

TESTIMONY  
CommPACT Schools

Good afternoon Representatives thank you for the opportunity to testify on a matter before you. My name is Nathan Quesnel and I am the Superintendent for East Hartford Public Schools.

I am here today to express our concern regarding the elimination of the line item supporting CommPACT Schools from the Fiscal Budget for 2015-2016. I am here to represent both the district I serve, the roughly 7,200 students that attend our 16 schools, and my professional judgment as a leader of a large urban school district.

I want to express my appreciation for your awareness of the importance of family and community involvement and its direct link to improved outcomes for children through your previous financial commitments to CommPACT schools. While I fully recognize the hard choices that the budgeting process forces policy leaders to make, I urge you to reconsider this proposal and find a way to fund a vital program that truly does meet the needs of our schools and communities.

As a part of the Commissioner's Network Plan, we developed a CommPACT school at Robert J. O'Brien STEM Elementary School last spring and have already begun to see the benefits of the work and funding. Robert J. O'Brien Elementary is a large K-6 elementary school in the north central section of East Hartford. O'Brien Elementary has a population of 501 students K-6. O'Brien Elementary serves a diverse and needy population with 80% of families qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch.

Through CommPACT Schools, the following activities have been developed, implemented and supported through an effective partnership that involves a variety of stakeholders:

- The Family Resource Center was created in January and has been very well received by teachers, other staff and the families. This is a room that is designed to be welcoming and will function as a gathering place for families to feel they belong in the school, for parent training programs and for community members to provide support. Whole Foods sent enough boxes of food to fill the three new storage cabinets. Over 50 people attended the ribbon cutting ceremony and day-long event celebrating the creation of this facility.
- A "Visioning" night was hosted. This activity is part of the CommPACT process that engages parents, teachers, and administrators in a conversation dedicated to envisioning what family and community engagement will look like at the school five years from now. There was a clear overlap between the stakeholder groups on the goals and ideas.
- A Family and Community Collaborative team has formed consisting of parents, community and staff members. They are pulling together the feedback gathered during the Visioning process to formulate a school wide vision statement for family and community engagement and to create an action plan for increasing family and community involvement, fostering collective impact from these different stakeholder entities. When completed, the Vision Statement will provide overarching guidance for formulating action steps.
- A unique inventory tool called ASPIRE is being used to gather information from parents, staff and community members about resources and skills that parents and community members can bring to enrich the school, students

and families. This is a tool that has been cited by the National Network of Partnership Schools as a “best practice.” ASPIRE training took place with staff during a Professional Development day. Parents have started to participate in the ASPIRE Survey. They see the potential for bringing more assets to the school through this as well as using parents and their skills in innovative ways. These first parents will be leaders in engaging other families. Over 200 assets, skills and professional relationships have been identified and because of the web basis for this tool, this information is able to be accessed by teachers 24/7.

In short, through the efforts of CommPACT Schools, we have been able to better support the needs of our community. In this process, families are encouraged to make strong connections to school and guided through the intricacies of the educational process. CommPACT Schools has been a part of an important terminology shift and change at O’Brien where parents used to visit “the school,” they now visit “our school.” Through CommPACT Schools, O’Brien Elementary School is making a difference in the lives of children by bringing families into the classrooms, hallways and cafeterias to truly develop schools that are the pride of our community.

Thank you for your support of CommPACT Schools and for your support for Connecticut children.

