



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Commission on Children



**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing re Governor's Proposed FY 2016-2017 Biennial Budget
Submitted by Elaine Zimmerman, Executive Director
Connecticut Commission on Children
March 3, 2015**

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

My name is Elaine Zimmerman. I am the Executive Director of the CT Commission on Children and I am here today to speak on Governor's Proposed FY 2016-2017 Biennial Budget as it relates to the proposed budget of the State Department of Education.

READING

The Governor's proposal includes a \$420,000 cut to K-3 Reading under a "K-3 Reading Assessment Pilot" line item. This cut is compounded by a proposed cut to the summer school components of the priority school district grant, where summer reading instruction is a key priority.

A child who is not reading by the end of first grade has a one in eight chance of becoming a proficient reader. Low literacy impact is seen at many levels, including school retention, special education, dropout rates, unemployment, and crime. Connecticut has the greatest achievement gap in reading in the country.

The Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) results have consistently revealed large differences in performance between low- and moderate-income children and middle-class children. Similarly, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test shows white students significantly outperforming black and Hispanic students. But we also know that 95 percent of all children can be taught to read. Therefore, our state achievement gap in reading demands an urgent turnaround.

The majority of teachers in the early grades have not had opportunity to acquire researched-based classroom skills to close the reading achievement gap. They are not trained in ongoing assessment, prompt intervention, or how to place children into differentiated group cohorts for various fundamental early literacy skills acquisition and practice. This continues to be a crisis in education that is disproportionately impacting children of color and poor children.

In the last few years, we have worked with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, the State Department of Education, UCONN, Literacy How and the Grossman Foundation, to create, learn from, and grow an

intentional set of literacy reforms to significantly narrow the achievement gap in reading. Policies have been developed to facilitate this intensive response:

Year 1: Public Act 11-85

Initial reforms piloted the use of alternative instruments to assess children's reading level and building capacity of all teachers in the science of teaching reading.

- Allowed for alternative reading assessment instruments to be tested, designed to be teacher-friendly, efficient, and in-depth regarding necessary reading interventions;
- Tested how to bring parents in as core customers and partners in their children's learning;
- Assessed the impact of external coaches on classroom outcomes in reading; and
- Allowed on-going training in scientifically-based reading research and practice for teacher and school administrators.

Year 2: PA 12-116

Focused an expanded effort on the 50% of African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students who were not reading at proficiency. This included individualized reading interventions to help these students move forward successfully.

- Targeted intervention assessed all students in selected schools and rapidly intervened with students whose reading was below proficiency, utilizing: a) an external literacy coach, b) four reading interventionists per schools, c) rigorous and on-going assessments, d) prompt and proven, research-based interventions, e) summer school with focus on reading excellence, and f) a focus on partnering with parents on reading.
- Budget allowed the pilot in five sites with expansion of 5 schools per year.
- Began to incorporate statewide reform by:
 - Increased expectations in pre-service of our special education and reading specialists who will have to pass a test in the science of teaching reading before they can work in CT schools;
 - Development of new reading assessment tools, a professional development system in reading, incentives for schools that improve reading performance, higher education improvements in oral language and early literacy for pre service teachers; and
 - Explicit transition reporting between early childhood and kindergarten teachers to assist young children in their early language skills.

Year 3: PA 13-245

Focused on professional development to improve teacher knowledge of teaching reading and increase pedagogical and practical exposure, expanding the interventions that were successful over the last two years.

- A K-3 reading survey of our current teachers to help us to understand what they know and do not know about teaching reading, and help create a professional development plan with targeted support and information tailored to the, school, grade or individual teacher.
- Allows for Alliance Districts to choose to close the achievement gap through improvements in reading instruction by using the model emerging from the last two pilot years.

