Our vision for transformation in our school change initiative is coherent, collaborative, and persistent reform to ensure that:

- Students are learning through meaningful and coherent experiences in individual classrooms, among different classrooms, and in the rest of their lives.
- Schools are centers for learning, where teams of adults take collective and empowered responsibility for students, working separately and together to move students from where ever they start to the highest performance levels, collaborating without fault.
- The district and schools are supporting, developing, adapting, and innovating for persistent change.

Our goals include college success, an increase in the graduation rate and reduction in the dropout rate, eliminating the achievement gap between New Haven students and the State average, and strengthening each school's effectiveness. And, we are making progress in our goals. Our graduation rate has jumped nearly 20% in several years. Our dropout rate has dropped. And the learning environment in our schools, as reported by parents, teachers, and students that we are told is the biggest survey in the city next to the US census, has consistently improved over the last several years.

Our strategies to achieve these goals include a portfolio of schools (so that each school will be organized and supported on its own unique path to success), talent (so that adults in the system will be managed as professionals to encourage collaboration, empowerment, and responsibility for outcomes – and this will enable us to attract, develop, and retain the highest caliber staff), and community and parents (so that the work of the school system will be as aligned as possible with the parents, community organizations and agencies who work on behalf of our students – and together, building community investment for the promise of college). We

aggressively seek outside grants to assist us with school change, as evidenced by the Teacher Incentive Fund grant we were awarded in the fall by the U.S. Department of Education, with \$53 million over five years to further the development of our teachers, and a recent planning grant for innovative Professional Development from the Gates Foundation that we share with Bridgeport.

We have nearly 21,000 students in our schools, with a structure of 29 pre-K-8, K-8 and several elementary schools, two middle schools, two comprehensive high schools, and nine other high schools, as well as several transitional schools. We also have the largest pre-K program in the state. More than 80% of our student population is minority, and more than 80% qualifies for free and reduced lunch. Five percent of our students change schools after October 1st each year – some moving within New Haven, and many arriving from other school systems, other states, and other countries.

What does all this mean? It means we can and must do more to educate our students– and we can do it with our many partners. New Haven’s philanthropic, not-for-profit, governmental and business communities have been working together with us for school change utilizing all the strategies outlined above, and all are ready to do more. Continued state support for key reform components, like school turnaround and transformation and educator talent, is important, and so too is extending real support for the full range of needs faced by students raised in poverty.

Wraparound Services, Boost! and Community Schools

Several years ago, United Way of Greater New Haven, New Haven Public Schools and the City of New Haven began an initiative known as Boost!, which is a customized version of community schools. Boost! is in 11 public schools, with at least five more added each year. It focuses on wraparound services, which are the non-academic supports that students need to succeed academically. We break them into four domains, which can often overlap:

- Social, emotional and behavioral
- Physical health and wellness
- Student engagement and enrichment
- Parent and community engagement

Students and families engage in similar services outside of the school system, and coordination and coherence of support have a much greater likelihood of success with a wraparound framework. In addition, resources for wraparound services are short, so coordination and alignment between internal and external providers can maximize resources. Finally, Boost! is building knowledge and systems to helping to prioritize wraparound services in the context of academic and other school system priorities.

A key foundation to Boost! is that participating schools list and analyze all their resources and “assets”, and then analyze their gaps in the four wraparound domains. They then work with Boost! resources in reallocating or reframing their work within the domains, in a deliberative and cohesive fashion, sometimes with additional resources that are provided through a grant from First Niagara Bank and additional fundraising by United Way.

New Haven Public Schools has social workers, psychologists and guidance counselors who work with our students on social, emotional and behavioral issues. We spend over \$10 million on their services, and we still are not able to have all three full time in each school. We also have approximately 15 school-based health centers

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(SBHCs), which could, with additional resources, serve more students' physical and mental health needs, and could perhaps serve students in a neighborhood and not just one school. We are proud of what we are doing, but we know we need to do more. Our Boost! schools ask for more interventions and help for students with social, emotional and behavioral issues, and we try to provide that assistance. We brought in the Foundation of Arts and Trauma for a program called ALIVE in 9 of the 11 Boost! schools, and we are seeing behavioral improvements, thanks to that program and our many other efforts.

New Haven's Boost! Program and SB 1002

My Boost! Partner, Laoise King of the United Way of Greater New Haven, 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 to 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, it be permissive rather than mandatory for the BOE 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.

We admire your efforts and intentions on behalf of students, their families and the community. 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.