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News & Commentary

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Strong Schools, Strong City



1 Can We Stop Losing Principals ... by Starting to Value Them More?

HPS, Achieve Hartford! Look at What It Takes to Keep Great Principals, Elevate the Profession

On average, Hartford has said farewell to 16 percent of its principals over the past three years. Given all that they confront on a daily basis, isn't it time for fewer good-byes and more major "hello's" – with respect for their increasingly intensive, high-accountability environment?

Awareness of the rigors of the school leadership position – and the need to elevate public understanding of it – was just one of the points emphasized in Achieve Hartford!'s latest **edfocus** issue brief, issued yesterday at a joint press conference featuring Hartford Public School Superintendent Beth Schiavino-Narvaez, UCONN's Executive Leadership Program Director Robert Villanova, Executive Director Paul Holzer of Achieve Hartford!, and a roomful of key education leaders and advocates.

Over the past three school years, Hartford has lost an average of 16 percent of its principals per year – and needs to find new ways to recruit, reinforce, and retain great school leaders, Executive Director Holzer said. Hartford's principal attrition rate is much better than the national average of 25 percent, as reported by Vanessa de la Torre in the [Courant today](#), but instability at the top is known to affect teacher turnover.

"The costs of instability at a given school – especially if recurrent and within our most challenged schools, are simply too great to expect those schools to achieve the significant, year-over-year growth needed to close the achievement gap in Hartford," Executive Director Holzer said.

What's Being Done about It?

In a guest commentary, Dr. Villanova was very clear about the need for well-prepared, highly-effective, and fully-committed principals. Districts nationwide are seeing the need to develop strong internal and external leadership pipelines and focused systems of support and professional development – and Hartford is on the case, he said. Hartford's standards-based, full-time, on-the-job resident principal programs, under which aspiring principals shadow veterans to learn the ropes, are the "gold standard," he advised. Here are Dr. Villanova's [guest commentary](#) and the District's [resident principal listing](#).

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In some ways, yesterday's speakers took the press conference audience to school, elaborating on the best practice and research information of Achieve Hartford's **edfocus**. Here's how:

- **Highest-Impact Practices.** Dr. Narvaez pointed to research showing that urban school principals spend less than 17 percent of their time on instructional leadership. Accordingly, her emphasis has been on clarifying the role of instructional leaders and by making sure the District has great supervisors and great coaches. The associate superintendents for instructional leadership, part of her central office reorganization last year, are key players here, serving as liaisons between schools and central office staff, promoting the highest-impact practices and helping to take things off the plate of principals.
- **Re-engineering and Focusing.** Dr. Villanova pointed out that while more than 5,000 CT educators are certified to serve as school principals, the vast majority either are not interested or not prepared; sometimes not encouraged to move up to school leadership. Yet, he maintained, Dr. Narvaez and her team are addressing the challenges, in significant part by the re-engineering and focusing of the associate superintendents of instructional leadership positions, which he said were at the cutting edge of research and best practice in District leadership.
- **Recommendations.** Executive Director Holzer drew attention to Achieve Hartford!'s recommendations, including those concerning innovative training for gap areas, further funding residency programs, and identifying financial and non-financial incentives for principals to stay in their positions longer. He also contended that “burnout is real” in this leadership position – thus elevating the importance of how Hartford stakeholders view the profession and how the District finds new ways to recruit, reinforce, and retain school leaders. As examples, he called for videotaping “Day in the Life of a Principal” programs at contrasting schools and eliminating the daily “time sucks” that cut into principal effectiveness.

Here are the [joint HPS-Achieve Hartford! news release](#) and the “Standing by Our Principals” edition of [edfocus](#).

2 Yale Conferees Examine Community Engagement

Overcoming Hurdles to Get the Entire Village Involved in Learning

One Hartford-relevant consensus at last week's Yale School of Management Educational Leadership Conference was that it does take a village to drive excellence and achievement equality in public schools – but that the family and community engagement necessary to mobilize that village faces strong headwinds.

“It absolutely takes a village to raise a child – and to improve schools for all – but effective family and community engagement is elusive,” said Achieve Hartford Executive Director Paul Diego Holzer. He participated in panel, entitled “It Takes a Village: Building and Sustaining Community Engagement in the Schools,” with Daniel Cardinali of Communities in Schools, Nadya Daby of the U.S. Department of Education, and Jeremiah Kittredge of Families for Excellent Schools.

