



March 3, 2015

**TESTIMONY CONCERNING:  
HB NO. 6824 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE  
THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS  
RELATED TO REVENUE**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Garth Harries and I am the Superintendent of New Haven Public Schools and with me is Victor De La Paz, Chief Financial Officer. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the impact of the Governor's Proposed Budget for 2016-2017 on our school district. I'd also like to thank Governor Malloy for proposing a budget that, while difficult to introduce, does its best to keep education at the forefront.

I would like to provide some background and highlights on the work we have been making in New Haven, and the importance of the services provided by the proposed budget cuts. New Haven is a city and district with consistent investments in its students, staff and schools. In 2009, we launched our School Change Initiative which has received state and national attention for our collaborative work with our teachers, administrators, and parents.

Looking back, we have accomplished much, both in implementing changed practices and policy in the school system, and more importantly in better results for our students. Looking forward, though, we have much further to go—in maintaining the hard work, in continuing to have frank and hard conversations with each other, in continuing to invest on behalf of our students, our teachers, and our principals, and in ensuring that every student in New Haven is afforded the same opportunities in college, career and life as students in the state, nation and world.

Our graduation rate is up 17% in the last five years, to 75%, and our college going rate is up 4% in the last two year, to 36%. Our student population is growing roughly 1,700 students in the last 5 years and our continued enrollment of just under 3,000 suburban students and 2,000 PreK students. We are creating our school portfolio through turnaround, school creation, and school improvement. We are focusing on talent development of leadership and teachers as well as growing the Promise scholarship to strengthen our college going culture as well as wraparound expansions.

In our classrooms, we will continue to work with the resources we have to ensure that our kids are succeeding at the same rate as rest of the state. We have launched revised tracking of reading this fall aligned to constituent kills of reading, to pursue functional reading by the end of 1<sup>st</sup> grade. We continue to strengthening mid-year assessment, individualized plan including parental engagement, and summer learning program for those students not on track. In addition, we are using Scientifically Research Based Interventions with clarity for students, educators, and parents on underlying skill deficiencies and necessary literacy acceleration.

While we continue to grow as a District we always must keep in mind the needs of our community. New Haven being an urban district and community, we recognize we must direct our efforts toward supporting our students living in poverty every day. The dependency of families on the school district to support not just the academic learning needs, but the connection to social resources necessary for survival is high. With limited resources, we are doing our best to maximize the supports necessary to sustain adequate access to support the needs of the youth

especially during out of school time. In order to ensure continued and improved access, we will need continued support from State-level resources.

New Haven Public Schools is also in the process of redesigning our alternative education settings for our students. We are redesigning and investing in homebound and alternative schools to engage struggling students in meaningful and full day educational experiences, whether for transition education services or full day educational trajectory.

Today, in addition, to speaking on the state of our district, I'd like to express my support the Governor's proposal around school construction grants to be used for general improvements to school buildings for Alliance Districts. The proposed changes enable improvements to school buildings, where the changes do not rise to the level of school construction projects but do for Life-Cycle or Sustainability in relation to school buildings and footprint. The changes would allow proactive, well planned and sustained investments to extend the life of school buildings and avoid greater outlays of public dollars at a later point. By maintaining school facilities and systems and demonstrating proactive stewardship, the public investment in education is deepened and expanded. Schools should offer a welcoming and supportive learning environment for all students and should be well maintained to do so. A system that rewards proper and appropriate stewardship while maximizing the past local and state investments will achieve both educational and maintenance goals.

As you will hear from our colleagues in other districts, our ECS support from the State has remained flat in the last six years, while our costs, investments and commitment to our students have increased. Notably, the Alliance grant that began in the 12-13 school year has provided additional ECS entitlement, but in grant form and with specific strings attached. In New Haven, as elsewhere, the largest portions of our budget increase continue to be tied to negotiated employee salaries, benefits, transportation, special education and utilities. Unlike many other CT districts, however, New Haven's enrollment is growing, so a flat ECS entitlement is experienced as decreased funding to all students. Aggressive efforts continue to be employed in order to reduce these fixed costs, where possible, through negotiations with collective bargaining units, comprehensive energy efficiency program, and careful evaluation of programs and redistribution of staff and resources in order to maximize productivity while minimizing added costs.

