

Date: February 23, 2015

Testimony: CommPACT Schools

From: Maria Burns, Principal, West Side Middle School, Waterbury

West Side Middle School has been a CommPACT school for seven years. Our staff, students, administrators and parents have gained a tremendous amount from our collaboration with UCONN. I cannot begin to name the tangible gains we have seen throughout the years and it is difficult to describe all of the supports and resources we have obtained in our journey to develop a shared leadership model for our school. The biggest impacts to our school improvement have been with parent and family involvement and student achievement and involvement.

Several years ago, our administrators and reading/language arts teachers were searching for a model to increase student achievement in reading. The SEM-R program was provided to us, along with comprehensive training, resources and classroom libraries. We have seen much growth over the years in reading achievement and most importantly, we SEE our students reading every day. We cannot put a price tag on the fact that thanks to UCONN we were able to teach students at their instructional level and stop the practice of using a "one size fits all" approach.

We have also been privileged to have the support to create a Parent Resource Center in our school. The Center was established through our partnership with UCONN and filled with state-of-the-art equipment and resources. Our staff has benefitted immensely from the workshop opportunities provided so that our Center can be used effectively. We are drawing more parents and family members into the school through activities and programs designed to invite and inform them.

Lastly, our governing structure, acquired from our partnership with CommPACT and UCONN, allows our staff of more than 100 members to function in a productive and meaningful way. Eight cadres made up of staff and parents create action plans each year in response to areas of need for our school. We are able to tackle issues around effective communication tools, achievement in reading, student recognition, school unity and many more topics that make up our school improvement plan. We have seen steady improvement with all aspects of the student learning, teacher learning, school climate and parent and family involvement components of our plan.

As the principal, I could not imagine these changes without UCONN and the individuals dedicated to CommPACT.