Year 4 and beyond: Leadership and Resources to Embed and Expand

Focusing on building on the results and learning from the ongoing, now-consolidated reading initiative to:

- Build internal capacity in tier 1 and tier 2 in each of the reading schools by embedding a tiered system of assessing students and implementing reading interventions with fidelity;
- Building internal leadership at SDE through the hiring of a Chief Reading Officer, who will report directly to the highest levels at SDE;
- Develop and implement leadership training modules with teacher leaders, principals, district reading coordinators and superintendents to create and sustain reading improvement in their schools and districts. The delivery format will include statewide monthly training courses as well as embedded support at the district and school level;
- Expand resources to bring the multi-tier reading intervention model to scale in the Alliance Districts and across the state through a reading plan; and
- Utilize modern literacy assessment instruments that closely monitor a student's reading level and guide individualized interventions.

As you can see from the intentional expansion of the K-3 reading model, the line item described as a "K-3 Reading Assessment Pilot" is not a pilot at all, but a targeted, long term approach at closing the achievement gap in reading in the state. Until now, the K-3 reading work has focused on certain high needs schools and districts in the priority areas, but as efficiencies have been created the work has expanded.

Add to this the proposed elimination of the Extended School Building Hours and Summer School Components of the Priority School District Grant, and what this proposal means is an undoing of 4 years of solid K-3 assessment and intervention to close the achievement gap.

In 1995, the legislature expanded the Priority School District law to provide funds to the school districts identified as priority school districts. Extended School Hours Programs shall include, but not be limited to, before and after school hours, weekends, summers and school vacations.

All of the K-3 reading schools use priority school funding to run their summer school programs. This cut would decimate the summer component of this gap closing initiative. As it is, the funding only provides resources for about 20 3-hour days which by no means covers what children need.

According to the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, all of the research shows that students lose ground academically when they are out of school for the summer. The loss is greatest among low-income students who lose an average of more than two months in reading achievement in the summer.

Sadly, even the proposed cut only covers children who are one or more years behind in reading, so those children who are less than years behind don't qualify for summer school. These funds help the children who need it most retain their reading gains.

Parent Trust

The Governor's proposal also includes eliminating the Parent Trust Fund (\$500,000). The Parent Trust Fund is the first family civics initiative focused on training parents in leadership skills to improve the health, safety, and learning outcomes of children. It was established by the Connecticut General Assembly in 2001. The State Department of Education administers the Parent Trust Fund through the State Education and Resource Center (SERC).

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation seeded the Trust with \$250,000. The William Casper Graustein Memorial Fund followed with matching dollars to the state budget appropriation. Unlike any other state appropriation, the investment in the Parent Trust Fund is matched at the state and local level. **The \$500,000 in state contribution raises an additional \$625,000 in local cash and in-kind matching funds.** Communities leverage local matching funds up to 50% of the total program cost.

With more than 14 years of success behind it, the Fund has earned strong bipartisan state and local support over the years.

Research shows that parent involvement has a significant positive impact on child outcomes. The Trust prepares parents to work with school, community and state leaders to improve health, safety and learning outcomes for all children. More than 1100 parents and their children are served annually. Each of these training graduates leaves better prepared to advocate for their children, volunteer in their community, serve on non-profit boards, lead parent-teacher associations or partner with their schools. By mentoring and empowering parents, the Trust's programs create ripple effects on family, local and state levels.

Parents are able to be trained as leaders through this grant process. Dads learn engagement; parents learn about budgets and their connection to quality and best practice for children. Some parents learn to lead and partner with schools to assure quality learning and equal access. Others learn how the school system works, and share this information with more marginalized families. The leadership

becomes a tool to reach a broad social network of parents, many who are not reached by the schools or the systems they serve.

