Connecticut Commission on Children
2013 Annual & RBA Report
Cover image: “Angel,” by Anna Cartelli, 13, of Newtown
In response to 12/14
Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

Pursuant to Section 46a-129 of the Connecticut General Statutes, you will find herein the Commission on Children's 2013 Results-Based Accountability (RBA) Report Card and Annual Report.

We thank you again for the opportunity to lead in coordination and best practices for children. If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at 860-240-0290.

Sincerely,

George Coleman     Elaine Zimmerman
Chairman      Executive Director

cc:   Governor Dannel P. Malloy
Clerk of the Senate
Clerk of the House of Representatives
Connecticut State Library
Legislative Library, Connecticut General Assembly
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A Humbling Time for Children and Families

An Overview of 2013 by Commission on Children Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman

Introduction

One can usually draw a work year with a stretched line of timetables, action steps and outcomes. However, very little was linear in 2013. The Newtown massacre of December 14 the previous year left us haunted, healing, and actively moving in and out of two concurrent agendas—the one that preceded 12/14 and all that emerged after.

Parents needed guarantees of safety. Youth sought to congregate together to master the whys of the school tragedy. The right and left barraged our state as an emblem of perceived remedies or obstacles. The year would not be business as usual.

Some of us worked in Newtown. Others focused on model policy in mental health and safety. We strove to listen to parents and youth on their questions regarding violence. We helped guide the disaster response in our homeland security role, with focus on the child.

Simultaneous to the massacre, we sought to work on the items in our charge or partnerships that were the year’s work before the shootings. This included research, design of model policy, targeted systems reform, family civics, school and community training, joint oversight of particular policy implementation and multiple forums.

Newtown

The Commission worked with Save the Children to set up a play station in Newtown for all families and children at the middle school. Children could paint, play games, write, dance. Parents could talk together in an environment where play was the norm and anything could occur. Therapy dogs came in bright scarves ready to comfort, play or be hugged by the children.

The Commission on Children directed the play station for several months. Each late afternoon and evening and each weekend, the play station offered tables of games and art, food, music and materials to take home. Counselors were co-located in the school and called upon, as needed. Families came frequently and returned often. The space became a community living room, in a time of grief.
Concurrent with this work, the Commission designed a civic forum where children beyond Newtown could express their views and concerns. In partnership with the state Department of Education, we ensured that hundreds of children could ask questions, receive support, and use art as a vehicle for doing both. Simultaneously, we prepared schools for the response. At the Legislative Office Building on June 5, children and youth offered their art in dance, poetry, song, prose and painting. This work is now being chronicled by the State Library and will become a compendium of the youth response to Newtown.

Newtown has taught children and youth there are life events that have no logic. They articulated repeatedly, in myriad art forms, that they must and will stick together, in spite of chaos. They understood, though with pain, that not all actions can be deterred or explained. It is togetherness that will heal what is not easily combed into reasonable patterns. There is a profound strength in this understanding of group cohesion as a buffer to the irrational that faces everyone, at some point in their life.

The Commission also understood that art had come to Newtown and curated a sampling for the public to see in a show called “Honoring Community Safety and Bravery: A Student Tribute to Newtown and Connecticut.” The show was coupled with the student art from around the state and became a three month-corridor exhibit in the LOB. Submissions come from schools, after-school programs, families, professional artists, collectives, non-profits and Healing Newtown. Every item is a personal or collective response to “12/14.” The art and words served as a vehicle for healing, and offered hope in the human instinct to build community, create and “make special’ in difficult times.

**Mental Health**

In all aspects of child development, making the right diagnosis early on and then taking immediate steps is crucial in developmental progress and stability. This is particularly true in mental health, where timely intervention and family support can head off lifelong emotional problems.

However, we face a critical shortage of practitioners, limited locations for healing, and a culture that says emotional challenges are not to be discussed. Financing is often focused on profit, rather than for the customer. The community needs accessible mental-health services that are not stigmatized; until that happens, healing and safety will be narrow.

The Commission worked with mental-health experts, community practitioners and Senator Dante Bartolomeo to design a comprehensive mental health policy for our state. The goals were
to create a systemic response, rather than a single-agency response. We sought to address the whole child, rather than funding streams, through research-based practice and prevention. The resulting legislation, Public Act 13-178, An Act Concerning the Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health of Youths, passed with every vote in June 2013.

**Reading**

Connecticut has the worst achievement gap in the U.S. This is partially caused by poverty, low maternal literacy, and children with limited exposure to language or books. At the state level, causes include teachers, both new and senior, being poorly prepared to teach the complex skills of reading in K-3 classes.

A child who is not reading by the end of first grade has a one in eight chance of ever becoming a proficient reader. The impact of low literacy is seen at many levels including school retention, special education, drop outs, unemployment and crime.

The Commission on Children worked with SDE and the legislature’s Black and Puerto Rican Caucus to build a model of reading intervention that reaches children from preschool to grade three. We built reading interventionists in five schools for every child performing beneath goal. We taught school leaders and teachers the science of reading assessment and intervention in 14 schools and brought in alternative reading assessment instruments that were teacher-friendly and that offered immediate intervention strategies. These two models are now being integrated. The outcomes show significant gains.

The Commission also designed a curriculum for parents in schools so they would partner more with classrooms, at home and in school, in literacy intervention. Hispanic families were the strongest participants and showed returning attendance for every evening class.

**Early Care**

Home visitation begins with the premise that parents are the child’s first and most important teacher and the home is the most influential learning environment. It is an effective early childhood service delivery strategy that promotes healthy child development, provides parenting support, and facilitates linkages to community resources.

As chair of the Home Visiting and Parent Engagement Workgroup of the Governor’s Early Care and Education Cabinet, the Commission worked to create a system for our home visitation practices and to integrate home visitation into our early care system. This is the beginning of an
infant/toddler system for young families, with some vulnerability. This language is now embedded in PA 13-178.

The Commission worked also with early-care providers to help them talk about how they might maximize partnerships with families. We designed, performed and analyzed focus groups throughout the state, to optimize early care practices with the family.

**Poverty**

An estimated 35,000 children fell into poverty during the recession in Connecticut. Family stressors are up. More children are left alone while parents work or hunt for jobs. More youth are saying they cannot see their way to college. Some are leaving home to relieve parents of the extra costs.

The Commission worked with Liberty Bank and the Workforce Boards to create a WorkPath fund that would provide bridge resources to family members seeking to hold onto a job or acquire one. Modest funds will pay for critical and hidden employment costs such as car repair, work equipment, specific work uniforms and other silent expenses that often impede workers who lost their resources in the recession.

The WorkPath fund has raised more than $120,000 from philanthropy and is now a part of the Workforce board infrastructure to help the middle- and working-class families who lost their resources but are ineligible for state supports.

**School Safety**

School climate is critical in a time of unnatural disaster. Bullies zero in on difference, whether the difference is race, culture, language, learning style or appearance. The Commission worked with youth, helped schools provide forums and brought the best practices together for schools to discuss and learn from as models. Concurrently, we have partnered with the University of Connecticut’s Neag School of Education to begin creation of a website for schools, parents and policy leaders on school climate and bullying, with links and research to mix and match what works best within a family, a community or a school.

**Parent Engagement and Civic Dialogue**

The Commission has continued to grow our family civics models in communities and schools. The Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) has more than 3,000 graduates in Connecticut and serves communities in the urban, rural and suburban sectors. Parents Supporting Educational
Excellence (Parents SEE), a variation on the PLTI curriculum for parents in schools, now provides targeted curriculum for parents on what makes educational excellence occur.

The Parent Trust, a vehicle for family civics throughout the state and initially conceived by the Commission on Children with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, now has 20 grantees throughout the state. The Parent Trust Act provides resources to communities to assure that parents know how to participate in the public sector and that their discrete and varying voices are heard in child and youth policy. The model is considered a best national practice. In 2013, the state of Virginia began to explore state replication as a practice.

The Commission worked with the Governor’s Cabinet in Early Care and Education to support parents and their needs in early care. Our findings taught us that parents needed more information on quality, sought cultural competence in settings, needed transportation, and could not afford the programs that were of the best quality.

Concurrent with this, we assured public dialogue for families on model policy issues. This included civic forums at the State house on parent engagement, Newtown and on mental health.

**Nutrition and Obesity**

More than one-quarter of Connecticut high school students are now considered overweight or obese, and one-third of kindergarteners are in this same category. The Commission continued to work with a broad-based coalition of agencies and health providers concerned with nutrition, hunger and a growing epidemic of child obesity to reverse the trend. PA 13-173, An Act Concerning Childhood Obesity and Physical Exercise in Schools, was a gain on this path forward in healthy food access and greater physical activity.

**In 2013, more than 200,000 people sought information from our agency.** The Commission is proud of our partnerships, civic efforts, and policy gains in such a complex and humbling time.

Enclosed you will find a performance report, work details within specific policy domains, publications and articles and funds raised for our state.
Commission on Children Performance Report, 2013

Approach 1: Research and Model Policy

The Commission on Children performs pertinent research on current trends impacting children and families and shares the research findings with the legislature and the public. We work on best policy practices and help draft model policy for children and youth with the legislature.

