

**Connecticut State Board of Education**  
**Targeting Strategic Investments in Urban Schools**  
**January 14, 2005**

**Background**

Eight schools (Beardsley and Columbus in Bridgeport; Kinsella, Milner and Moylan in Hartford; and Hill Central, Clemente and Robinson in New Haven) have been identified as “in need of improvement” for the fourth straight year under the No Child Left Behind Act. More important, they have been significantly underachieving schools for many years. They need a targeted, comprehensive, no-holds-barred infusion of support in all of the following areas in order to improve student achievement both quickly and sustained over time. Federal school improvement funds will be used to implement programs at the district level, but targeted efforts in the schools of greatest need are essential if we expect significant progress.

**Targeted Areas**

**Preschool**

Research consistently shows the importance of early, continuous, high-quality nurturing and education of young children to their long-term success. Offering a high-quality preschool experience to all who need it is the foundation of a comprehensive approach to closing the achievement gaps. Every child who will enter one of these eight schools must be able to attend preschool connected with that school; each of these preschools must offer a high-quality program; and Connecticut must develop a preschool assessment to evaluate the quality of preschool programs. An average of only 43.8 percent of youngsters in the seven schools currently configured with a kindergarten attends preschool, while the state average is 76.4 percent.

***Recommendation:*** Provide a high-quality preschool experience in the first year for all 3-year-olds, adding a new group of 3-year-olds in the second year, thus serving all 3- and 4-year-olds who live in the attendance areas of these eight schools (Robinson is being reconfigured to include kindergarten and the early grades).

***Estimated cost:*** \$4,036,775 in the first year and \$8,073,550 in the second year

**Family Resource Centers (FRCs)/School-Based Health Centers**

FRCs will establish within the school family support services that foster the optimal development of the child and the family. Because parents are children’s first and most influential teachers, FRCs help support parents in positive parenting skills that support their children’s mental, emotional, medical and academic needs. Each of these family resource centers must have a targeted focus on the learning needs of parents so that they can support and help improve the academic skills of their children. In addition, the FRC needs to link families to needed health services, ideally provided in school-based health centers. Currently, of the eight schools in their fourth year of school improvement, only Hill Central in New Haven has a family resource center and only four of the schools (Beardsley, Hill Central, Clemente and Robinson) have school-based health centers.

*Special note concerning family resource centers:* Parents whose literacy and employment skills are developed through FRC services may be uniquely suited to employment at the schools themselves. The schools, their students and the community may particularly benefit from having these parents employed in their preschools, school-based health centers and family resource centers.

*Special note concerning school-based health centers:* The Department of Health is the state agency responsible for funding and operating school-based health centers. These centers are comprehensive primary health care facilities. The services are provided only to students who are enrolled in the health center and not to the entire student population. Parental consent is required. The Hill Central center is federally funded.

**Recommendations:** Establish a family resource center in each of the seven schools that do not currently have one.

**Estimated cost:** \$1,500,000

**Recommendation:** Change the legislation that authorizes family resource centers from a competitive grant to one that requires a center in each eligible school which focuses its work on services that help the family find and maintain a job and support its child's physical, mental, emotional and academic needs.

**Estimated cost:** N/A

**Recommendation:** Establish a school-based health center in each of the four schools that do not currently have one.

**Estimated cost:** \$1,353,000

### **Incentives to retain outstanding teachers, support staff and administrators**

A primary key to student achievement is an excellent teacher – one whose energy, commitment, passion and caring for children results in a belief on the part of students, parents and the community that all children can achieve. Even the most passionate teachers burn out quickly, resulting in high teacher absences and an inordinate turnover rate in these schools. The following interventions are necessary to support these teachers in sustaining their commitment to these children and their schools:

- decrease class size;

**Recommendation:** Reduce the size of all kindergarten classes to 15 and all Grade 1-3 classes to 18.

**Estimated cost:** \$1,765,900

- provide adequate support staff, including sufficient numbers of reading specialists and school nurses, psychologists, social workers and guidance counselors to effect change;

**Recommendation:** Provide each school with enough support staff members to equal the state average ratios.

**Estimated cost:** \$1,425,000

- provide financial incentives for expert midcareer teachers to remain in these schools;

**Recommendation:** Pay 20 percent of staff members at and above the 6<sup>th</sup> step on the salary scale a \$5,000 bonus; teachers will be selected based on their demonstrated ability to increase student achievement.