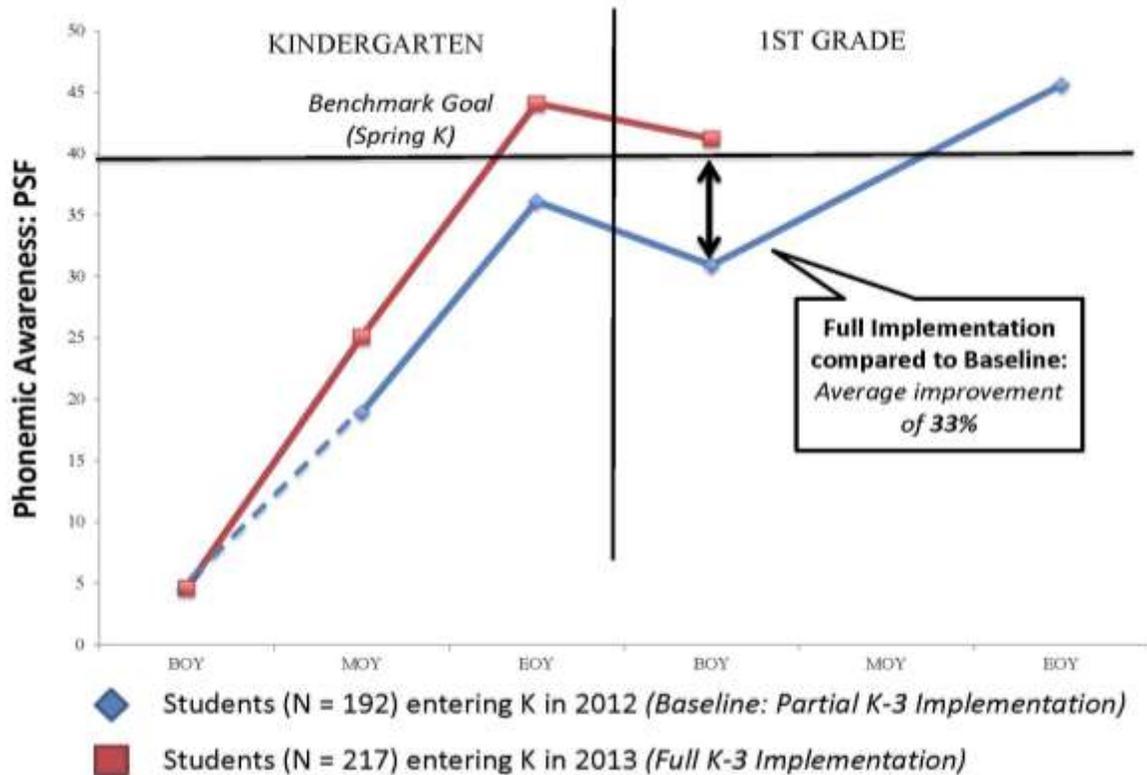
Communities apply for funding and contracts are awarded through a highly competitive statewide bidding process. Funds are allocated to non-profit agencies that offer training to promote parental involvement and leadership by increasing the technical and civic skills needed to share an active role in decision-making as a tool for improving the health, safety, and learning of Connecticut's children.

The Parent Trust Fund supports parent leadership training in **Bloomfield, Bridgeport, Bristol, Coventry, Danbury, Enfield, Greenwich, Hamden, Hartford, Killingly, Meriden, Middletown, Milford, Naugatuck, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Norwich, Plymouth, Stamford, Stratford, Torrington, Waterbury, West Hartford and Windham.**

In times of significant budget cuts, one needs the parent as a leader. The Parent Trust helps communities stay vibrant, brings in the family and assures a careful parent eye on the community. This is not the time to cut the Parent Trust that brings in a public private match and offers up so much civic vibrancy among families.

Thank you for your time.

Effects of K-3 Reading Model



As the chart above shows, students in 4 of the pilot schools who have received multiple years of the K-3 Reading Model demonstrate greater literacy growth and achievement than students who received fewer years of the K-3 Reading Model – so effects are cumulative over time.

Analyses were conducted on 4 Pilot Schools who have been participating in the K-3 Reading Model pilot since the 2012-2013 school year: (1) Burns, Hartford, (2) Truman, New Haven, (3) Norris, East Hartford, and (4) Windham Center, Windham.

