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March 12, 2014

**TESTIMONY CONCERNING HOUSE BILL NO. 5078, AN ACT IMPOSING A MORATORIUM ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

Good afternoon, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill No. 5078, *An Act Imposing a Moratorium on the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards*. My name is Garth Harries and I am Superintendent for New Haven Public Schools.

Both across the country and here in Connecticut, the one thing that we know in education is that we are not succeeding with enough of our students, especially in urban environments. Consider these actual numbers: For every 10 middle school students in New Haven, nine say they want to go to college, but only five of those students actually go, and only two get a degree. These are stark numbers that should shock us, but not surprise us. As I told my Board of Education this week in a reflection on the state of education in New Haven, numbers like these should spur us to action for our students.

The stakes are too high not to act. And in taking action, we must demand the very best for our students and challenge them with rigorous, meaningful classroom learning experiences that prepare them for success at the next level, whether the next level is kindergarten, middle school, high school or college. I believe that the Common Core, though only a part, is an important part of preparing our students for lifelong success.

Let me take a moment to say what I believe is true about the Common Core State Standards. I believe that the setting of rigorous learning standards that emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving is a crucial step toward elevating education in the United States. I also believe that raising the bar academically for all students everywhere means that no matter where a student lives or goes to school, that student is held to the same high learning standards that will empower him or her to rise to success in college, career and life. I believe that these research-based and teacher-inspired standards will strengthen education. And I believe that the laser-sharp focus on preparing students to take on more difficult challenges at the next level will create paths to bright futures for our students.

In our schools and in our communities, we are increasingly seeing parents ask questions about Common Core and how it will impact their kids' education. Discussion about Common Core is healthy. It's great that parents and the community are seeking more information about new standards designed to ensure all students learn what they need to know to be successful in college and career. And in New Haven, we have found that the best way to answer the questions is not to engage in the rhetoric, but instead to let our parents sit down with the practice tests and to thumb through the standards themselves. When they do that, the parents consistently emerge agreeing that they do indeed want their students to be able to perform at the higher level. Perhaps more importantly, they believe their students can succeed at these standards. And most importantly of all, the evidence from our early work on the Common Core in classrooms with kids is that students actually *can* rise to the standards. Teachers, particularly teachers

in early grades who aren't handling the impact of years of lower standards, are finding that kids can do the work, can rise to the standards. And that is the most important thing of all.

We are here today, I think, because there tends to be an oversimplification of Common Core in the public discussion, discussion that too often misses some key points about how these more rigorous standards will help our students tremendously in the long run. First, having a clear measure of where a student is on the ladder to college will be immensely useful to educators and families. Second, 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. Third, it is important to say, we have measures and standards now, reflected in the CMT and CAPT – but they are measures and standards that we know aren't deep or compelling enough.

The underlying concerns behind Common Core probably have more to do with the standardized tests that will measure them, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, or SBAC. Like any standardized assessment our students take (PSAT, SAT I and II, AP), the key question is the quality of the assessments, their relation to what students have learned and what students need to know. Frankly, parents, students and teachers clamber to push themselves to high standards on the standardized assessments of the College Board's AP – why should it be different for our other students? As compared to the existing statewide assessments, I am more confident the Smarter Balanced tests will be high quality, given the national expertise being brought to bear, the quality of the underlying standards, and the long-term computer adaptive capability.

And the heart of this underlying concern about SBAC is actually not about students at all, but about the use of those tests for adult accountability purposes, before teachers and principals subject to evaluation are familiar with them. I understand this concern, sitting as it does at the intersection of independent but contemporaneous policies of adult accountability and standardized testing. In considering the appropriate response, though, our New Haven experience is instructive. As you know, we have been leaders in the implementation of educator evaluation and development. In that context, as we prepare to implement the Common Core, we have heard very little of concern about the use of the SBAC in New Haven from our teachers and leaders. One reason why is 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. My sense is that this is the same flexibility that the State Department of Education is offering. A second reason why is that we have experience already with teacher evaluation and development, in advance of the test, so it is easier for teachers to understand that our process is not a “gotcha” accountability process, but rather a developmental one. Again, my sense is that this is the goal around the state – we just have more experience with the process, and so our teachers can see the practice reflecting the theory.

I want to thank our local partners, particularly the New Haven Federation of Teachers and the School Administrators Association, who have been so supportive of our School Change efforts in New Haven, in our continuing work to implement the Common Core. I also applaud Governor Dannel P. Malloy and Connecticut Department of Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor for their steadfast support to school districts as we navigate implementation of Common Core – and for their commitment to continually hear feedback, including through the recently announced Educators' Common Core Implementation Taskforce. Transition is difficult – especially when it involves rising to a new challenge, taking on more

rigorous academic standards and shifting to new technology. But these are the kinds of challenges that strengthen the fabric of education and bring us together in the service to students. State-funded School Technology Grants have enabled school districts across Connecticut – including New Haven – to add hundreds of computers to classrooms and strengthen wireless capabilities in schools, an advancement that prepares us for implementation of computer-based assessment but also for stronger integration of technology into classroom learning. In New Haven, we are forging new partnerships with the community to give students and families who need it more access to computers and time getting familiar with the new tests. We are not there yet – we have a long way to go, but ultimately we become a stronger community and a stronger school district through these exercises in collaboration and innovation. It is important for us to be doing this work.

Ultimately, Common Core is about teaching our kids how to be thinkers. And this translates to life success – graduating from college, getting a good job, being a productive and creative member of society. Common Core is a strategy that supports closing the achievement gap between schools and districts that held their students to higher standards, more targeted to college, career and life success – and frankly, to closing the very real international achievement gap that should cause anxiety in every community. We must demand the very best for each and every one of our students. Any roll-back of Common Core is a step back for our kids, both in New Haven and around the State. I urge you not to support this bill.