Here is a sampling of the points discussed:

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- Family and community engagement is integral to the application of grassroots pressure in the interest of school improvement.
- An honest dedication to outreach from districts, principals, and teachers is equally crucial; if it isn't a priority, community buy-in won't be, either.
- Getting communications right will require strong and tailored support for principals (please see the article above). Their efforts must be customized to fit their populations; parent-teacher bridges, cultivating effective School Governance Councils and PTOs, hiring parents, and getting families to play a supportive role at home are all powerful. But so is thinking outside the box and cultivating community partners for individual school needs; the most impressive school principals are resourceful in these and many other ways.
- Training for principals and all staff – to be culturally competent, have a youth development disposition and embrace parent engagement, not just to “bring families along” but to listen and respond to their concerns – could be a game changer.
- Achieve Hartford!'s interactive SMARTERHartford.org website to inform and engage parents and its No Child Held Back training program for parents are worthy examples of how nonprofit organizations can step in and wake up the village.

As to future innovations, Achieve Hartford! would like to implement a citywide case management model with resource networks; annual School Community “Accountability Forums”; principal professional development modules on community bridge building and communications; training for community organizers to work in school districts; and the new VOXER app for iPhone and android, to build communities of practice.

3 Urgent Call for Stepped-Up ELL Support

State Work Group Finds State System “Woefully Underfunded and Understaffed”

Connecticut’s English Language Learners need immediate attention – and they’re not getting it from a “woefully underfunded and understaffed” State system in which one educational consultant provides guidance and support for a student population of 35,000.

That was perhaps the most startling finding in a report last week from a State Work Group co-chaired by Rep. Juan Candelaria and Kelvin Roldán, the Hartford Public Schools’ Chief Communications and Policy Officer – and a former Hartford State Representative. [The report, online here](#), makes compelling recommendations for upgrading ELL program design, teacher capacity, accountability, and resources – but it comes as tension mounts before a Fiscal 2016 State budget buzz saw.

Despite the competing demands during this tight budget year, Mr. Roldán was cautiously optimistic about the future for the sweeping changes his work group proposed for Connecticut’s bilingual education laws and the state’s approach in supporting children in need.

According to Mr. Roldán, many of the recommendations don’t necessarily carry budgetary impact, such as the planned delivery of Common Core SBAC assessments in students’ native languages, already being prepared. Other central recommendations include extending the bilingual education period from

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30 to 60 months and improving both the standards design process and the accountability reporting to the legislature.

In addition, prioritizing the recommendations, so as to provide districts with necessary resources for planning and establishing pilots, is under discussion, with the idea in mind of a potential \$5 million investment in the biennium to begin the work. Currently the state spends \$1.9 million a year; House Speaker Brendan Sharkey, to whom the work group report was directed, is looking at doubling the investment initially.

Importantly, enhanced services for English Language Learners constitute a key part of Superintendent Beth Schiavino-Narvaez's equity agenda, Mr. Roldán pointed out.

Looking at the concept of dual language learning, which has been discussed in the context of the *Sheff v. O'Neill* desegregation case, the dual language approach is indeed one in which the work group was interested. "Our initial focus was on looking at the system as a whole and delivering on a set of recommendations that will move the state in the direction of addressing the needs of English Learners," he explained. "If we provide good systems and structures, then programs like dual language will flourish – and that would be really exciting!"

Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport are the CT cities with the largest concentrations of ELL students, with 11 percent, 8.8 percent, and 8.5 percent, respectively. With a 24.4 percent ELL proportion, Windham has the highest concentration in the state. Also statewide, roughly two-thirds of ELL students do not transition during the mandated 30-month period of bilingual education; in the 2013-14 school year, fewer than 6 percent met the State English mastery standard.

The Bottom Line: It makes sense to double the transition period and follow through on the other important upgrades regarding pilot programs and teacher shortages. More importantly, it makes sense to elevate this issue for this and the next few legislative sessions to come, because if CT is going to rise up economically it is going to be on the shoulders of its urban and immigrant populations, to a large extent. Either we educate well our most vulnerable – but ambitious – students, or we watch children's potential wane and our state lose more businesses that can't hire locally.



Insights of the Week

Here are the [commentary from UConn Executive Leadership Program Director Dr. Robert Villanova](#) and the [Courant coverage](#) regarding the new **Achieve Hartford!** [edfocus](#) issue brief, "Standing by Our Principals".



Upcoming Events

The next Hartford Board of Education meeting will be a budget workshop, Tuesday, April 7, 2015, at 5:30 p.m., at Rawson School, 260 Holcomb Street.

Achieve Hartford!'s GradNation event at Capital Community College on Thursday, April 16, 2015, will offer a free program to promote understanding of student-centered and personalized learning – including optimizing new technology. [Register here.](#)



