



MEMORANDUM

To: Allan Taylor, Chairman of the State Board of Education

From: Jeffrey Villar, Ph.D., Executive Director

Re: **Explanation of Presentation Before the State Board of Education on Dec. 2, 2015**

Date: November 6, 2015

The objective of my presentation is to provide the State Board of Education with a brief overview of the Connecticut Council for Education Reform (CCER) and the work that we engage in across Connecticut. The majority of the presentation will focus on the methods through which CCER works to improve districts' systems-level capacity. I will also briefly touch on our policy agenda. I have included below a brief summary of our work to provide members of the Board with some background information.

1. SCHOOL SYSTEM FUNDING ANALYSIS

CCER has partnered with Education Resource Strategies to perform a school system funding analysis in five Connecticut Alliance Districts (two projects are currently underway).

The objectives of the school system funding analysis are to:

- 1) Understand how each district is using its funds, as compared to similar districts;
- 2) Identify to what degree the district is funding schools equitably and identify drivers of inequity;
- 3) Identify opportunities to reallocate resources in a manner aligned with district strategy; and.
- 4) Identify key challenges that school districts are facing as a result of the state's current education finance system—in order to inform proposals for state-level policy changes.

2. DATA SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

CCER has partnered with the consulting firm Sagence to assist three Connecticut Alliance Districts improve their data systems. Sagence assisted in the development of a maturity model that would allow CCER to assess the data system of each district against a clear set of external benchmarks. Based upon that project, CCER has also partnered with an Alliance district to develop an online platform to share these practices and resources with other districts. This platform will be released at an upcoming press event.

3. DATA-DRIVEN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CCER collaborated with Bloomboard—a company that provides a platform for storing teacher evaluation documents—to train Central Office administration, principals, and district evaluators in how to use Bloomboard's dashboard reports on teacher and administrator performance in a Connecticut Alliance District.

4. COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

CCER partnered with the Leadership and Learning Center to conduct a Comprehensive Needs Assessment in two Connecticut districts. The Leadership and Learning Center, a research-based organization, has worked extensively with school districts over the past two decades to produce significant improvements in academic achievement by identifying and employing nine foundational practices, which are critical for students' success. The Center has developed a Comprehensive Needs Assessment to analyze how a school district is performing in relation to these practices in three key areas: Accountability Practices, Classroom Practices, and School Practices.

Districts are assessed on these practices through a series of on-site classroom observations, meetings, surveys of parents, staff, and students, and a thorough document review. A final report identifies the districts' strengths and opportunities for growth, and offers specific direction for school improvement based upon these findings. Unfortunately, CCER was forced to terminate a study in one Connecticut district because of Union objections.

5. DEVELOPMENT OF DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LEADERSHIP TEAMS

CCER is collaborating with Dr. Michael Wasta to build an accountability model in a Connecticut Alliance District that will allow the district to measure progress towards meeting clearly defined goals which are based on a series of metrics which go beyond simple student achievement as measured by standardized tests. This will involve developing both school management teams (often called Data Teams) and a district leadership team (often called a District Data Team).

Connecticut Council for Education Reform

December 2, 2015

Jeffrey A. Villar, Ph.D.
Executive Director



Our History

- Established independently in 2011 by several members of the original Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement (CCEA), CCER works to carry out the 67 policy recommendations identified by the CCEA as having the greatest potential to improve public education by narrowing the achievement gap and raising overall student achievement.
- During the 2012 legislative session, we launched a major public awareness effort and worked with Governor Malloy's administration, the SBOE and Commissioner, and CT legislators to include these recommendations in their proposals. To date, over half of our recommendations now exist in CT public education law.



How We Do Our Work

Objective #1: Pursuing Policy Priorities

- Advancing reform policies that research shows are most likely to raise achievement for high-need student populations.
- Researching and analyzing new policies and initiatives.

Objective #2: Direct Work with Schools and Districts

- Working directly with district leaders to support the improvement of core management functions to raise student achievement.
- Convening experts and practitioners to promote best practices in raising student achievement and closing gaps

Objective #3: Raising Public Awareness

- Using traditional, social, and digital media to increase public awareness of CT's achievement gap and the need for reform.
- Building a network of business and civic leaders who support policy reforms at the state level and in their own communities.

District Partnerships

- CCER has worked directly with 10 Alliance Districts during the past 2 years.
- We have provided over \$750,000 of services at no cost to these districts.

School System Funding Analysis

- Conducted in partnership with Educational Resource Strategies (ERS).
- Provides district with an analysis of spending using a common chart of accounts.
- Looks for equity of spending across schools based on student need.
- Identifies expenditures that are not aligned with district priorities.

Data Systems Analysis

- Conducted in partnership with Sagence.
- Provides district with understanding of how to improve its data systems to better meet district objectives.

Data-Driven Professional Development

- Provided in partnership with Bloomboard.
- Helps district understand and use data from evaluations to provide teachers with meaningful professional development.

Comprehensive Needs Assessment

- Provided in partnership with the Leadership and Learning Center.
- Analyzes district's system of delivering curriculum and instruction based upon nine foundational practices associated with high performing school districts.

Strategic Planning/ Holistic Accountability

- Conducted in consultation with Dr. Michael Wasta.
- Provides district with technical support in developing and implementing an accountability framework that drives improved student learning.

CCER Conferences

- Innovate to Eliminate Gaps Workshop
- Best Practices Conferences (x2)
- Communicating the Common Core: Parents and Schools Working Together for Student Success
- Early Childhood: Building Blocks for Future Success
- School Finance: Moving Forward

CCER Policy Priorities

- Defend education reforms.
- Increase Pre-K opportunities for low-income children.
- Expand Connecticut's pool of excellent educators.
- Continue to improve Connecticut's ability to turn around schools and school systems.

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