Major Commission-Supported Bills Adopted into Law:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bill Number</th>
<th>Bill Title</th>
<th>Signed Into Law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SB No. 1097</td>
<td>An Act Concerning Revisions to the Education Reform Act Of 2012</td>
<td>Signed into law as Public Act No. 13-245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB No. 972</td>
<td>An Act Concerning the Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health of Youths</td>
<td>Signed into law as Public Act No. 13-178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB No. 6526</td>
<td>An Act Concerning Childhood Obesity and Physical Exercise in Schools</td>
<td>Signed into law as Public Act No. 13-173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Papers on Key Policy Issues Written or Commissioned By the Commission:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“What Works in K-3 Literacy Reform?”</td>
<td>Dr. Barbara Foorman – Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University</td>
<td>September 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“All Children Can Read By Fourth Grade,” (update)</td>
<td>Elaine Zimmerman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Reading at All Costs,”</td>
<td>Margie Gills of Literacy How</td>
<td>September 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Connecticut K-3 Literacy Initiative,”</td>
<td>Michael Coyne of Neag School of Education – University of Connecticut – CBER</td>
<td>September 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“2012-2013 Parent Leadership Training Results Survey,”</td>
<td>RMC Research Corporation</td>
<td>August 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Annual Evaluation of the Impact of the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI),”</td>
<td>conducted by RMC Research Corporation</td>
<td>August 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A Message to Parents and Teachers on the One-year Anniversary of the Newtown Shootings (How Parents and Teachers Can Talk to their Children),”</td>
<td>Elaine Zimmerman</td>
<td>December 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Lessons Learned about Parent Leadership,”</td>
<td>Elaine Zimmerman</td>
<td>July 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Engaging Patients and Families as Partners in the Medical Home,”</td>
<td>Eileen Forlenza, Colorado Family Engagement and Community Engagement Specialist</td>
<td>May 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“State and Local Partnerships with Parents,”</td>
<td>Elaine Zimmerman</td>
<td>July 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Approach 2: Education and Outreach

The Commission on Children educates the public on child development and public policy issues in the areas of child health and safety, learning, economic self-sufficiency and equal access, family strength, and overall social health.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>126,899</strong></td>
<td>Visitors to the Commission website, <a href="http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc">www.cga.ct.gov/coc</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>67,202</strong></td>
<td>Documents downloaded from the website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15,041</strong></td>
<td>Subscribers to Commission newsletters, excluding legislators and staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td>Meetings televised on the Connecticut Network (CT-N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
<td>News reports, newsletters and/or releases highlighting the Commission’s work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1212</strong></td>
<td>Facebook and Twitter followers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Approach 3: Partnership Development

The Commission on Children performs its functions through substantive partnerships with educators, families, city and town officials, youth leaders, scholars, the business sector, news media, the religious community, and health and public-safety professionals.

We held more than 150 informational meetings with parents, providers, and policy leaders on public information, model policy and civic input. These meetings occur throughout the state, and vary in size. A range of our policy partners are reflected through public forums and panel discussions. A sampling is provided below:


February 27 – “Moving From Tragedy to Action: The Power of Community,” Old State House. Experts and residents explored how community can come together after tragedy, such as Sandy Hook, for meaningful action. In collaboration with the Secretary of the State’s office, CT-N, Everyday Democracy, and CT Humanities.

March 20— “Reading Excellence and the Achievement Gap,” a forum held at the LOB in partnership with the legislature’s Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, Reading by Grade Three, SDE, Literacy How, University of Connecticut, the Neag School at UConn, and the Achievement Gap Task Force.

April 22 – “A Community Conversation on the Achievement Gap: Moving from Talk to Action in Middletown,” with Middletown Public Schools, the Middletown PTO, United Way of Middlesex County, the Secretary of the State’s Office, the Middlesex County PLTI Alumni Association and the Achievement Gap Task Force.

May 23—“Cyberbullying, School Climate, and Safe Learning,” a forum at the LOB in partnership with the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, the Anti-Defamation League, the Governor’s Prevention Partnership, and SDE.
May 31—“Engaging Patients and Families as Partners in the Medical Home,” a forum held at the LOB in partnership with Governor’s Early Care and Education Cabinet, the Home Visitation and Parent Engagement Workgroup, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

June 5—“Honoring Community Safety & Bravery: A Student Tribute to Newtown and Connecticut,” in partnership with the state Department of Education (SDE), the State Library, the Department of Economic and Community Development, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, Healing Newtown, the Newton Cultural Arts Commission, Youth Leadership Advisory to SDE, Michael AuYang of the Institute of Professional Practice, Danbury Children First, Save the Children, UNESCO, the Children’s Defense Fund, Newtown parents, and the Connecticut Education Association.

June 19—PLTI and Parents SEE Statewide Graduation Ceremonies, at the LOB, in partnership with the Connecticut Center for School Change.

July 23 – “Mind in the Making” at Hartford Public Library in partnership with Families and Work Institute, the City of Hartford, and the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

September 17—“The Color of Justice: Explaining the Role Race Plays in Juvenile Justice and Exploring Solutions,” held at the LOB in partnership with the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance.


November 12— “Here to Learn: Chronic Absence and the Achievement Gap,” a forum held at the LOB. In partnership with the legislature’s Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, the Connecticut Achievement Gap Task Force, the legislature’s Committee on Children, CT Kids Report Card, and SDE.

November 21 – “The 2013 Parental Involvement Recognition Awards” at the State Capitol, in partnership with SERC and families throughout the state.

December 2— “New England States on Home Visitation,” in partnership with the Pew Charitable Trust, the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Sandy Hook Promise, and the states of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Maine. Held at the LOB.
**Approach 4: Family Civic Engagement**

The Commission on Children performs its functions within a civic framework, ensuring that families understand, participate in, and lead on children’s issues in Connecticut. Outcome data is reviewed annually from the two extensive family civics initiatives created by the Commission to increase family civics and family leaders for children: the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) and Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (PSEE). The outcomes include increased technical skills, increased civic and community involvement, gains in confidence, and increased parental input at decision-making tables. Both initiatives have been evaluated by national researchers for their civic impact. We also co-lead, with state and community partners and philanthropy, on the Parent Trust, a public/private model that provides competitive grants for quality proven family civics initiatives throughout Connecticut.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>20 communities...</th>
<th>offered the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) or Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (PSEE) training.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52 communities...</td>
<td>offered parent leadership training with Parent Trust funds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 communities &amp; organizations...</td>
<td>offered training and technical support to promote family civic engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 child care provider focus groups...</td>
<td>were held to explore perceptions, policies and practice on parent involvement and leadership in the early-care field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,288 volunteer hours...</td>
<td>were logged by PLTI alumni, who averaged two hours per week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15...</td>
<td>cities and states replicated the PLTI model throughout the country.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Approach 5: Revenue Generation

The Commission on Children finds additional resources for children, youth and families. This effort includes identifying federal, foundational, and private funds to bolster model policy and best practices for improved child outcomes. The funds are largely targeted to community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2013 Initiatives</th>
<th>Approx.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WorkPath Fund</strong> – The Commission helped create the WorkPath Fund as a direct result of 2010’s children-in-the-recession legislation. In partnership with Liberty Bank Foundation and the Workforce Boards, we raised $120,000 from foundations to help parents with one-time small grants to meet such job-related expenses as car repairs, uniforms, tools, and certification and license fees.</td>
<td>$120,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liberty Bank Foundation</strong> – The Commission received resources for our parent leadership programs in various towns and cities.</td>
<td>$35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Liberty Bank Foundation, and William Casper Graustein Memorial Fund. The Commission raised funds for an eight-minute National Public Broadcasting piece.</strong></td>
<td>$32,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W.K. Kellogg Foundation</strong> – The Commission received funds for our family civics work as a best practice in family engagement and leadership.</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early Care Cabinet</strong> – The Commission wrote grants to bolster father engagement and early care/family partnerships. The focus was on making practices more father-friendly ($9,000) and learning what early-care providers needed to partner substantively with parents ($12,000).</td>
<td>$21,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Donations</strong> – Private donors contribute to the Commission.</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pew Charitable Trusts</strong> – Donation given to the Commission to assist with a New England Forum on Home Visitation at the Legislative Office Building and a special meeting on trauma with Newtown parents at the University of Hartford.</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Dollars Raised:</strong></td>
<td><strong>$240,700</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Result—Children Are Safe

The story behind the baseline: Increasingly, children are exposed to both natural and unnatural disaster in the United States. Connecticut has experienced increasingly severe damage from natural disasters, particularly hurricanes and relentless snow and ice storms. All caused heavier-than-expected losses to homes and businesses, including the closing of schools and child-care centers. Unnatural disasters include mass shootings, the best-known being the one in Newtown at the close of 2012. In addition to the loss of life, it caused incalculable child and family trauma. But it also led to education and safety reforms.

Yearly Breakdown of Gun Related Child Fatalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Homicide</th>
<th>Suicide</th>
<th>Accident</th>
<th>Undetermined</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Provided by the Office of the Child Advocate

Indicator 1: Children Remain Safe in Unnatural Disasters

Twenty-six people were murdered on December 14, 2012 by gunfire in an elementary school with outstanding protections, well-trained staff and a profoundly engaged family community. This community tragedy rebounds elsewhere and with unanswered questions, as preparedness was in place and so many were nonetheless lost. Those remaining are still reeling and beginning to heal.

