

TESTIMONY
THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP TASK FORCE REPORT
JOSEPH J. CIRASUOLO, ED.D.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS
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The CT Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) which represents the superintendents of schools in CT along with over a hundred school system central office administrators is very appreciative of the work that has been done by the members of the Achievement Gap Task Force to address a problem that has to be solved if CT is to have a prosperous economy and more important, a viable social and political structure.

CAPSS is also impressed by the width and depth of the recommendations that are contained in the Task Force Report. Those recommendations touch upon just about every facet of any successful effort to eliminate the achievement gap between children who through no fault of their own live in poverty and children who through no effort of their own do not live in poverty. The Task Force, therefore, has avoided placing all of the responsibility for eliminating the achievement gap on public education. While public schools have to play a major role in this effort, all by themselves they will not succeed and the Task Force has recognized this fact.

The recommendations contained in this testimony, therefore, should be viewed as part of an effort to make an already strong document even stronger. CAPSS' recommendations are the following.

- The Report's recommendations, especially the ones that call for planning, should be condensed and prioritized. As they presently stand, their sheer volume can be overwhelming and might result in many people simply not completely reading the Report.
- The recommendations that will need financial support to be implemented should be accompanied by additional recommendations that this support come from the state government. If implementation of the recommendations is left to depend on financial resources supplied at the local level, the recommendations will be sparsely implemented if they are implemented at all. Local communities for the most part do not have the capacity and in some cases the will to pay for the implementation of the recommendations that require financial support.
- The recommendations that address the preparation of educators should be enhanced to include an identification of the skills and knowledge that teachers and administrators have to possess in order to address the achievement gap successfully. In addition, it should be recommended that these skills and knowledge be incorporated into the preparation programs for the respective administrators. With respect to this area, a suggestion that those being prepared to teach at the secondary level be trained to teach reading would be particularly helpful.
- The benchmark recommendations should be enhanced by including more qualitative criteria.
- The recommendations for early childhood programs should be enhanced by calling for programs that are developmentally appropriate for the children served by the programs.

This would be an antidote to tendencies to make these programs watered down kindergarten programs.

- The recommendations that address educational programs should be enhanced by less emphasis on curriculum alone and more emphasis on the entire instructional process. The best curriculum in the world will not produce the desired results if the instructional practice that delivers the curriculum is poor.
- The recommendations that address the need for qualified personnel in the effort to eliminate the achievement gap should be enhanced by addressing the need to remove from practice personnel who after reasonable efforts have been made to produce effective performance, still are not effective.
- All of the recommendations should be enhanced by:
 - A greater emphasis on program sustainability. Particular emphasis needs to be placed on the need for stability of leadership at the local school system level.
 - A clearer delineation of the time it will take for the recommendations when they are fully implemented. There is, after all, only so much time available for implementation so whether the recommendations can be implemented with or without time adjustments in present program structures needs to be determined.
 - Elimination of recommendations that provide too much specificity at the implementation level. Local school systems need to have a significant degree of flexibility when it comes to implementation as long as it is clear that there is no flexibility with respect to the expected outcomes.

Finally and most important, CAPSS urges the members of the Task Force to include in their report the need to transform schooling so that it is student centered and competency based. The achievement gap is in large part the result of the present system that is in place for educating children. If the system is not transformed, therefore, the achievement gap will persist no matter how much the system is enhanced. In other words, we are presently organized in education to produce the results that we are producing and unless we change how we are organized, we will continue to produce the results that we are presently getting.

Transforming schooling so that every child moves through the education system at a pace that aligns with the child's mastery of content and skills, so that every child is taught in a way that aligns with the child's primary learning style and so that every child is taught in a way that aligns with the child's interests will result in the systemic change that is necessary for schooling to produce the result that we all want, the elimination of the achievement gap.

CAPSS, once again, thanks the members of the Task Force for the good work that they have done and assures them that CAPSS is willing to work with them as we build on that work to bring about the changes that need to be made so that every child leaves public education prepared for the next step on their journey towards lives that are decent, productive, fulfilling and happy.