



February 24, 2014

TESTIMONY CONCERNING GOVERNOR'S BILL NO. 5030, AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2015, AND IMPACTS IN NEW HAVEN

Good evening, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Maynard, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on Governor's Bill No. 5030, *An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015*. My name is Susan Weisselberg, and I am the Chief of Wraparound Services for New Haven Public Schools.

We thank you for all your hard work last year in the biennial budget for education, including early childhood. You restored many of the items we testified about last year. Our children and our families benefit from your thoughtful and targeted assistance, in restoring funding for Parent Academies, Coordinated School Health, science programs, ConnPEP, mental health, interdistrict cooperation grants and healthy foods initiatives. Other funding, for ECS, priority schools and the Alliance District, also is essential to our work.

This year, we are asking you to increase after school and summer program funding, which provide critical support to and engagement of our children; these programs are particularly scarce for our special needs students, including lower-functioning autistic children and children with multiple handicaps. In New Haven, as in many cities and towns in Connecticut, we struggle to provide adequate programs and services for children with social, emotional, behavioral and physical health needs. Additional assistance for more social workers, psychologists and counselors, care coordinators, school nurses and school based health centers, and healthy food subsidies would make a real difference for our children and their families.

Many of our children have experienced stress and trauma in their lives, and they need to be healthy in order to be engaged and learning to their full potential. Many people will speak to the benefits of after-school and summer learning programs as well as other components of education, as noted above. As Chief of Wraparound Services, 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. It is a challenging task, and all help is welcome.

About School Change in New Haven

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. (In fact, Melissa Bailey, the education reporter and managing editor of the New Haven Independent, just had an op-ed published in the Christian Science Monitor on New Haven's reforms: <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Common-Ground/2014/0219/The-education-reform-compromise-heard-round-the-US>)

Students are at the core of our work, with academic learning and personal development – they need to be strong in both to succeed in college, career and life. We focus on talent (teachers, administrators, and all school staff), a portfolio of schools (with each school a center for learning), and wraparound services, engaging families and the community in partnering with us on behalf of our students. As we work to deepen our student engagement, we understand the urgency of our undertaking, and we must make sure that ALL students are learning. We want to re-engage our disengaged youth and work with students of all ages and levels to ensure that they remain engaged in their academic learning, the personal development, and their vision of their future. We want all our students to have good choices, whether they involve a trade, a two-year college or a four-year college, and they must have the skills to support their choices.

As we continue to implement the Common Core in New Haven, we know that having a clear measure of where a student is on the ladder to college will be immensely useful to educators and families. By having fewer, but clearer and higher standards, teachers can go deeper with their lessons and do what they do best – make learning come to life for kids. They also have more time to focus to be sure students really get the skills, and to remediate as needed. As we look at tests and measures of success, we are proud that New Haven has always incorporated flexibility and multiple measures in our understanding of student learning – since any one test will always give an imperfect picture of the nuanced and multi-faceted learning that our students do in school. Common Core is about teaching our kids how to be thinkers. And ultimately, this translates to life success – graduating from college, getting a good job, being a productive and creative member of society.

Our **vision** for transformation in our School Change initiative is coherent, collaborative, and persistent reform. 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. 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, has 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 over a year ago by the U.S. Department of Education, with \$53 million over five years to further the development of our teachers, and a planning grant for innovative Professional Development from the Gates Foundation that we share with Bridgeport.

We have over 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 eight 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.

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 16 public schools. It focuses on wraparound services, which are the non-academic supports that students need to succeed academically. These are in 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. Much of what we are doing with BOOST! was memorialized in the community schools bill you adopted last year.

This year, we are asking you to increase after school and summer program funding, and to assist in efforts for healthy children, helping those who have experienced stress and trauma in their daily lives.