Children and youth throughout the state had many questions. Newtown needed immediate tending. But the whole state was in shock and mourning. Policy issues included gun control, school safety, and child and youth mental health access/quality of services. Civic issues included the need for conversations between and among families and children, to master social and emotional impact and to understand local and state policy remedies.
**Partners:** State Department of Education (SDE), State Library, Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, Healing Newtown, Newtown Cultural Arts Commission, Youth Leadership Advisory to SDE, Michael AuYang of the Institute of Professional Practice, Danbury Children First, Save the Children, UNESCO, Children's Defense Fund, Newtown Parents, and the Connecticut Education Association (CEA).

**What the Commission did in 2013:**

- Directed and staffed a play center at the middle school in Newtown for families and children each day and on weekends for several months so that a site was available for “normal,” relaxed play and conversation. This also linked families to counselors and other family supports.

- Wrote talking points for parents on how to discuss incidents like the Newtown shootings with children. This article was utilized by the state Department of Education and other agencies.

- Brought national expert in on disaster and children to train teachers and others in Newtown on short, mid- and long-term responses and to assist them in their emotional responses.

- Developed with SDE a set of questions for students of various ages, to allow all to express views and concerns.

- Invited students from across Connecticut to submit poems, essays, paintings, music, and other art in response to 12/14. Hundreds of submissions were received. On June 5, several hundred students presented their work and exchanged views at a forum at the Legislative Office Building (LOB).

- Curated and showed art submissions, both local and national, in the LOB corridor in response to Newtown. The show lasted three months and received extensive news media coverage.

- Designed a partnership with the state library to chronicle all written and art submissions of children and youth on school violence and Newtown.

- Brought Marian Edelman to Newtown to meet with town leaders, school superintendent, mental health practitioners to talk about implications of Newtown for all cities and states. Also met with Legislature and state leaders.
• Worked with Newtown families to offer support and work towards no release of photos of murdered children after the shooting.

• Served as one mediator with Michael Moore to shift direction away from release of photos of murdered children in Newtown as a way to turn the public response in the nation against guns.

• Keynote speaker at Askwith Forum at Harvard University School of Education with education correspondent John Merrow and Marian Wright Edelman of the Children’s Defense Fund, on school violence and gun control.

• Visited cities with Marian Wright Edelman of the Children’s Defense Fund to talk about shootings in the urban sector and what policies can be put in place to address safety and gun control.

• Worked with parents in Newtown to plan a preventive mental health strategy to the massacre. This included a focus on public education, proven intervention and a family strengthening and support paradigm. Components of these conversations were placed in PA 13-178.

What remains to be done:

• Train professionals in diverse fields on trauma and child impact, so responses are immediate and appropriate in intervention and referral.

• Coordinate mental-health services across sectors, such as school and community mental health services.
• Expand prevention policy so that intervention, if needed, occurs early in children’s social emotional development.

• Develop a media campaign on mental health that removes stigmas and publicizes available services.

• Ensure that home visitation programs address the psychological impact of disasters.

• Train schools around the state, using the just-developed DEMHS/School Safety Working Group manual, on how to make schools as safe as possible for students and staff.

• Continue to train child-care providers statewide on how to make their centers as safe as possible for children and staff.

• Continue to develop like guidance for family day cares on how to make their home-based child care as safe as possible for children and staff.
Indicator 2: Children Remain Safe in Natural Disasters

The story behind the baseline: While 2013 was nowhere as severe as 2012 for natural disaster, February’s Winter Storm Nemo and several other lesser storms throughout the year left many families homeless or at least in the cold and dark for long periods. When it comes to protecting children in such events, our state has had a head start in recent years, thanks to a first-in-the-nation law requiring that the needs of children be incorporated in disaster planning. The Commission on Children, which played a pivotal role in adoption of the legislation, co-chairs an inter-agency committee that seeks to ensure the requirement is met.

Connecticut Child Care Providers Trained in Disaster Preparedness and Response

*Connecticut’s grant from Save the Children to conduct emergency preparedness and response trainings with child care providers ended in 2012. The State of CT continues to dedicate funding to support this critical initiative, but is not able at this time to devote funding equivalent to the Save the Children grant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of child care providers trained in emergency preparedness and response through CT Charts-A-Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013*</td>
<td>118</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of care providers trained in emergency preparedness and response through the CEPC assessment and training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Number of child care providers trained in emergency preparedness and response through CT Charts-A-Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Number of care providers trained in emergency preparedness and response through the CEPC assessment and training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Connecticut Charts-a-Course, the state Department of Social Services, and the state Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS).
What the Commission did in 2013:

- Co-Chaired the statewide Child Emergency Preparedness Committee to develop continuing plans on how to best prepare our state’s child care providers for disasters and response. Included participating in statewide CERT conference to infuse child care providers into community preparedness and response planning, and raising awareness about SecondResponse, an agency that works with children in the aftermath of disasters to process and move forward. Resulted in SecondResponse training in northwest CT in January 2014 of 60 participants.

- Worked with United Way 211, the state Department of Public Health, and DEMHS to conduct pilot assessment of a child care center disaster planning and risk reduction. Using results of exercise to compile resource for child care centers statewide.

- Worked with Capitol Region Council of Governments (CCROG) and schools throughout the Region to develop a plan for shared use of facilities in the event of a disaster. First meeting convened in fall 2013 drew strong interest from schools throughout the Region. Next meeting set for February 2014, with goal of plan by end of summer 2014.

- Worked to incorporate communication with families as key component in DESPP/DEMHS School Safety and Security Template, a handbook for schools in our state developed over the course of 2013 in response to Newtown. Handbook also includes considerations vis-à-vis natural disasters.

Proposed strategies to turn the curve:

- Continue to partner across agencies through the Child Emergency Planning Committee at DEMHS, which meets quarterly to explore disaster-related gaps vis-à-vis children, and potential solutions including emergency planning and federal and private funding.

- Continue to participate on the FEMA’s Children’s Working Group to ensure that a federal disaster response meets the unique needs of children.

- Ensure alignment between all first responders and information regarding location of child care settings, non-traditional school settings, summer camps, temporary foster care settings and other sites where children are located that are not a traditional part of an organized data system.
• Ensure children remain high on the radar screen in planning for and responding to disasters through active participation in the statewide Advisory Council and in numerous ad hoc meetings statewide on issues involving disaster planning and response.

Winter Storm Nemo
– Hartford, CT

Winter Storm Nemo –
Stratford, CT
Result—Children and Youth Are Ready for School and Succeed in School

Indicator 1: Preschool Enrollment

The story behind the baseline: The brain develops to 90% of its capacity in the first five years. A child’s ego, self-esteem and learning patterns are developing and linked together before a child reaches kindergarten. Quality preschool is proven to assist in these important years with cognition, social and emotional skills, gross motor skills and language and numeracy development. Poor quality care or no early care is often the starter fuel for inequities in educational achievement.

The chart below shows that the number of children utilizing preschool slots grew between 1998, when preschool was made available for 3- and 4-year-olds, and 2013. While the number dipped slightly in 2010, the overall increase should continue if we are to close the gap for children who cannot attend preschool due to lack of supply, limited access, or family working hours.

*Data provided by the CT Office of Early Childhood*
**Partners:** State Department of Education, Governor’s Early Care and Education Cabinet, Hartford Childcare Collaborative, Connecticut Academy of Pediatrics, Birth to Three, State Legislature, PEW Charitable Trusts, Early Childhood Funders, Achievement Gap Task Force, Children’s Investment Partnership, Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority, and LISC.

**What the Commission did in 2013:**

- Designed model policy to improve assessment and interventions early for young children through professional development training of both pediatricians and child care providers to help prevent and identify social emotional issues in children by utilizing the Infant and Early Childhood Mental health Competencies (PA 13-178 Section 2).

- Designed model policy to improve referrals for infants and toddlers who are not eligible for services in Birth to Three, but who show possible need for a licensed mental health care provider for evaluation and treatment (PA 13-178 Section 3).
• Worked to assure implementation of policy language in the education reform bill to both create hands-on practical higher education curriculum in early language and literacy for pre-service students of early childhood development and to assure implementation of policy language that will improve a child’s transition planning between preschool and kindergarten in early language and literacy.

• Co-Chaired the Home Visitation and Parent Involvement Workgroup of the Governor’s Early Care and Education Cabinet. This workgroup created an integrated home visitation system from pre-natal to age five for families with attention to the most vulnerable children in poverty, facing violence, experiencing the depression of a parent, and/or experiencing trauma.

• Created a structure and raised the dollars, in partnership with the Early Childhood Funders, for early care providers to share their needs to better partner with families for improved child outcomes. Designed the focus group strategy, led the focus groups throughout the state and co-authored the report.

• Worked with the Achievement Gap Task Force, as an appointee of the Speaker of the House, in representing quality early care and an early care system as vital to educational opportunity for low-income children and the first program step towards school success.

• Worked on the Child Care Loan Fund Guaranteed Loan Program with the Children’s Investment Partnership and the CT Health and Educational Facilities Authority to help address site deficiencies and to promote the health, safety and learning of children in appropriate environments through grants for facilities improvement and minor capital repairs to businesses or entities that received school readiness or child day care funding.