**Estimated cost:** \$200,000

- provide computer-based assessment tools and the training to use them so that teachers can continuously and frequently monitor the progress of their students' learning and modify their instruction to continuously improve that learning;

**Recommendation:** See laptop computer recommendation immediately below and "Longer school day and year," on next page.

- provide adequate technology, curriculum materials and supplies and the training necessary to use them in order to support students' learning; and

**Recommendation:** Provide laptop computers to all students and teachers.

**Estimated cost:** \$1,391,127 in the first year and \$3,908,819 in the second year

**Recommendation:** Provide each classroom with \$500 worth of supplies and \$50 per pupil in both math and science curriculum materials (\$100 per pupil total).

**Estimated cost:** \$542,800

- provide adequate time during the school day and year to collaborate with others about student achievement and well-being.

**Recommendation:** See "Longer school day and year," on next page.

- provide specialized curriculum and instructional support to new teachers (those teaching under an initial certificate).

**Recommendation:** Provide one master teacher for every 10 new teachers in a school to observe, critique and model instruction throughout the year.

**Estimated cost:** \$845,000

### **Additional space**

Many of the recommendations described above – preschool, family resource centers, school-based health clinics, reducing class size – require additional space. Financial support for this additional space is critical to each of these initiatives. The estimate of additional cost is based on the number of portable classrooms that would be needed for **all** of these expansions; however, not all school sites will be able to accommodate portables. Thus, in some cases, funds would be used to lease nearby private facilities.

**Recommendation:** Provide funding to lease additional space as needed at each school equivalent to a total of 114 portable classrooms.

**Estimated cost:** \$2,622,000

### **Longer school day and year**

Student achievement in these eight schools as measured by the Connecticut Mastery Test has been consistently poor. One of the fundamental ways to improve student achievement is to give students not only better instruction, which is addressed in the areas above, but more instruction. A longer school day and year would provide students with exposure to a full, rich, comprehensive curriculum including the arts, health and physical education, science and social studies – all of which are valuable in themselves and as ways to help students gain basic reading and mathematics skills. A summer school experience for preschool youngsters from high-poverty backgrounds would be particularly important. Additional time for teachers would be used to collaborate on curriculum and instructional issues, to receive training in current techniques in teaching and learning, and to discuss students' academic achievement and social, emotional and physical well-being – without which academic achievement is impossible.

**Recommendation:** Provide one additional hour of instruction per day.

**Estimated cost:** \$4,182,700

**Recommendation:** Provide enough additional days of instruction to equal 190 days per year (the number of additional days required varies per district). The state-required minimum is 180 days.

**Estimated cost:** \$1,137,500

**Recommendation:** Provide enough additional work days for teachers to equal a 200-day work year (the number of additional days required varies per district).

**Estimated cost:** \$853,900

**Recommendation:** Provide high-quality preschool summer school for 3-year-olds in the first year, adding a new group of 3-year-olds in the second year, thus providing summer school to all 3- and 4-year-olds served by these eight schools.

**Estimated cost:** \$608,400 in the first year and \$1,216,800 in the second year

### **Final thoughts**

These targeted areas do not constitute a buffet. They are a full-course meal. If we want to see significant improvement in student achievement, all of these areas should move ahead in concert.

The development of high-quality preschools will have long-term benefits, while the things we do for teachers have the strong potential to have immediate positive effects. Family resource centers offer both. Students enrolled in these schools now and those who will enter in the years to come all have the right to expect our best and most urgent efforts.

The benefits of the improvement we expect to see at these eight schools will not be limited to these schools. What we do here and now must be considered pilot work, because we know there are well more than eight schools that have long-term educational deficits, in terms of both resources and results. The entire set of proposals is critical for the dramatic improvement we must see in these eight schools. However, within the next 3 years approximately 130 more schools have the serious potential to be in the same position as these 8 schools. This, then, is just the beginning.