

## *Prevention Partners for Children*

A Connecticut public-private partnership established per the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act for the advancement of child abuse prevention.

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### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RESTORING FUNDING IN THE STATE BUDGET

#### FOR FAMILY SCHOOL CONNECTION

March 3, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Laura Amenta and with Faith Vos Winkle, I am co-chair of the Prevention Partners for Children. In this testimony, I urge your support of restoring state budget funding for Family School Connection.

Established in 2000, Family School Connection provides intensive home visiting services to families with **elementary school children who are at-risk of school failure**. These are young children who are chronically absent, truant, have academic or behavioral problems, or come to school unprepared. These entry criteria are also key indicators of a high risk of child abuse and neglect.

A critical mass of research over the last two decades indicates that gains in student achievement are possible when parents support students' learning in the home. This is especially true for traditionally underachieving students and holds promise for narrowing the achievement gap.<sup>i</sup>

**We have not been able to bridge the achievement gap, because we are not fully addressing the preparation gap that exists before children enter school.** Children in school spend at most 20 percent of their time annually in the classroom. Before they enter school, many children, particularly low-income children, spend all of their time at home with family, friends and neighbors. None of the most popular school reform efforts (class size reduction, teacher training, new reading and math curriculums, or charter schools) focuses much attention on the critical role of the families and the home environment.

**Family School Connection data shows this work with families at home, at a fraction of the cost of school reform efforts, pays off.** Home visitors help to solve issues, work with families to improve their parenting skills, and help them understand their role in their children's education.

Past RBA's from programs at five public schools across the state<sup>ii</sup> demonstrate a myriad of benefits; among these is a statistically **significant increase in parental involvement in their children's education** – parents spent more time with their child doing school-based activities such as reading, helping with homework, or volunteering at school. The data shows **significant improvement in organized daily routine** - indicating a home environment that is more supportive of children's learning and preparation for school. There are also improvements in parenting behaviors and attitudes, a result that is **promising for reducing the risk of child abuse and neglect**. Sites also demonstrate **strong evidence of reduced absences, improved grades and improved behavior in children**. For example in New Haven, there was over 50% reduction in overall absences or tardiness and most importantly, over 97% of children showed improvements in academics and behavior.

Research has shown that school reform efforts will only yield sizable benefits if children are prepared to take advantage of them. Working with children *and* their parents in their homes has been shown to not only build children's skills, but also families' skills and knowledge so that they can support their children as they move through school.<sup>iii</sup>

If we want to really make strides in bridging the achievement gap, we must start thinking outside the walls of school buildings and work with those who have the most at stake in the future of children: their parents. Family School Connection does this with impressive results. We hope you will agree that Family School Connection should be a valuable component of Connecticut's newly formed Office of Early Childhood and not eliminated from our state.

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<sup>i</sup> Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (available for download at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>)

<sup>ii</sup> The program was implemented in partnership with five school districts at the following schools: Betances in Hartford, Bielefield School in Middletown, Fair Haven School in New Haven, Wequonnoc School in Norwich and W.B. Sweeney School in Willimantic. In 2013, state budget implementation resulted in the closure of Hartford and Willimantic sites.

<sup>iii</sup> Kirkland, K., & Mitchell-Herzfeld, S. (2012). *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Home Visiting Services in Promoting Children's Adjustment in School*. New York, NY: State Office of Children and Family Services, Bureau of Evaluation and Research

RESTORE STATE FUNDING FOR FAMILY SCHOOL CONNECTION WHICH PREVENTS CHILD ABUSE AND HELPS CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP



Family/School  
Connection

## WHAT'S AT STAKE

- Family School Connection is a **prevention-focused, intensive home visiting program** that teaches parenting skills to families with elementary school children who are at-risk of school failure.
- Family School Connection, with its focus on early intervention, is **cost effective** in terms of its ultimate cost savings as it minimizes the need for later, far more expensive interventions. It is also a fraction of the cost of most school reform efforts.
- Home visits and support are provided to families of children identified as having **truancy, academic or behavioral issues (key indicators of risk of abuse or neglect.)**
- Family School Connection focuses its attention on the **critical role of families and the home environment in children's success.**
- Involved families are mostly female, single head of households, have high rates of unemployment and few resources. **More than one-third of parents have less than a high school education.**
- Home visitors meet with families on a regular basis for the duration of their time at a school **working in partnership with the school.**

Evaluations by the **University of Hartford School of Social Research** support the program's ability to **strengthen the competence of families to support their child's development and school success**

### PARTICIPATING PARENTS:

- SPEND MORE TIME HELPING THEIR CHILDREN WITH HOMEWORK AND LISTENING TO THEM READ
- ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE INVOLVED WITH THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL AND EDUCATION
- HAVE IMPROVED PARENTING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS
- DEVELOP GOALS, PLANS AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS
- TAKE HOLD OF AND MEET THE DEMANDS OF PARENTING

### WHEN PARENTS ARE INVOLVED

#### PARTICIPATING CHILDREN:

- HAVE HIGHER GRADES AND BETTER SCHOOL ATTENDANCE
- FEEL BETTER ABOUT THEMSELVES
- HAVE FEWER BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Prepared by Prevention Partners for Children

A Connecticut public-private partnership established per the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act for the advancement of child abuse prevention.