• Developed and co-led the play station at Newtown for young children while their parents addressed the trauma facing family members and the community-at-large.

• Served on a national committee under LISC to address preschool quality and facilities need in the states, with attention to best practices and opportunities in the federal government.
Proposed strategies to turn the curve:

- Build preschool to scale for poor children who are three and four years old.

- Invest in child care workforce through scholarship and increased wages to assure continuity of skilled early care providers.

- Align standards and financing for the early childhood education system across departments. This will increase supply and align reimbursements.

- Expand infant and toddler programs to address our current shortage.

- Develop birth-to-five programming rather than separate and fragmented services for infants, toddlers, birth to three and preschool.

- Build the skills of family day care providers as an ignored cohort, though a frequently preferred program for many parents with very young children.

- Assure quality oversight of standards and regulations in early care facilities. Though we have high standards in early care, our oversight is limited and can lead to child harm and/or fatalities.

- Integrate home visitation with the early care and education system to ensure a prenatal through preschool system of care, family education, and school readiness planning.

- Attend to chronic absence reporting in preschool as this is the first sign of school absence difficulties and portends challenges for the child.

- Increase information to parents about quality care and how to access it. Our regional groups with parents informed us that parents were significantly ill-informed about access and quality.

- Continue to improve training on literacy for early care and education providers and in home visitation staff to maximize early language and literacy acquisition.

- Design two generational strategies that help children with school readiness and parents with workforce readiness.
Indicator 2: Reading

The story behind the baseline: A child who is not reading by the end of the first grade has a one in eight chance of ever becoming a proficient reader. The impact of low literacy is seen at many levels, including school retention, special education, dropout rates, unemployment, and crime. Connecticut has the greatest achievement gap in reading in the country.

Our Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) results reveal large, persistent differences in performance between low and moderate income children and middle class children. Similarly, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test shows white students significantly outperforming black and Hispanic students.

In 2013, sixty-three percent of Connecticut's African-American and Hispanic students were not reading at goal. Fifty-six percent were not reading at proficiency. Since 95% of all children can be taught to read, our state achievement gap in reading continues to call for an urgent and successful turnaround based in research and implemented with fidelity. But race and class are not destiny, and the gap in scores between white students and students of color as well as between low-income and non-low-income students in Connecticut is as unacceptable as it is preventable.

2013 Connecticut Mastery Test Results - Grade 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>N Total</th>
<th>N Tested</th>
<th>% Tested</th>
<th>% Absent</th>
<th>% Other</th>
<th>Results by Level**</th>
<th>Average Scale Score</th>
<th>% At/Above Goal</th>
<th>% At/Above Proficient</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black or African Am</td>
<td>5041</td>
<td>4489</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>14 20 33 4</td>
<td>231.8</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>56.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hisp/Lat or any race</td>
<td>8378</td>
<td>7423</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>15 19 33 5</td>
<td>232.4</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>58.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>24015</td>
<td>22909</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6 13 51 24</td>
<td>266.0</td>
<td>74.5</td>
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<td>Asian</td>
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<td>1963</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>8 11 46 31</td>
<td>273.1</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>87.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Am Ind or AK Native</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<td>13 21 47 11</td>
<td>252.1</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>79.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nat of HI or Pac Isl</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>3 13 57 23</td>
<td>272.5</td>
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<td>901</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>11 14 46 21</td>
<td>260.1</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>79.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data provided by Data Interaction for Connecticut Mastery Test, 4th Generation

Teachers who know the current research and are trained in the science of reading can help every child read. Yet, not all teachers know how children learn to read, even children who start school
behind their peers, either because of a lack of quality pre-school or other impacts. They have not been taught the early literacy assessment or intervention that can help mitigate some of these early deficits. This is not the fault of the teachers; it is a serious and persistent higher education professional training gap. Prior to reforms instituted by the legislature (in the last year), not all higher education institutions taught their pre-service teachers the science of teaching reading.

The majority of teachers in the early grades have not had opportunity to acquire researched-based classroom skills to close the reading achievement gap. They are not trained in ongoing assessment, prompt intervention or how to place children into differentiated group cohorts for various fundamental early literacy skills acquisition and practice. This continues to be a crisis in education that is disproportionately impacting children of color and poor children.

**Partners:** The Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, the State Department of Education, Literacy How, the NEAG School of Education, Hill for Literacy, the Committee on Education, and the Achievement Gap Task Force.

**What the Commission did in 2013:**

- Following targeted and statewide legislative reforms in reading in 2012, the Commission staffed the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus to ensure fidelity in implementation of both the statewide and targeted elements of the reading reforms. Statewide elements adopted in the 2012 education reform bill (PA 12-116) included increased expectations in pre-service of our special education and reading specialists who now have to pass a test in the science of teaching reading before they can work in CT schools; development of new reading assessment tools, a professional development system in reading, incentives for schools that improve reading performance, higher education improvements in oral language and early literacy for pre service teachers; and explicit transition reporting between early childhood and kindergarten teachers to assist young children in their early language skills.

- Representing the Caucus at bi-weekly meetings held at the State Department of Education, the Commission also worked with the Academic Office to ensure fidelity of implementation at the eighteen pilot schools that are employing Tier 1 and Tier 2 scientifically-based interventions in reading.

- Tier 1 interventions at 18 pilot schools funded by the State Department of Education and 7 schools in Norwalk funded by the Grossman Family Fund and the state included use of
an alternative reading assessment instrument designed to be teacher-friendly, efficient, and in-depth regarding necessary reading interventions; bringing parents in as core customers and partners in their children’s learning; assessment of the impact of external coaches on classroom outcomes in reading; and on-going training in scientifically-based reading research and practice for teacher and school administrators.

Targeted Tier 2 interventions at five additional schools added under the 2012 reforms. These schools assess all students not reading at proficiency and rapidly intervene, utilizing: a) an external literacy coach, b) four reading interventionists per schools, c) rigorous and on-going assessments, d) prompt and proven, research-based interventions, e) summer school with focus on reading excellence, and f) a focus on partnering with parents on reading.

*Data provided by University of Connecticut Neag School of Education, Center for Behavioral Education and Research

- Continued participation on the Reading Advisory Team for NEAG to assist with systems reform in reading.
• Taught curriculum to teach parents in 18 elementary schools, both English and Spanish-speaking, on the importance of reading and how to partner in K-3 on reading achievement. In partnership with Literacy How, implemented and expanded upon a curriculum to help parents understand what their children should know about reading assessment and intervention in kindergarten through grade three. Used materials created in partnership with Wireless Generation so parents can see how their children are doing in reading year – long through charts, discussion with their child’s teacher and activities at home.

• Held a major forum on the science of reading in April 2012, in partnership with Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, Ralph Smith from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Literacy How, Haskins Laboratories, and the Connecticut Association for Human Services. The forum, “Every Child Reading by Third Grade,” allowed teachers and families from across the state to discuss their various literacy experiences. In addition, Connecticut Public Television interviewed many of the participants for special program on reading and literacy.

Proposed Strategies to turn the curve:

• Phased implementation should take piloted Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions to scale, beginning in districts and schools that exhibit persistent gaps in academic achievement, namely Alliance District Schools and individual schools in the Commissioner’s Network of underperforming schools. Sustainable, embedded reforms in each school should align with the common core curriculum and should include, at a minimum:

  o A team of embedded literacy leaders with a cohesive knowledge base on the leadership routines necessary to institute evidence-based literacy practices within a tiered instructional model and that will provide on-site facilitation and establish sustainability for the initiative;

  o Creation of a consistent knowledge base and common language among teachers that is based on the overview of reading, current reading research and evidence-based practices in reading instruction and behavior management;

  o Collaboration with the school leaders to establish a framework and process for using scientifically-based dynamic assessments to make instructional decisions at the district, school, grade, classroom and individual student levels and
- Development and implementation of a school-home/family model for parent and family engagement and student support.

- Integration with best practices for English Language Learner (ELL) instruction, either through bilingual or English as a Second Language programming, emphasizing assessment, intervention and progress monitoring. Reading should, at a minimum, be aligned with high-quality model K-5 curricula in reading. These curricula should reflect the best practices and most up-to-date research and methods, and should be ready for teachers to use in classrooms. The curricula should include authentic CCSS aligned assessments and progress monitoring indicators that lend themselves to the data-driven decision-making process and SLO implementation. Curriculum will be recommended to districts with limited resources, high transiency, and large achievement gap.
**Indicator 3: Chronic Absence**

The story behind the baseline: Good attendance is essential to student achievement and graduation. Children must be in school to thrive academically. But too often, students, parents and schools do not realize how quickly absences – excused or unexcused – can leave children and youth falling behind. Chronic absence – missing ten percent of the school year, or just 2-3 days each month – predicts lower third-grade reading proficiency, course failure and eventual dropout.

The impact hits children of color and low-income students particularly hard, especially if they don’t have the resources to make up for lost time in the classroom. These children are more likely to face systemic barriers to getting to school – such as unreliable transportation or conflicting parent work schedules. Other factors that contribute to chronic absence may be situated in the family, school, and the community. They include but are not limited to high family mobility, low maternal education, food insecurity, inadequate healthcare, ineffective parent engagement, and high levels of neighborhood violence.