The Governor's Proposed Budget would impact the following areas:

- Flat funding: Transportation, Bilingual Education, School Breakfast and Special Education Excess Cost  
While we appreciate that no cut was proposed for the services mentioned above, flat funding these services presents a significant impact for New Haven Public Schools. The District has seen a steady increase since 2010 with approximately 1700 additional students enrolling in our schools. In addition, our ELL population continues to grow, 29% growth in the last five years, with no increase in funding.
- Cut to Priority School Districts  
The proposed budget eliminates the Extended School Building Hours Grant and the School Summer School component funding. The Extended School Building Hours Grant will eliminate our afterschool coordinators who oversee the design, implementation, and management of all activities that are provided to New Haven's youth and families that occur outside of the school day and during summer. This includes collaboration of community partners and engaging providers to maximize services, learning opportunities, and ensure access to safe centers for positive youth and community engagement opportunities in and out of school. This is an crucial component in our ability to partner with area youth providers who offer important programs and activities that support schools and district learning initiatives while offering additional resources that

specifically address the needs of the community's demographic which is largely minority, low income families.

The impact to our summer component would require that this funding be shifted to our general budget which given our growing costs strains the district further. As the State Department of Education requires mandatory programs that determines retention/promotion for substantially deficient readers; in New Haven this averages approximately 1800 students in grades K-3 each summer that are at risk and low performing. In order to meet state regulations and cutoffs, the District would potentially need to eliminate offering to non-mandatory students or have to charge low income families and parents for summer reading programs.

- Cut to Adult Education Pilot Program

The proposed budget cuts \$420,000 to 3 communities including New Haven for a pilot program targeting the transition to college. In New Haven, we partner with Gateway Community College to serve students primarily from 18-25. Our Adult Education program – the largest in the state by a significant margin - is integral in the success of our older students who may seek non-traditional learning. This program encourages and supports our students of all ages.

- Cut to Health Food Certification

The proposed budget eliminates 4.8 million in funding for the Healthy Food Certification program, which provides funds to school districts based on the number of reimbursable lunches (free, reduced and paid) served during the prior school year. For years, Connecticut and our school nutrition programs have been leaders on the national front, providing meals and snacks that exceed federal nutrition standards.

NHPS receives over \$200K a year. This helps us offset the costs associated with fresh fruits and veggies (particularly out of season) and allows us to run the program with these critical elements in there. As reimbursements rates have remained relatively flat and labor and food costs have risen this small be critical revenue really goes a long way for us and many other participating districts.

- Cut to Commissioner's Network

Overall funding has been decreased by \$4.7 million even though proposed legislation would increase the number of eligible schools per district from 2 to 8. In New Haven, we are developing best practices as part of the Commissioner's Network in Lincoln-Bassett School and the International Academy at Wilbur Cross. We know that it is working and support this program.

- Cut to School Health Centers

The proposed budget reduces the support for school health centers. While the Department of Public Health indicates that cost can be recovered through HUSKY, we still face challenges in New Haven with our growing immigrant population. I strongly urge that we continue to fund the SHC's at the current level and look at working groups to address the change in population especially in our urban areas.

- Accounts Eliminated from Proposed Budget

The following grants were eliminated and impact the services and programming provided to parents and students of New Haven Public Schools.

- Healthy Foods Initiative
- Science Program for Educational Reform Districts

- Parent University—Since receiving this grant Parent University New Haven has served over 1,800 by providing free workshops and conferences for parents to gain knowledge and tools on how best to support their children in school.
- School Health Coordinator Pilot
- Technical Assistance for Regional Cooperation--\$92,000 cut to the Sound School. The Sound Schools is a regional vocational school in New Haven serving students from New Haven and the surrounding towns.

- Interdistrict Magnet Schools

Transportation funding for students in non-Sheff districts is \$1,300 compared to \$2,000 in Sheff region. The state magnet grant for non-Sheff districts is \$7,085 per out-of-district student and \$3,000 per in-district students compared to \$13,054 per out of district students in the Sheff region. In addition, our RESC receives \$7,900 for all students while \$10,440 is provided to the RESC in the Sheff region. The funding streams place a strain on our district and others.

While we understand the impact of these budget cuts, I am here today to remind you that students and families in New Haven depend on these services. Whether its afterschool programming, services in our school based health centers, parent workshops, healthy food options or science programming, our families look to us. Every day students and families come in to our schools and search for more than just academics. They yearn for schools that give them a sense of belonging and community that engage them in education and impact their lives. In New Haven, we are committed to this and we will continue to move forward with our work.

I'd like to stress that New Haven, like other communities, will continue to fight for additional funding in areas such as: mental health services, social, emotional and behavioral needs, disengaged youth programming and overall wraparound services for our students. In order to close the achievement gap, we must meet the needs of our students both in and out of the classroom.

We believe we are on the right track. The meaningful collaborations with the New Haven Federation of Teachers, School Administrators Association, custodians and other staff, parents, the business community, nonprofits and other community leaders have created a rich environment for exponential growth not only for students but also for our educators. New Haven Public Schools has strengthened pride in our schools and drawn support of the community to ensure our students succeed. Additional support will take us closed to the finish line so that our students will have positive choices for their futures and be productive members of our workforce.

Thank you for your time and consideration.