## 2013 Program Report Card: Family School Connections (Children's Trust Fund, DSS)

*Quality of Life Result:* All children will begin school prepared and ready to learn.

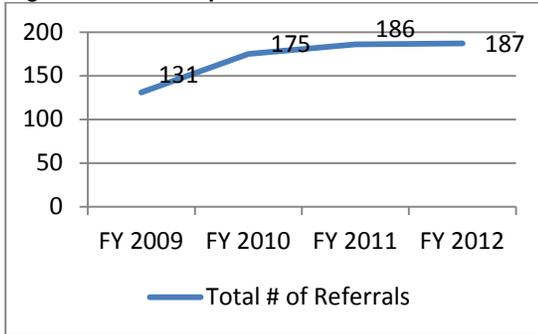
*Contribution to the Result:* Improve parenting skills and help families become more involved with their children's educational experiences.

Program Expenditures	State Funding	Federal Funding	Other Funding	Total Funding
Actual FY 12	\$934,650			\$934,650
Estimated FY 13	\$911,294			\$911,294

*Partners:* Hands on Hartford, Madonna Place, Middletown Public Schools, and New Haven Home Recover Inc.

### How Much Did We Do? Performance Measure: Number of referrals to FSC

Figure 1. FSC Participation rates: FY 2009-FY2012

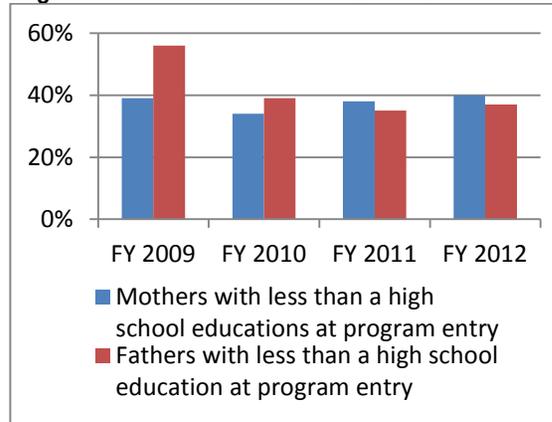


**Story behind the baseline:** The number of families referred to FSC program has risen by 43% from 2009 to 2012, with 131 referrals in 2009 to 187 referrals in 2012. In 2011, 60% of the children who entered the program were in pre-k, kindergarten, or 1st grade, 37% were 2nd through 5th grade, and 3% were in the 6th, 7th, or 8th grade. Nineteen percent of these children had the following overlapping reasons for referral: chronic tardiness, truancy, child's excessive excused absences, and reporting child's clothing as dirty or need of repair. In addition, concerns about parents and families at time of referral included the following major stressors: unstable housing or homelessness (29%); unable to address child's academic problems (25%), and not meeting basic needs (22%).

**Trend:** ▲

### How Well Did We Do It? Performance Measure: Reaching target population

Figure 2. Parent Education: FY 2009-FY2012

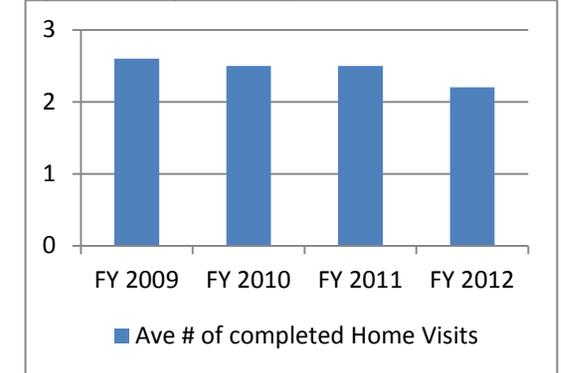


**Story behind the baseline:** As shown in Figure 2, parents obtaining less than a high school education ranges from 34% to 40% of mothers to 35% to 56% of fathers between FY 2009 and FY 2012. 76% of mothers and 60% of fathers were unemployed in FY 2012. Additionally, 75% were of families living in an apartment or a shared home with family, and 14% were living in homeless shelters. These demographics, proxies showing high stress level in the families, indicate that recruitment efforts are reaching the target population.