![Percent of Students Chronically Absent by Lunch Eligibility, 2012-13](image-url)
In Connecticut, the data show these disparities clearly. According to State Department of Education, 11.5 percent of all Connecticut K-12 students were chronically absent during the 2012-13 school year. Students eligible for free lunch are three times as likely as their peers who are not eligible for lunch subsidies to be chronically absent. Black/African American students are about twice as likely and Hispanic students are more than two times as likely as White students to be chronically absent. English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities also evidence substantially higher chronic absenteeism rates when compared to their general education peers. Finally, chronic absenteeism rates are higher in urban districts.

Although attendance is typically considered the province of local education agencies, state policymakers can play key roles in ensuring that schools track the most reliable attendance data and intervene in meaningful ways. Essential to this is looking beyond the traditional measures of attendance: the number of students who show up every day (average daily attendance) and the number of students skipping school (truancy). Schools and districts must also look at how many students are missing ten percent the school year in unexcused and excused absences. Research shows that ten percent is the threshold where absenteeism correlates poor academic outcomes. This measure is known as chronic absence.
**Partners:** Attendance Works, a national and state initiative that promotes better policy and practice around school attendance, the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, the State Department of Education and the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap, Children’s Report Card Leadership Group and the Committee on Children.

**What the Commission did in 2013:**

- In 2013, the Commission partnered with Hedy Chang at Attendance Works and its state partners, to quantify the problem of chronic absenteeism in the state, to explore best practices, and to consider possible infrastructure, policy and legislative changes to improve how we track chronic absenteeism in the state.

- On November 12, 2013, the Commission held a public forum at the Legislative Office Building titled, *Here to Learn: Chronic Absence and the Achievement Gap*. At the forum, Hedy Chang presented a keynote address warning that chronic absenteeism is a national crisis which is exacerbating achievement gaps and dropout rates. She noted that nationwide, an estimated 5 million to 7.5 million students (more than one out of 10) are chronically absent every year.

- We also learned that, with the right interventions and policies in place, chronic absence can be turned around when schools, districts, community agencies and families work together to monitor the data, identify and remove barriers for getting students to class, and nurture a habit of regular attendance. State policy and action are essential to advancing such practice.

- Connecticut is well-positioned to start this important work because the state already tracks attendance and absences in our longitudinal student data systems. The State is poised to turn the curve on chronic absenteeism as a strategy to close the achievement gap and improve student outcomes generally.
Proposed Strategies to Turn the Curve:

• The State Department of Education, in collaboration with the Commission on Children and other state agencies, should build public awareness of chronic absence and why it matters across schools and communities.

• The State must track individual student attendance and absences in state longitudinal student databases, ensuring that data are entered accurately and consistently, and that data are available “real time” to ensure that interventions have maximum impact.

• While the state of Connecticut defines truancy statutorily (10 or more unexcused absences, not including discipline), the state should adopt a standard definition of chronic absence (missing 10% of the school year) to be used statewide and by each school district. The definition should clarify how chronic absence is different from unexcused absences (truancy) and ensure the inclusion of absences due to suspensions, as well as absences that come when children switch schools and do not immediately start at a new school.

• Chronic Absence Reports: Regularly calculate and share chronic absence data statewide, providing information by district, school, grade and subgroup. Make the information publicly available through school and district report cards.

• Reports to Families: Districts should be encouraged to provide families with real-time data on their child’s attendance, as well as an alert if their child may be accruing too many absences. Often parents do not realize how quickly absences add up.

• Help families understand what they can do to ensure their children are in school so they have an equal opportunity to learn is a critical ingredient of a two-generation approach to ending poverty. Couple this with outreach to ensure parents know how to improve attendance or where to turn for help.

• School Improvement Planning: School improvement plans should include chronic absence data, strategies that will be used to identify causes for such absence, build a culture of attendance, and fashion effective interventions for chronically absent students.

• Schools should not have to solve chronic absence alone. State policymakers and advocates should encourage schools, public agencies, civic organizations, businesses and non-profits to jointly review data on chronic absence and discuss the implications for action, policy and allocation of resources that can improve school attendance such as health supports, early education programs, afterschool programs and mentoring efforts.
Indicator 4: School Climate

The story behind the baseline: Research has found a correlation between school climate and student achievement, with negative school climate impacting student performance in English and mathematics. As noted in other sections of this report, external impacts such as poverty, substandard housing, and limited or absent parent engagement and involvement can all impact whether a child comes to school ready to learn. Maximizing academic outcomes and closing the achievement gap are linked to understanding the role of these external stressors, and addressing these external stressors in school environments that are safe, respectful, and conducive to learning. In this way, adults in a school environment have a key role on promoting positive school climate.

Promoting positive school climate through research-based behavioral and emotional supports and interventions addresses external stressors, improves student learning, reduces the likelihood of depression and suicide in youth who are targets of bullying, reduces crime, and strengthens communities, – now and well into adulthood.

Reported Verified Acts of Bullying in Connecticut for the 2012-2013 School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of District</th>
<th>Number of Districts</th>
<th>Incidents Reported as Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local School Districts</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>1201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESC School Districts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter Schools</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State School Districts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowed and Incorporated Academies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>1,431</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data provided by the Connecticut Department of Education

In 2011, Governor Malloy signed into law a measure that strengthened our efforts to improve school climate and prevent and address school bullying. The law required—among other things—that each school board develop and implement a safe school climate plan, that each
superintendent appoint a district safe school climate coordinator, and that the principal of your school, or a designee, serve as a safe school climate specialist.

Providing professional development opportunities to principals and teachers in these areas in low performing schools as well as opportunities for meaningful wrap-around services such as, PBIS, parental engagement, after school programs, mental health and disability supports, community engagement and service, and alternative learning programs are important to children's academic success in low performing schools.

**Partners:** The State Department of Education, Dr. George Sugai of the Center for Behavioral Education and Research (CBER), the Governor’s Prevention Partnership, Anti-Defamation League, True Colors, and the CT Family Support Council.

**What the Commission did in 2013:**

- Collaborated with our public and private partners on public information and implementation strategies for the state’s law on promoting positive school climate and bullying prevention.

- Together with the Governor’s Prevention Partnership, staff represented CT and the Commission on Children at the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Conference, which serves as a venue for the most knowledgeable national scholars and practitioners to share their expertise on the prevention of bullying and the creation of safe, positive school climate and culture.

- Continued to collaborate with Dr. George Sugai of the Center for Behavioral Education and Research (CBER), at the University of Connecticut to initiate the CT Bullying Behavior Prevention Project (CBBPP), to provide Connecticut school and community members with evidence-based information for guiding their prevention decision-making within a multi-tiered support systems (MTSS) approach. The CBBPP was engaged by the Commission to develop a website that will bring together information and resources for districts and schools to use to implement their school climate policies and procedures.

- Led a public forum on “Cyberbullying, School Climate, & Safe Learning” at the Legislative Office Building, which included presentations by a panel of youth, parents, and educators
who have been deeply impacted by poor school climate, including LGBT, learning disabled and children of color, moderated by Marji Lipshez-Shapiro, director of education, Connecticut Office of the Anti-Defamation League; Marc Brackett, Ph.D., director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, consultant to Facebook on a large-scale research project designed to both prevent and decrease online bullying, and board member on Lady Gaga’s Born This Way Foundation; a panel of State and Local leaders, including State Rep. Michelle Cook and Rep. Cathy Abercrombie on “How Much Further Do We Have To Go To Protect Our Kids?”; Leaders on civil rights and school safety; and artistic and moving presentations from youth members of Bully Busters, part of the Greater Norwich Anti-Bullying Coalition.

- Conducted various presentations on implementation of the school climate law, including continued collaboration with the Family Support Council at their annual retreat at Camp Harkness.
- Worked with students in Greenwich after the suicide of Bartlomiej (Bart) Palosz, 15, who was allegedly bullied at school.
- Worked with the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence to design training for parents on social emotional behavior.
- Raised funds for the funeral of Asia Dunmore, 16, a student who committed suicide in Stamford.
- Worked with school counselors to bolster proven interventions in the school house.
- Assisted families in direction and policy remedies for school climate and bullying.

Proposed Strategies to Turn the Curve:

To address external and internal stressors that impact an individual student’s readiness to learn and to improve school climate overall toward closing the achievement gap, six important implementation recommendations must be considered:

- Recognizing that fostering a positive school climate is an important component to addressing social-emotional stressors that may impact learning and exacerbate the
achievement gap; the State Department of Education shall provide guidance and support to implement the state’s school climate and anti-bullying statute with fidelity in K-12 districts and schools that experience persistent gaps in academic achievement. Such support may include resources to alleviate any administrative challenges in the law, administrator and teacher access to training, and to identify and promote best practices to ensure climate that is conducive to learning;

- In order to track climate within the school, which is often impacted by stressors that a child may be experiencing outside of the school, K-12 districts and schools that experience persistent gaps in academic achievement shall collect and utilize local data and efficient data systems to define, describe, and understand the climate culture in a particular low-performing school and how to address particular needs, problems, or issues at the student, classroom, school, district, and community level that help minimize gaps in academic achievement.

