

Testimony on behalf of Hartford Superintendent

Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto

Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission
Connecticut General Assembly

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My name is Mary-Beth Russo, ELL District Coach. I am presenting on behalf of Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto, Superintendent of Hartford Public Schools, who had a longstanding out of state commitment.

Hartford Public Schools wishes to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to testify on an important topic that affects a large portion of our student population and, by extension, the district's success rates.

Governor Dannel Malloy and Commissioner Stefan Pryor continue to set forth a bold package of educational excellence, using reform strategies that have proved successful in Hartford, which in turn, have impacted our English Language Learners.

Due to the significant size of our English Language Learner population, 17.7% of the total (3,600 students), Hartford Public Schools ("HPS") has developed a strong body of research on the delivery of adequate and appropriate services.

Our experience over several decades, demonstrates that certain changes in law would create a fairer standard for assessing student growth and help close the Achievement gap. Here are some simple yet significant recommendations:

- Federal guidelines permit states to exempt recently arrived ELLs from administration of their reading/language arts assessment for as much as one year. **Change Connecticut's current 10 month exemption for reading and writing to 30 months in all state standardized ELA subtests subsets.** ELL students would benefit from extending the amount of time they are in school before they are mandated to take the state assessment. This time would allow ELL students to acquire academic language needed to accurately measure what they know. Of the 2,386 ELL students currently eligible to take the state assessments, 738 (31%) students have less than 30 months in Hartford schools.
- **Provide an opportunity for standardized testing in students' native language.** This would be a better indicator of skills and knowledge. Currently California, Texas, New York and Florida provide native language accommodations. **Connecticut – the Education state should do no less.**

As an English language assessment, LAS Links is not a fair or adequate predictor of proficiency on state academic content assessments because they measure different competencies. About 31% (or 1,100) of Hartford's ELL students are proficient on the LAS Links. But it takes about three to five years for them to reach proficiency depending on the grade level and strength in one's native language.

- Universities are currently not training teachers adequately to meet the demands of urban systems. **Modify teacher training programs by creating pre-service programs that require more course work for teaching diverse learners, specifically ELL students.**

The Connecticut state ELL average is 5%.

Hartford's district average is 17.7% - almost 4 times the state average.

35 Hartford schools are above the state average.

20 Hartford schools are above the district average.

26 schools are bilingual mandated schools.

12 percent of Kindergarten students are ELL learners.

Approximately, 145 new teachers enter the Hartford Public Schools annually.

Hartford has a significant history with the ELL student population and can attest to the positive impact these recommendations would have on those students. Through our reform efforts to date, we have delivered on five consecutive years of performance gains.

In order to sustain and accelerate these gains we need to be in the best possible position to deliver high quality services to every student in the Hartford Public Schools district. We welcome the opportunity to play an active role in the dialogue around the future of ELL students in our state.