

Testimony to Achievement Gap Task Force

April 17, 2014

My name is Andrew Lachman, executive director of the Connecticut Center for School Change, a not-for-profit school reform organization with a mission to improve teaching and learning and close achievement gaps. The Center is the managing partner of LEAD Connecticut, a consortium of CABE, CAPSS, CAS, the Neag School of Education at UConn, and New Leaders. LEAD Connecticut has been tasked by the State Department of Education to design and offer leadership programs to identify, prepare, support and retain highly-qualified principals, central office staff and superintendents with a special focus on the Alliance Districts.

Given the Center's services to local districts and our work in LEAD Connecticut, my remarks today focus on the leadership section of the Task Force report. Second only to teachers, principals are the most important school-house factor affecting student achievement. Closing the gap will require districts to recruit, support, and retain effective leaders who have the competencies, skills, and knowledge about talent management, academic rigor, culture and climate, and operations that are the key domains of educational leadership. Closing the gap will require that principals lead their staff in developing a sense of urgency and acquiring the knowledge and skill to ensure that all students are ready for college and careers.

Schools with large achievement gaps don't exist in a vacuum. They are part of local school districts and the result, at least in part, of the structures, policies and practices of those districts. This means that closing achievement gaps must focus not only on the school level, but also on district leadership. District leaders need coaching and job-embedded professional learning to enable them to provide the support and accountability to school leaders that will ensure that gap closing strategies are successfully designed and executed.

The Center supports the recommendations for financial incentives – including mortgage assistance, bonuses, and public recognition – for principals and district leaders. But the research tells us that while compensation is important, working conditions, structures and the systems in which principals operate often trump salary. This means that closing gaps will demand continued state support of leadership programs that focus on developing embedded professional learning supports for principals, executive coaching for school and district leaders, and communities of practice that help school and district leaders create the conditions for school success for both adults and children.

The Center and our partners in LEAD Connecticut are prepared to continue our work to ensure that the state has the talent and the human capital strategies to close achievement gaps wherever they exist. We look forward to working with you to translate your master plan into reality.