- Recognizing that school can best serve as a “service-hub” for the organization, delivery, and evaluation of the full range of community and behavioral supports (e.g., behavioral mental health, child and family services, and juvenile justice), K-12 districts and schools that experience persistent gaps in academic achievement shall extend their reach to include after-school programs, evening family and community supports, neighborhood vocational and recreation programming.
Result — Parents Are Engaged and Informed about Children’s Programs and Policies

Indicator 1: Family Civic Engagement

The story behind the baseline: Since 1992 and the inception of the Commission’s Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), Connecticut has led the nation in promoting family civic engagement. We know that for any initiative involving children to succeed, parents must be involved from the outset. The Commission has repeatedly demonstrated for more than 20 years that increasing family civic engagement improves the operation of programs, changes policy and creates a diverse network of involved parents focused on improving child outcomes.

The number of communities offering parent leadership training has more than tripled in the last 10 years. This trend is largely due to public demand, recognition of the importance of parental involvement in schools, and a public-private funding partnership supporting the Parent Trust Act. The success of Connecticut’s landmark legislation has garnered national attention with replication of the Parent Trust in Virginia and consideration in Colorado.

Funds for the Parent Trust were allocated in the 2011-13 state budget, and $250,000 in matching funds were leveraged from the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. Additional matching funds were generated at the local level from funding partners like the Liberty Bank Foundation, Newman’s Own Foundation, the Napier Foundation, and many others.

Volunteer Hours of PLTI Graduates

Background image: Solomon (pictured) is one of 19 graduates of the 2013 class of the New Haven Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI). A fire destroyed Maria Solomon’s home while she was taking the 20-week community leadership course. On June 10, 2013 she celebrated graduating the course—while creating a new life for her own family in a new home. Thomas MacMillan – New Haven Independent

*Families, schools and community organizations all contribute to student achievement; the best result comes from all three working together. Schools that connect to their communities have higher achievement and graduation rates.*
The monthly All Pros Dads breakfasts at Bielefield Elementary provide a way for fathers and their children to connect and talk about things they may not at home. What began as part of Mitchell Wynn’s project for the Parent Leadership Training Institute class three years ago, the All Pros Dads breakfast has even been started at Spencer School. Wynn also serves on the Board of Education. Kaitlyn Schroyer — The Middletown Press.

**What the Commission did in 2013:**

- Coordinate CLTI so that children could attend leadership programs while their parents attended adult learning programs.

- Continued the growth of the Commission’s Parent Leadership Training Institute, rated by RMC Research as one of the strongest parent leadership initiatives in the nation.

- Provided technical assistance and support for communities, developing a continuum of parent leadership training opportunities, and expanding family civics initiatives.

- Ensured diverse recruitment, participation and mentoring in PLTI to sustain civic involvement after graduation from training.

- Embedded parent engagement in the Governor’s Early Care and Education Cabinet as one of four core functions of the work.
• Participated in the Cabinet QRIS work group offering recommendations for success indicators on parent engagement and leadership.

• Appointed by the State Department of Education to serve on its Parent Trust Collaborative Management Team, which oversees the funds of the private-public partnership.

• Participated in the Connecticut Civic Health Advisory Committee convened by the Secretary of State’s Office where PLTI was noted as a statewide best practice in family civic engagement.

• Co-sponsored a Town Hall Meeting on parent leadership, “Moving From Tragedy to Action: The Power of Community” with our colleagues at the Old State House, the Connecticut Network (CT-N) and CT Humanities.

• Worked with InfoLine to publish an updated inventory of all parent leadership training programs in Connecticut.

• Participated in the “Right from the Start” collaboration to embed parent engagement and leadership in local systems for children birth to eight.

• Worked to increase parent engagement and leadership in early care and education through facilitating five child care provider focus groups in partnerships with the Early Childhood Cabinet and the Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative.

• Supported the State Department of Education's efforts to promote “parent universities” in the neediest school districts.
• Hosted meetings and trainings to encourage new community partners and fatherhood programs to offer parent leadership training.

• Participated in the Strengthening Families State Leadership Team and the DCF-Head Start Strengthening Families collaboration.

• Partnered with the Center for Study of Social Policy, Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative and Real Dads Forever to recommend changes to enhance the parent leadership and fatherhood components of the Strengthening Families program assessment tool.

• Cosponsored a statewide parent leadership training alumni event at the Capitol featuring Danbury PLTI grad Miguel Barreto's international children's artwork display, “Illuminate.”

• Spearheaded an effort to embed the Youth PEP leadership training into the after school network.

• Continued work with the Kellogg Foundation on a $1.2 million three year grant to replicate the Parent Leadership Training Institute nationally and to embed the model in pertinent national organizations.

• Offered a workshop on Family Engagement Strategies at the Connecticut Consortium on School Attendance fall conference.

**December 5, 2013:**
An International Art Exhibit: Illuminate – Bringing Culture to Light, was hosted by PLTI alumni at the Hall of Flags in the State Capitol. The event celebrated multicultural education and art throughout communities. Photo courtesy of Doug Edwards.
Proposed strategies to turn the curve:

- Continue and expand the Parent Trust Fund to embed family civics in Connecticut.
- Continue outreach to increase fathers’ engagement in civic leadership roles for their children and guide the RBA Strategic Planning process for the statewide Fatherhood Advisory Council.
- Train state and local leaders and community agencies how to work with parents as partners and bring them in as community assets.
- Bolster opportunities for parents to lead on policy and program, particularly within the context of children’s health, safety and learning.
- Expand public-private partnerships to increase and embed the family as a true partner in children’s policy.
- Ensure that public and private contributions are allocated and released through the Parent Trust Fund in a timely and transparent fashion so communities can offer parent leadership training.
- Explore options for developing culturally competent Spanish-language PLTI and PSEE curriculums.
- Expand the opportunity for longitudinal evaluation on the impact of parent leadership training.
- Study if and how parent leadership has an impact on child and youth leadership, expanded networks of supports, and racial integration within community activity.

Indicator 2: Parent Involvement in Schools

The story behind the baseline: Research shows that children with parents involved in their learning develop better grades, test scores, long-term academic achievement, attitudes, and behaviors. Children do best when families and schools share information and partner in creating quality learning environments. Families, schools, and communities have come together to more than double the number offering Parents Support Educational Excellence (Parent SEE) training between 2005 and 2013.
What the Commission did in 2013:

- Worked with the federal and State Department of Education on the importance of parent engagement in school reform.

- Co-led the growth and implementation of Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parents SEE), which the Commission envisioned, designed and co-authored with the Connecticut Center for School Change.

- Participated in SDE School Technology Work Group to identify ways to better access technology to inform and engage parents of public school children across the state.

- Facilitated the recruitment of PLTI and PSEE graduates into leadership roles on school governance councils across the state. The State Department of Education reported that 28 parent leadership training graduates were serving in the 34 schools they surveyed.

- Cosponsored a community conversation on the Achievement Gap in Middletown in partnership with the Secretary of State’s Office, Middletown Public Schools, the Middletown PTO, the Middlesex County PLTI Alumni Association and the United Way of Middlesex County.

- Celebrated the importance of parent partnerships in schools with the annual Parent Involvement Recognition Awards at the Capitol.

Parent Leadership Training Offered with Parent Trust Funds

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Proposed strategies to turn the curve:

- Bolster opportunities for parents to partner on policy and program, particularly within the current school reform context.

- Expand public-private partnerships to increase and embed the family as a true partner in school policy and budget.

- Ensure the public and private funds are allocated and released through the Parent Trust Fund so communities can offer parent leadership training.

- Monitor the annual School Strategic Profiles for documentation of how school districts are engaging parents.

- Partner with the Center for School Change and the State Department of Education to offer a broader range of training to encourage more school districts to offer parent leadership training.

- Create trainings with professionals and parents together.

- Assure the leadership work for school leaders includes parent engagement and parents as partners in the schoolhouse.
Result—Children Are Born Healthy and Grow Up Healthy

Indicator 1: Mental Health

Connecticut’s children and adolescents are experiencing a mental health crisis. There is a critical shortage of mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services.

- Twenty percent of all children and adolescents in Connecticut struggle with a diagnosable and treatable mental health problem.

- Only twenty-five percent of all children and adolescents with emotional-behavioral problems currently access adequate mental health treatment services.

- Connecticut’s suspension rate for black students with learning disabilities is the third highest among all 50 states.

- One in fifteen Connecticut high school students attempted suicide in the last year.

Barriers to Problem Identification, Screening, Medication Prescription, Counseling, and Referral to Mental Health Specialists

*Data provided by the Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI)
If we start at the beginning, we have the best outcomes and the best return on investment. Our state needs an interconnected framework of supports in which schools, mental health, child and family services, and early childhood programs are organized in a continuum of intervention services to assure that children with emotional-behavioral problems have access to good mental health services. Some of this is no cost or low cost and more about systems building than about new services.

**Partners**- Child Health and Development Institute, CT Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, CT Council of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Keep the Promise Coalition / NAMI of CT, CT Juvenile Justice Alliance, FAVOR Family Advocates CT, Office of the Child Advocate; Office of the Healthcare Advocate; CT Association of Public School Superintendents, CT Association of School Social Workers.

**What the Commission did in 2013:**

- Met with mental health providers and planned a prevention mental health bill in response to Newtown.