After School Programs

Two schools in New Haven currently receive State funding for large after-school programs: Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School and Common Ground (a charter high school). We applied for state grants for other after school programs in K-8 schools, in middle schools around STEM, and in high schools for a technical program, but those were not funded. We have 21st century programs at 10 schools this year – but the funding for the five-year grant ends with this school year at six schools (Barnard, Celentano, Columbus, Conte West Hills, Fair Haven, and Lincoln Bassett). We use \$141,000 in State extended day funding at a variety of schools for small programs, and have implemented small extended day academy programs at many schools, with State funding assistance. We utilize “Little Scientists” for several after-school programs and providers such as Young Audiences for various enrichment programs.

In brief, next year we will have relatively robust after-school programs at only five of our schools, Coop and the four remaining 21st century schools (two high schools and two K-8 schools). That leaves over 40 of our schools without significant after school programs.

That does not mean they will not have programs. We are working with school principals, staff, parents and various community members on how we structure programs at our schools creatively and at as low a cost as possible. We are coordinating with our City Parks Department. Non-profits and institutions who may have grants for their programs approach us with opportunities. BOOST!, with its Request for Information process, helps identify and bring in providers, some at little or no cost. We are looking at sliding scale funding in some instances and seeking scholarship sources for some of our students to attend after school with outside providers, such as the Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, LEAP and the Farnam Neighborhood House. Using a BOOST! analysis, we identify gaps at schools for the strategies outlined above.

We want our programs to engage our students, to help them develop critical thinking skills in a fun and creative way. And we want our parents to have options. We know we can do it – and we know that sometimes it does not come free.

At a time when student engagement and enrichment play such a key role in achievement, when we are seeing progress in closing the achievement gap, when our graduation rates are increasing and our dropout rates decreasing, additional funding to leverage additional programs would make a huge difference for our students and their families.

Stress, Trauma and Positive School Climates

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 16 school-based health centers (SBHCs), which could, with additional resources, serve more students' physical and mental health needs, and in the future may 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 some of our 16 BOOST! schools, and we are seeing behavioral improvements, thanks to PBIS, ALIVE, and our many other efforts.

We have been working to improve school climates in our schools, and our surveys bear out that we are doing so. We have implemented PBIS in 18 of our schools. We work with Dr. James Comer, Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry at the Yale Child Study Center and an associate dean at the Yale School of Medicine, to train a number of our schools in the School Development Program (SDP), which is a research-based, comprehensive K-12 education reform program grounded in the principles of child, adolescent, and adult development. Our professional development on classroom management and behavioral issues, for teachers, administrators and all school staff, is expanding. And we would like to do more.

Screening for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) is critical; a study in Washington State showed that a traumatic childhood takes 20 years off life expectancy and that social service agencies and public health communities screen for ACEs, but not the medical community.

We are working with DCF, the City of New Haven, United Way, Clifford Beers Clinic and others in creating a trauma-informed environment at our schools, beginning with six BOOST! schools. We will screen students for trauma and its impact, we will train ALL school staff in trauma, we will utilize care coordinators hired by Clifford Beers in these schools for students and their families, we will hire a school psychologist to oversee the work in these six schools, and we will provide additional resources for care. We will use a computer program known as Review 360, which works with UConn researchers, among others, and supplement that screening with an ACEs screening. We will help the teachers use the Review 360 advice and support functions. We will assess the pilot's impact vis-à-vis results-based accountability (RBA).

We will build upon already existing resources in New Haven, from schools to the United Way to the City to the MOMS Partnership to Clifford Beers, the Foundation for Arts and Trauma to Yale Child Study Center, the New Haven Family Alliance and The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven. We will work on robust school-wide early interventions and addressing the teaching of pro-social skills. We will make sure Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in School (CBITS) will be available. Home visits and early childhood interventions will be part of our strategies, and we will utilize advisory and support groups. We can weave together what is already taking place and expand it deliberately and collaboratively. And we can measure it and use that information to develop customized models so that stress and trauma do not cripple our children and their families.

Addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences early and cohesively means that we as a community and a State will save far more in social, emotional and fiscal costs by doing so.

Thank you.