



Testimony to the Achievement Gap Task Force Eileen S. Howley, Ed.D.
Executive Director LEARN
Representing the RESC Alliance, the six regional educational service centers across Connecticut.
April 17, 2014

Members of the Achievement Gap Task Force, thank you for the opportunity to address this Task Force. The RESC Alliance includes the six regional educational service centers across serving all of our school districts across Connecticut. The RESCs are not-for-profit, fee-for-service, public education agencies. RESCs enable school districts to expand services beyond what they can cost effectively implement on their own. RESCs operate independently, serving their regional member school districts as well as working together as an alliance in the procurement of resources and the statewide delivery of services.

On behalf of the Alliance, I would like to commend the task force for its hard work and efforts and would like underscore three points regarding this extensive report. First, the master plan that you have produced is comprehensive. To address the achievement gap requires a comprehensive approach. Schools alone can not address this issue in its totality. The thoughtful consideration of supports both outside the schoolhouse, inside the schoolhouse as well as inside higher education and state government underscores the complexity of the achievement gap. However because it is so comprehensive it will be important for the Task Force to consider how best to prioritize it's many recommendations, to determine the highest leverage points for change.

Second, the recommendations around Early Care and Education are essential. The research is compelling. Researchers have identified the achievement gap as early as two years old. Providing young children with rich learning opportunities and safe environments are critical to school readiness. The achievement gap begins early in oral language development and vocabulary development. This is a time when children develop the executive functioning skills and early language that are essential to success in school. Pre-K is not early kindergarten but rather requires developmentally appropriate practices for young children. Early education and pre-K needs to be developmentally appropriate and be held to high standards of quality. The Alliance strongly supports your recommendations for early care. Early care cuts across multiple state agencies and requires a coherent and cohesive approach to lead to success. The Alliance has long endorsed the importance if early childhood education and stands ready to support the implementation of these expectations.

Third, schools can only succeed in closing the gap with great leaders. Your recommendation for new ways of preparing leaders is an essential step in the process of developing successful schools. We support the importance of developing leaders who work together to share common experiences and knowledge regarding how best to meet students' and teachers' needs. It requires highly skilled leadership, that is, to support teachers who teach English langue learners, to support the implementation of model curricula, to engage in meaningful supervision of staff to help them to achieve such curricula and its standards, to consider how best to maximize learning time and help students to achieve at their appropriate rate and pace, and also to cultivate creativity and innovation. Your recommendations for expectations in the schoolhouse depend upon highly skilled leaders. To move from random pockets of excellence of individual teachers to a cohesive and successful school for all children requires leadership that can cultivate and sustain such efforts. Moreover, to support the accomplishment of every child

ready to read by the end of third grade, school leadership requires a deep knowledge base of how children learn to read. The model of developing such leaders needs to be supported in the workplace, not just in higher education settings.

The RESC Alliance is appreciative of the depth and breadth of this report. Our staff stand ready to support the development and implementation of plans, policies and programs from this Task Force. We look forward to supporting the implementation of these critical and rigorous expectations.