- Worked with Senator Bartolomeo to draft a comprehensive system of mental health, cross funding stream and policy domain. The bill included a comprehensive plan for the mental and behavioral health needs of children with a focus on prevention, continuum of service, with specific policy changes and developments with the departments of Social Services, Public Health, Office of Early Childhood and the Department of Children and Families, and family engagement.

- Included parents from Newtown in planning and drafting the mental health policy.

- Worked with federal government to ascertain all possible mental health resources for states.

- Helped Child First continue to grow as a new and upcoming national model of home visitation reaching those with emotional and mental health issues early.
**What still needs to be done**

- Create a family friendly mental health media campaign that works to destigmatize mental health and social emotional challenges.

- Bring research-based practice, prevention and families as partners into our medical home system will bolster our early interventions.

- Assure that parents know how to access information and referrals.

- Create access in different languages and with full cultural competence.

- Promote school based early identification and screening efforts due to the access, use and normative context. Increase the number of school counselors and social workers in schools.

- Build up and support our mental health policies. We have a shortage of programs and staff with skills in mental health, particularly child and youth psychiatrists are in dramatically short supply.

- Create a coordinated system of care with more attention to trauma-informed practice.

- Assure that schools, including preschools, have school climate plans.

**Indicator 2: Home Visitation**

There are approximately 40,000 births in CT each year. Roughly 10,000 births are to families with at least one significant risk factor. Of these births, 2,400 babies are born to mothers, age 19 and younger.

We have programs in towns and cities reaching out to pregnant moms and vulnerable parents helping the family with mental health issues, substance abuse challenges, trauma and other high level constraints on family functioning.

Children with mothers who are depressed face extreme challenges. Depression leads to isolation, lack of connection and, at its extreme, an absence of nurturance. For a child, this lacuna is harmful to the heart of childhood growth, play and attachment. Targeted programs that address maternal depression help children significantly.
Home visitation is not the primary staircase to a mental health system. But it is a preventive strategy that could buttress numerous early and weak links from breaking apart and harming children. This includes attending to neglect, abuse and violence.

CT has home visitation programs of excellence but lacks a coordinated system of these programs to maximize consumer utilization, efficiencies, data analysis. Better woven and coordinated with our early care and mental health systems and our Birth to Three system which works with infants and toddlers facing specified neurological and developmental challenges, this model could be a system of family strengthening, parent support and early infant toddler assessment. Home visitation should be integrated into Connecticut’s family, housing, school readiness, infant-toddler, early childhood and mental health policy.

**Partners:** Pew Charitable Trust, Governor’s Cabinet Early Care and Education Workgroup, CT Legislature’s Co-Chairs of Children’s Committee, home visitation programs, and Real Dads Forever.

**What the Commission did in 2013:**
• Worked extensively, on state and national level, to determine most integrated system for home visitation to assure best supports and interventions for vulnerable families, during and after pregnancy.

• Researched legislation in states to create model integrated home visitation systems, with accountability. Performed work as Chair of Governor’s Early Care and Education Workgroup on Home Visitation and Parent Engagement. Partnered with Representative Catherine Abercrombie as Co-Chair of Human Services Committee and Pew Charitable Trusts.

• Drafted policy language that required the integration of home visitation and early care into a system for young children and their families within the Office of Early Childhood. This required a plan for continuum of services with focus on prevention, early intervention for families facing poverty, trauma, violence, special health care needs, and mental or behavioral health care needs.

• Drafted language to create a more seamless and less siloed home visitation system with a common referral process, core set of competencies and standards for programs, required training for all home visitation program staff, coordinated training for home visitation and early care providers, development of common outcomes and shared reporting of outcomes to the General Assembly.

• The above recommendations and draft policies were passed in PA 13-178.

• Linked home visitation to disaster. Invited federal director of home visitation, Dr. David Willis, to a briefing on families and trauma, following the Newtown disaster.

• Organized a New England consortium on home visitation policy. Invited all New England states to a forum to share policies. The Lieutenant Governor, Senator Pro Tempore, Speaker of the House and Co-Chair of Human Services, Higher Education, and Children’s Committee, attended. Pew Charitable Trust partnered on this regional plan for vulnerable families. New England states have agreed, resulting from this forum, to meet two or three times a year to share regional policy issues, resources and exchange strategies.

What remains to be done:
• Establish a shared system of data collection across all home visitation programs and models. Agree to collect common indicators on the population level and to identify underserved groups to assess access and intervention opportunity. Measure across programs.

• Create a continuum of models. Do not just put one model in a town but a choice of models. The models can work together and the parents can have choice, based on particular need. Match up families and programs.

• Coordinate programs so that there is an extension of time, mix and match of interventions, as needed for the particular family, and targeted and efficient resources to address family need.

• Link home visitation to chronic absence so a CT home visitor, working with a vulnerable family with an infant as well as siblings in the school system, can be contacted by the State Department of Education to partner with a school if the siblings of the younger child are seriously missing school days.

• Create a friendlier system for parents so they understand how to use home visitation services to meet their parenting goals. Consider an advisory of parents to assist with marketing, outreach, coordination from the ground.

• Create or utilize existing access hubs so referrals can be made and the public, both families and professionals, know how and where to refer.

• Build a set of consistent skills across models. Create a ‘professional home visitation workforce.’ Consider trainings on trauma, early literacy, special health care needs and fatherhood involvement.

• Consider use of Ipads for home visitors to assure time saving, interactivity; easier way to work on change on family and on public policy levels.

• Consider linking home visitation with family planning, as is done in Maryland.

• Use a fatherhood audit to help bring in the dads or minimally, make agencies aware that they do not consider dads adequately in planning and assessments.
- Assure systems building on the community level, which is different than on the state level. Create a community based intake model. Loop back and gather community feedback.

- Make home visitation an explicit component of an infant toddler system.

**Indicator 3: Child Obesity**

**The story behind the baseline:** Obesity is one of the most serious public health concerns facing our state. It dramatically impacts the health of our citizenry, reduces the productivity of our state’s economy, places an unsustainable burden on our health care system, and disables workers. Direct medical costs of overweight and obesity account for more than 9% of all U.S. health expenditures. Obesity-related health problems in Connecticut adults generate $856 million in annual medical expenses.

Children and adolescents who are obese are 5 times more likely than normal-weight children to become obese adults, and are more at risk for physical and mental health problems during their youth and as adults. These include heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer, depression and osteoarthritis. Childhood obesity is a major factor in concerns that the current generation may be the first in our history to have a shorter lifespan than their parents.

Childhood obesity has more than doubled in children and tripled in adolescents nationwide in the past 30 years. The CDC noted in August 2013 that 1 in 8 U.S. preschoolers is obese. The numbers are worse for minority preschoolers: 1 in 5 (19%) black children and 1 in 6 (16%) Hispanic children between the ages of 2 and 5 are obese. While these percentages have shown recent improvement in 19 states, CT statistics have not improved.
The CDC further notes that nationwide, approximately 17% (or 12.5 million) of children and adolescents aged 2-19 years are obese, nearly triple the rate in 1980. A 2012 study conducted by the CT Public Health Department found that one-third of CT children in kindergarten and third grade were overweight or obese and approximately one out of every seven are obese. Recent studies have shown that more than one-quarter of Connecticut high school students are now considered overweight or obese.

Healthy lifestyle habits, including healthy eating and physical activity, can lower the risk of becoming obese and developing related diseases. Schools play a particularly critical role by establishing a safe and supportive environment with policies and practices that support healthy behaviors. Schools also provide opportunities for students to learn about and practice healthy eating and physical activity behaviors.

The Surgeon General recommends that children and youth get a minimum of 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. In a 2013 report, the Institute of Medicine reports that less than half of youth nationwide reach this goal. Today’s youth are considered the most inactive generation in history, according to the American Obesity Association. In CT, two-thirds of Hispanic (61.1%) and non-Hispanic black (NH, 65.9%) students, and roughly half (45.3%) of NH white students, do not get the recommended level of physical activity during an average week.
Partners: The Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, End Hunger CT!, American Heart Association, CT Department of Public Health, CT State Department of Education, American Academy of Pediatrics, CT General Assembly Children’s Committee, Stamford Hospital, UConn Center for Public Health and Health Policy, American Dietetic Association, American Society for Nutrition and the Hispanic Health Council.

What the Commission did in 2013:

- The Commission on Children worked with partners and lawmakers to research factors contributing to childhood obesity, consider potential policy remedies, then draft and pass legislation Public Act 13-173, An Act Concerning Childhood Obesity and Physical Exercise in Schools.

- The Commission provided testimony in public hearings regarding the critical need for efforts to address childhood obesity in our state, including in support of P.A. 13-173. This Act created a Task Force to study the effects of obesity on children's health and to report back to the Legislature with its findings by October 1, 2014; it also holds provisions regarding physical activity in schools.

- The Commission continues to actively participate on the Steering Committee of the statewide CT Coalition Against Childhood Obesity. This Coalition gathers input from
stakeholders and practitioners around the state, in other states, and at the national level. The Coalition educates the public, providers and legislators through conversations, information on its website, and through forums such as the one held in November 2012. The Coalition now actively partners with the Task Force to fully explore the many factors that impact childhood obesity.

