

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee- February 16, 2016
Denique Weidema-Lewis, Bridgeport, CT

Proposed Cuts to COMPACT COMMUNITY SCHOOLS COLLABORATIVE

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana and Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Denique Weidema-Lewis and I am writing to support putting CommPACT Community Schools Collaborative back into the budget. The loss of funds that support family engagement is something that we can't afford moving forward.

As a lifelong resident of Bridgeport and a parent of 4 young children under the age of 5 (which is both daunting and rewarding), my husband and I both recognize the importance of education. As the adage states, "Parents are a child's first teacher." Our involvement in our children's' education forms the foundation for their learning long before they are a part of the formal education system.

I've worked within the non-profit field for over 15 years. Based on my professional background and my own parent's investment in my education, I am able to be actively involved in my children's school. My husband and I are classroom parents in our daughter's preschool program- we've amassed more contact hours than any other parent in her classroom. We check-in daily with her teacher on what to reinforce at home and enhance her (and her siblings) learning through the exposure of museums, reading, and the arts at home. I say all of this because I appreciate my capacity as a parent to have a flexible work: home balance but I ask you- how about the parents of other circumstances who can't volunteer in their children's classroom or feel unwelcome in their child's school?

There is much to be said about what makes an effective school but a core characteristic is positive Home-School Relations. Students do better in school when their parents are engaged. Parents need to be engaged as partners in their child's learning which may require that school staff needs consistent training on how to engage families in a meaningful way and involve the community at-large in creating school environments that encourage children to come to school excited to learn, ready to actively participate, and continue their learning as the next generation of Connecticut taxpayers. CommPact facilitates these opportunities for professional development as well as creates avenues for parent voice in education through their work in underserved towns and cities throughout Connecticut.

Parent voice matters- we have the expertise to partner with the educational system to build on proven best practices can bridge the gaps and empower all to work together on behalf of all children. The elimination of funding for the CommPact Community Schools Collaborative would have a harmful effect to the children and families of Bridgeport as well as in other parts of Connecticut. I urge you to restore these harmful cuts to ensure crucial services are available continue the necessary work of creating impactful and effective schools for all.

Thank you for your attention to these important services and supports.