*Note summer learning loss between the end of the year (EOY) and beginning of the year (BOY).++

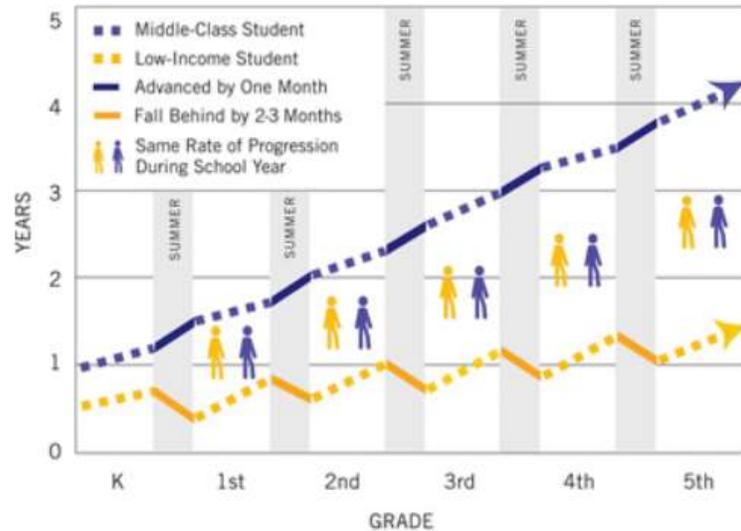
SUMMER LEARNING LOSS

Research spanning 100 years has proven that students lose ground academically when they are out of school for the summer. The problem is particularly acute among low-income students who lose an average of more than two months in reading achievement in the summer, which slows their progress toward third grade reading proficiency. And it exacerbates the achievement gap with their middle-class peers.

Funders, policymakers, and community leaders can help schools and local organizations address summer learning loss by supporting strong programs engaging more children in summer learning opportunities. Transcending the punitive and remedial model of summer school, summer learning's

new form is a blend of core academic learning, hands-on activities, arts, sports, technology, and meaningful relationships.

Low-Income Students Fall 2.5 to 3 Years Behind by Fifth Grade



Source: Cooper, H., Borman, G., & Fairchild, R. (2010). "School Calendars and Academic Achievement." In J. Meece & J. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Schools, Schooling, and Human Development* (pp. 342-355). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

2 MONTHS

Low-income students lose an average of more than two months in reading achievement in the summer, while their middle-income peers tend to make gains in reading.

AFTER 6 YEARS

By the end of fifth grade, disadvantaged children are nearly three grade equivalents behind their more affluent peers in reading.

6 WEEKS

Studies show 6-week summer learning programs can produce statistically significant gains in reading performance.

What helps

Investment in summer programs should help align dollars from other programs—libraries, recreation, and juvenile services—to provide comprehensive programming that:

1. Increases the duration and intensity of programming to a six-week, full-day model.
2. Expands participation to all students in Title 1 schools, or all youth living in poverty.
3. Changes the focus from narrow remediation and test preparation to one that blends academic learning in core subjects, hands-on activities, technology, and enrichment.
4. Strengthens and expands partnerships between schools, community organizations, and public agencies to leverage resources, identify gaps, and improve programs.
5. Provides incentives to students that improve attendance and engagement with enrichment activities such as arts, music, and sports and free breakfast and lunch.
6. Offers innovative professional development for educators and youth development leaders.
7. Engages in rigorous evaluation of implementation and impact to strengthen the evidence base for "what works."
8. Moves summer programs from the periphery to the core of school reform strategies through better planning, infrastructure, data collection, and accountability.

© 2015 The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

Prepared by the Commission on Children

18-20 Trinity Street * Hartford, Connecticut 06106 Phone: (860) 240-0290 Fax: (860) 240-0248 website www.cga.ct.gov/coc/