Good Information

- The [SmarterHartford.org data tool](#) for looking at Choice options in Hartford.
- Achieve Hartford! Suggestions on [Sheff Course Corrections](#)
- [On Resource Inequities: Letter from Catherine Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education](#), October 1, 2014
- [School Superintendents: Vital or Irrelevant?](#) Matthew Chingos, Russ Whitehurst, and Katharine Lindquist, Brown Center on Education Policy, Brookings Institution, September 3, 2014
- WNPR's "Where We Live" looked at [CT mental health care for children](#) on Wednesday, September 3, 2014, with a focus on how crisis brings families into emergency rooms
- [Precarious Work Schedules Common for Younger Workers](#), Jann Ingmire, UChicago News, August 27, 2014
- [Information about Hartford Community Schools](#)
- [Bridging the Gap between Policy and Practices in NYC](#), Perry and Associates
- [The Growth and Spread of Concentrated Poverty, 2000 to 2008-12](#), Brookings Institution, July 31, 2014
- [The Future of Test-Based Accountability](#), Russ Whitehurst, Brookings Institution, July 2014
- [Should Principals Be Treated Like CEOs?](#), Jacoba Urist, The Atlantic, June 24, 2014
- [Who Profits from the Master's Degree Pay Bump for Teachers?](#), Matthew Chingo, Brookings Institution, June 5, 2014
- National School Boards Association [Guide for School Board Members on Community Partnerships for Student Success](#)
- Observing the 60th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education
 - Former Rep. Diane Watson reflects on [its meaning](#)
 - UCLA's [Brown at 60](#) Report looks at trends
- [Evaluating Teachers with Lessons Learned in Four Districts](#), Grover [Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst](#), [Matthew M. Chingos](#) and Katharine M. Lindquist, Brookings Institution; full report [here](#)
- [CT by the Numbers Analysis](#) of U.S. News & World Report State High School Rankings
- [Plenary Session](#): 8th Annual Yale School of Management Educational Leadership Conference, April 3-4, 2014
- [Movement Grows to Assess Students' Digital Literacy](#), Robin Flanigan, Education Week, March 2014
- [Poet Malcolm London Finds Hope on Chicago's Streets](#), On Point with Tom Ashbrook, National Public Radio, March 18, 2014
- [State's New Common Core Website](#) launched in March 2014
- [College Board Outlines SAT Redesign It Says Will Be More 'Focused and Useful.'](#) Education Week, March 2014
- Two Views: the National Education Policy Center [Report](#) and Mathematica [Report](#), both examining Teach for America
- [Salary and Benefits Study](#), American Association of School Administrators, February 2014
- [CT Early Care and Progress Report](#), CT Voices for Children, January 2014
- [The new 2014 Quality Counts Report from Education Week](#)
- [Survey of Adult Skills: United States](#), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2013 Report
- [Why Educating the Educators is Complex](#), Valerie Strauss, The Washington Post-The Answer Sheet, December 5, 2013

- [School Choice and School Performance in the New York City Public Schools - Will the Past be Prologue?](#), Grover Whitehurst and Sarah Whitfield, Brookings Institution, October 8, 2013
- [Teaching with Poverty in Mind](#), Eric Jensen, American Society for Curriculum and Development, September 2013
- [The Equity and Excellence Commission Report, "For Each and Every Child: A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence."](#)
- The [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium sample items and performance tasks](#), in line with the Common Core State Standards, September 2013
- [The Pay As You Earn Plan for Student Aid](#), U.S. Department of Education, July 31, 2013
- [What Parents Want for Education Policy](#), Education Opportunity Network, July 23, 2013
- Achieve Hartford! Executive Director [Paul Diego Holzer's remarks at the inaugural graduation ceremony of the Hartford Parent University.](#)
- [What Some African American Parents Believe about Education Reform](#), Frances Messano, Deloitte Consulting LLC [Project in conjunction with the United Negro College Fund], June 2013
- [For Each and Every Child: A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence, the Equity and Excellence Commission, A Report to the Secretary](#), February 2013
- [The Promise and Peril of Cage Busting \[A View of Hartford Schools\]](#), Marc Porter Magee, Education Week Guest Blogger, April 2, 2013
- [2013 Brown Center Report on American Education: How Well Are American Students Learning?](#), Brookings Institution, March 2013
- [Self-Efficacy Plays Prominent Role in Research on Teacher Effectiveness](#), Educational Research Newsletter and Webinars, March 2013
- [Teens and Technology](#), 2013, Pew Research Center, March 13, 2013
- [Teaching Students the ABCs of Resilience](#), Edutopia, January 13, 2013
- [Spiritual Leader {Benjamin Elijah Mayes, mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.}](#), University of Chicago Magazine, January-February, 2013
- [Catching Up to College and Career Readiness](#), National Center for Educational Achievement, ACT, Inc., 2012 Report
- [State of Education: State Report Card, 2013](#), StudentsFirst, January 2013
- Issue brief: ["Best Practices for the Prevention of Youth Homicide and Other Youth Violences," from the Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute.](#)
- [Strife and Progress: Portfolio Strategies for Managing Urban Schools](#), Brookings Institution – New Books – Available December 7, 2012
- "The Invisible Student," a report from the [CT Pushout Research and Organizing Project](#), looking at statewide statistics that indicate a "secret pipeline," into which students are counseled, coerced, or involuntarily placed – and pushed out of school