**Trend:** ▲

### How Well Did We Do It? Performance Measure: Participation Rates

Figure 3. Average # of completed HV: FY 2009-FY2012



**Story behind the baseline:** Since the beginning of program inception in FY 2009, home visitors document contacts with families (visits both inside and outside the home) on a monthly activity log. Program expectations are that families be seen in the home a minimum of two visits per month. On average, families receive 2.2 home visits per month out of an attempted 2.7 in FY 2012, as shown in Figure 3. Sites engage strategies and review goals with families. Home visitors also document their use of approved program curricula during their visit.

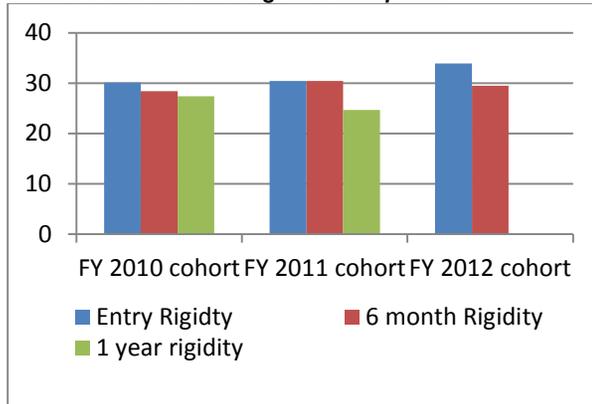
**Trend:** ◀▶

## 2013 Program Report Card: Family School Connections (Children's Trust Fund, DSS)

*Quality of Life Result:* All children will begin school prepared and ready to learn.

**Is Anyone Better Off? Performance measure: Parents show a decrease in rigid parenting attitudes.**

**Figure 5. Parenting Rigidity Outcomes After 6 month and 1 Year of FSC Program Participation**



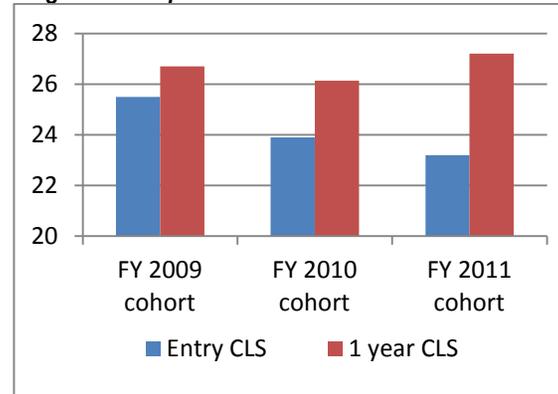
**Story behind the baseline:** Families participating in Family School Connections show reductions on the rigidity subscale of the CAPI-R within 6 month and 1 year of program participation, as shown in Figure 5.

A high-risk subgroup (entry scores at or above the cut-off score of 30) that continued FSC services for 6 months (N=64) were referred for program services for the following reasons: truancy (7%); tardiness (16%); excessive excused absences (14%); child stealing or vandalizing (33%), reports of child displaying lack of energy (51%), and reports of child's hunger, hoarding behavior or requesting food for his/her home (34%). These high risk families scored significantly lower after 6 months of participation ( $t = -4.6, p < .001$ ), indicating a decrease in rigid parenting attitudes for families who experience multiple stressors.

**Trend:** ▲

**Is Anyone Better Off? Performance measure: Parents make significant gains in knowledge and use of community resources.**

**Figure 6. Parenting CLS Outcomes After 1 Year of FSC Program Participation**



**Story behind the baseline:** The Community Life Skills (CLS) scale is a standardized instrument that measures someone's knowledge and use of resources in his/ her community (i.e. transportation, budgeting, support services, regularity/organization/routines). As shown in Figure 5. FSC parents made significant gains in their knowledge and use of community resources after 1 year of program participation; ( $F = 11.8, p < .001$ ) for FY2011 cohort (N=21). CLS outcome data indicate that FSC participants can navigate through daily routines and are connected to community resources. This indicates that families are more organized and able to attend to children's needs and daily routines in relation to school.

**Trend:** ▲

**Proposed Actions to Turn the Curve:**

Given the wide age range of children in the program (4 years old to 15 years old), and the differing needs, efforts will focus on exploring use of additional/applicable curricula in order to serve the needs of such diverse families. Moreover, based on scores on the CAPI-R, a measure of rigid parenting attitudes, it appears that there are 2 subgroups of families in terms of need (these data are reported in full report, August, 2012): While approximately half scored well above the cut-off point indicating high risk for abuse and neglect, the other (approximate) half scored within range of the normative population although, as indicated by reasons for referral, struggled with other issues of potential risk.

**Data Development Agenda:**

With implementation of the Connecticut Trust Fund web-based data system (piloting to begin within the first quarter of 2013), the content of home visits will be documented. These data would be important to describe program services, link what occurs in the home to program outcomes, and inform program content.