

## Thoughts on A Report from the Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement

This report contains many recommendations to remedy the "achievement gap" in Connecticut. There are too many here to give you my thoughts on each one. Instead, I have organized my thoughts by the categories in the report.

### *Demand Accountability*

These recommendations reorganize the way the state manages and leads the educational system in Connecticut. It mirrors the Massachusetts model. Systematizing the way we organize early childhood education is a great step in ultimately improving that element of our system. I serve as a member of the state's Early Childhood Cabinet, which is chaired by one of the members of the Commission that wrote this report. I personally believe that any plan to close the achievement gap that does not include an early childhood component will have a very limited impact. The need for a robust data system is to be applauded; however, as with many of these recommendations, how they will be funded is a critical question. I find it interesting that there is no "costing out" of any of these proposals.

### *High Expectations*

Many of the suggestions here are worthwhile if funding can be found. Early childhood shows up here as well. Many of the other recommendations are worthy but expensive. Making CMT and CAPT scores available to districts within 45 days is a nice thought, but if that means we must change to a multiple-choice-only format so that scoring is quicker, then that's a bad trade-off. Requiring that students "pass" CAPT to graduate raises the "exit exam" issue that the legislature wrestled with a few years back. I don't believe that CAPT was ever designed to be an exit exam, and so using CAPT for that purpose is not proper. Furthermore, the term "pass" is vague, as no one knows what the "cut score" would be to "pass." We presently have the terms "below basic," "basic," "proficient," "goal," and "advanced." Massachusetts has used an exit exam for a number of years.

### *Foster Leadership*

Attracting, retaining and empowering effective leaders at all levels of the public schools is a critical success factor. I believe that districts and schools, in developing improvement plans, should set student achievement targets. Training teachers and administrators in using data as a way to improve student learning is laudable. Removing tenure and collective bargaining for principals will be highly controversial; Massachusetts removed tenure for principals a number of years ago. I'm not sure how removing tenure and collective bargaining helps recruit and retain strong school leaders.

The report describing the separation of roles between Boards of Education and superintendents is noteworthy (under the heading "Let district leaders run the system"):

There is no question that major structural change is required if we are to meet the goal of all children achieving at Connecticut's high standards. While some of these recommendations may not be agreeable, if this report moves the conversation along, then it will have done a valuable service to education in Connecticut.

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