



Norwich Public Schools

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Testimony
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I want to thank you Senator Dodd, for providing me with the honor of testifying today on such a critical topic, Connecticut's Children. I am proud to say that I have watched you throughout your career making decisions that have improved the lives of our children and their families, and I thank you for that.

As a fairly new Superintendent, I don't see myself as the voice for all of my colleagues; however I will speak to you about some of our programs and services. I can't really do that without also addressing some of our needs. I'm sure that our story mirrors that of many of our cities and towns in Connecticut.

Norwich is an Urban Center with about 38,000 citizens; our median household income is \$48,000 a year based on 2009 data. Our district has 3,800 Pre-k to 8 students, with the majority of our high school students attending Norwich Free Academy, our designated high school. We do have our own Alternative High School and Clinical Day Treatment Program which are the types of programs that are helpful and important to the success of many high school students. Not everyone benefits from a comprehensive high school experience.

Our schools are very diverse. There are 29 languages spoken there. We house 5 Bilingual Centers. These centers are critical for the success of our students with English as a second language. Many of our students arrive in school without speaking any English. There are 465 students with English as a second language throughout our district. We are fortunate to be part of a partner program with UCLA in California, Project Excell. This program teaches our teachers strategies for their classrooms for our students who do not speak English. We have also had several years of training for staff in a program called Courageous Conversations. This program discussed issues related to race, our feelings about these differences and how to manage them in a very diverse environment.

79% of our students qualify for free or reduced meals in school. This federally funded program is critical to our district as we feed our students breakfast, lunch and snacks. Without this, many students would be hungry and we know how adversely hunger affects students' abilities to focus in school. During the summer of 2009 we provided 11,185 breakfasts and 21,654 lunches. I expect that this year's numbers will be higher. Our students and families need these programs.

Norwich has 845 students who meet the criteria for special education services. While we know that many of the mandates for Special Education have not been fully funded, we are able to provide specialized programs for students on the autism spectrum. I know that there is much research going on currently about autism and the numbers of students who qualify for these programs continues to grow. In addition, older students also are required to have programs that provide a transition for them to be able to be successful and independent after

high school. We are able to use ARRA funds to support both of these important initiatives as well as others.

We provide several integrated preschool opportunities. These are all possible through Title 1, School Readiness, and IDEA funding. We also have Family Resource Centers in several of our schools. Even with limited space we are committed to finding ways to keep these centers in our schools. They provide affordable before and after school care and supports for families. We all know how important early intervention is to future student success.

Increasing parent involvement is one of our goals. We provide opportunities to partner with them to work together for student success. One example is the FAST Team (Families and Schools Together). This grant through the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center helped us to focus on opening doors and bridging communication gaps with our parents. Each of our schools finds ways to engage our very busy and hard working parents.

Since 2007 we have expanded after school opportunities for our K to 8 students with a 5 year 21st Century Community Learning Center grant award. We are able to serve over 450 students from the end of the school day until 5:00pm. This has had a positive impact on students, with enriched academic and cultural opportunities, service learning projects and recreational activities. During the summer months we are able to provide service learning, enrichment, and structured recreational activities for students, bringing academic success from one year to the next, a very necessary bridge.

After school tutorial programs through grant funding enriches students' math and literacy skills. Learn and Serve America Funds support community partnerships with students. Community pride and involvement is critical to student and community success.

Three school based health clinics offer students and families access to essential health and counseling services. This program has helped students with obtaining physicals and immunizations. We have a Wellness Committee that oversees initiatives for healthy staff and students. We take advantage of fresh fruit and vegetable grant so that we set the example for students on healthy eating and lifestyles.

The Positive Behavior Support Program is being implemented in our schools to address school climate and culture. We have seen significant decrease in disciplinary referrals as a result of this program. This is all part of our Scientifically Research Based Intervention Programs that provide tiered interventions to address both the academic and behavioral needs of our students. Several of our schools have developed character count initiatives which provide positive reinforcement for good citizenship.

Those programs that I have mentioned are just a sampling of all that we do. I am proud to say we are making progress. Even with a nearly flat funded budget for the third year in a row and with having to close two schools and lay off 70 staff, we are making progress. We have not closed the achievement gap yet but with all of these program opportunities and our committed staff, we open the doors to our students and their families with programs and services that address their academic, social and health needs. Providing emotional and academic support is critical to student success and we need this success as then foundation for our future.