- The Commission joined the Coalition discussion with partners on the need for baseline and continuing data, and the pros and cons of utilizing BMI as the standard measure for surveillance purposes.
- The Commission presented at the CT Public Health Association annual conference, discussing how to involve parents as partners in addressing childhood obesity.
- The Commission fielded numerous calls from the press and researches on childhood obesity and shared updated information on the issue.
- Sat on a National Conference of State Legislatures Hunger Partnership. The Hunger Partnership connects public and private sectors to improve the availability of healthy food for hungry families. The Partnership brings together legislators, legislative staff and interested businesses to identify innovative and successful policies and programs to reduce hunger in America.

Proposed strategies to turn the curve:

- Limit beverages to healthy options for children in child care.
- Add food and wellness indicators to strategic school profiles.
- Implement a coordinated approach to school health in every school district.
- Develop policy template for local communities to implement shared use policy, where school facilities are open to the community for physical activity and nutrition when not in use by the school.
- Establish a permanent council on childhood obesity.
Result—No Child Lives in Poverty

The story behind the baseline:

Poverty is the most extreme form of family economic insecurity, and it may be the single most detrimental influence on a child’s development. Poverty itself – independent of other factors such as family structure and parents’ educational level – has severe and long-term effects on children’s cognitive abilities and school achievement, and it limits children’s chances to achieve economic self-sufficiency as adults.

Connecticut has one of the strongest state research-based responses to child poverty reduction. The Commission worked with state legislators to create a Poverty and Prevention Council that integrates both proven poverty reduction responses with prevention policies that would bolster child development. National experts in poverty reduction, across party affiliation, were brought together to work on public policy solutions. They were tasked to work with policies that would reduce child poverty in a decade. Four policy areas were stressed that include family income and earnings potential, education, the income safety net and family structure and support. The Commission works to assure these areas are fulfilled.


Indicator 1: Child Poverty

Child Poverty has profound effects on young children. These include greater likelihood of low birth weight, stunted growth, infectious diseases, missed immunizations, anemia, and asthma. Health–related problems that are higher among children in poverty, such as lead poisoning, have a significant impact on children’s school attendance and ability to learn. Children in poverty also face greater food insecurity and an increase in emotional and behavioral problems.
What the Commission did in 2013:

- Created the WorkPath fund which offers $200 to $1000 dollars per family for one-time costs of car repair, work equipment, child care, tools, and various supports to help pay the hidden costs of work. This Fund, resulting from the Children and Recession statute, was created in partnership with Liberty Bank and Workforce Investment Boards to help parents with children under 21 access privately- raised funds to help them stay in a job or transition to employment.

- Raised over $120,000 with Workpath partners from numerous foundations, including American Savings Bank; Bank of America; Community Foundation for Greater New Haven; Hartford Foundation for Public Giving; Middlesex United Way; Napier; People’s United Community ; Travelers; United Way of Greater New Haven; and Valley Community Foundation.

- Served as an active member of the Poverty and Prevention Council, determining poverty reduction strategies for the year including increase of minimum wage, family supports in housing, SNAP and energy, and public information on EITC state and federal benefits.
• Met with Aspen Institute and arranged to partner on model policy exchange on two generational strategies, a proven way to help parents with jobs and children with school readiness.

• Worked on early literacy and early childhood policy to bolster the preventive side of poverty prevention.

• Worked on strategy design to assure that every parent in CT has a high school degree to improve employability, wages and model for the child.

Indicator 2: Child Hunger

The story behind the baseline: Hunger continues to be a critical issue in our state. Last year we noted that FRAC (the national Food, Research and Action Center) reported 12.7% of Connecticut households were “food insecure” in 2010, an increase of more than 70% from 2006. The 3-year average for CT, 2010-2012, is even more concerning, with 13.4% of CT households food insecure (that equals 212,029 households) and 4.9% (or 76,143 CT households) in the dire category of very low food secure. Food insecurity affects child development, increasing the odds of cognitive, behavioral, and other development delays. These, in turn, have implications for educational achievement.

The federal government pays 100% of SNAP program benefits. The federal and state governments share administrative costs, with the federal government contributing nearly 50%. Based on USDA research, it is estimated that each dollar in federal SNAP benefits generates nearly twice that in economic activity. Under-participation in SNAP not only harms low-income people who are missing out on benefits, but also communities that could be benefiting from more federal dollars circulating in their economies.

According to a January 2014 Tribune Washington Bureau article, “reliance on food stamps has surged since the Great Recession.” The Tribune notes that nearly 48 million Americans are now enrolled in SNAP, up 47% since 2008. The number of CT residents participating in SNAP continues on its upward trajectory.
What the Commission did in 2013:

- Spoke publicly on hunger throughout the state in numerous forums and meetings, public and private.

- Participated in statewide conference on hunger, including discussions on how to best partner to reduce child hunger.

- Informed parents, the public and policymakers about summer food program locations and about school breakfast and lunch programs.

- Worked with public and private partners to launch WorkPath Fund, to help parents obtain/retain a job, and thereby increase their families’ economic security and decrease hunger.

- Accepted appointment by the National Conference of State Legislatures to serve on a national Hunger Partnership with food companies, allowing for new resources, best state practice information, and potential business partnerships for Connecticut. Participated in an issue briefing on Military Families, Veterans & Hunger in collaboration with the NCSL.
Task Force on Military and Veterans Affairs, which focused on strategies to help military families access much-needed federal assistance when facing food insecurity.

- Monitored compliance of language in Public Act 10-133, which requires the state Department of Education (SDE) to administer, within available appropriations, a child nutrition outreach program to increase: (1) participation in the federal School Breakfast Program, federal Summer Food Service Program, and federal Child and Adult Care Food Program; and (2) federal reimbursement for such programs.

- Worked to ensure that all federal dollars were being maximized in SDE through school breakfast, after-school, and summer fund programs. These programs would both provide food and the federal dollars. Worked with SDE to create a mechanism for all new Alliance schools to partner on federal food programs.

**Proposed strategies to turn the curve:**

- Increase information sharing through community- and faith-based organizations to increase summer food, school breakfast and lunch, and SNAP participation;

- Enhance partnerships between DSS and local agencies to promote efficiency and speed-up in the application process for food stamps;

- Complete DSS online benefits project that will expedite SNAP enrollment online;

- Streamline, expedite, and simplify points of entry for intake and case management;

- Increase access to federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) funds that would allow support of meals for low-income early care and education professionals; they would eat with the children, modeling healthy eating;

- Continue working with Wholesome Wave to expand doubling of SNAP coupons at CT farmers markets.

**Partners:** End Hunger CT!, NCSL, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and Hispanic Health Council
Result—Programs that Serve Children and Youth Are Measured for Accountability

Measuring programs for efficacy, efficiency, and return on investment (ROI) aims to increase information for state policy leaders on which policies bolster good outcomes, increase efficiencies, and promote evidence-based models for children, youth and families. There are the hallmarks of accountability and should be part of any embedded system to help government do more, in a better way, with fewer resources.

Accountability-based policy making isn’t new to Connecticut. The state has steadily deepened its commitment to the principles of results-based accountability (RBA) since 2005, building upon proven models such as Washington State’s Results First model and the research-based investment model of Social Impact bonding. The Commission continues to play a pivotal role in those efforts.

Indicator 1: Children’s Report Card

The story behind the baseline: Under legislation adopted in 2011 (Public Act No. 11-109), the legislature’s Children Committee, in consultation with the Office of Fiscal Analysis, the Office of Legislative Research and the Commission on Children, is required to develop an annual Report Card to help the public evaluate state policies and programs affecting the ability of children to grow up in a stable living environment, be safe and healthy, and ready to lead successful lives.

The law further requires applying results-based accountability (RBA) principles to the effort, so that anyone reading the Report Card can see exactly how well a program is doing in achieving its mandate.

The legislature created an initial set of primary indicators to track progress, including state-wide rates of child abuse, child poverty, low birth weight, third grade reading proficiency, and the annual social health index. For each indicator, the data must be presented according to ethnicity or race, gender, geography and, where appropriate, age and other relevant characteristics. The report card is to be updated annually.

As noted by the Children’s RBA Report Card Working Group, “[t]o date, dozens of primary and secondary indicators about the well-being of Connecticut children and youth have been identified.” Indicator data are being compiled in a central, electronically accessible location. Work
has begun on analyzing the story behind these data, assessing the impact of existing state policies and programs for children, and determining what state agencies and their partners need to do to achieve the desired quality of life result: “All Connecticut children grown up in stable environments, safe, healthy, and ready to lead successful lives.”

**Partners:** Committee on Children, the CT Kids Report Card, the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, and the State Department of Education, DCF, DSS, DPH, Judicial, OEC, Child Advocate, CT Voices, CAHS, CAN, CCPA, Parent Power, CHDI, and the Center for Children’s Advocacy.

**What the Commission did in 2013:**

- Continued to serve on the Children's RBA Report Card Leadership Committee, a group made up of the heads of key partner agencies and organizations, providing the Committee on Children with high level executive input needed to identify and promote implementation of strategies that ensure Connecticut's young people grow up in stable environments, safe, healthy, and ready to lead successful lives. The Leadership Committee meets quarterly to help set, steer, and monitor the state's course of action for achieving the quality of life results tracked by the CT Kids Report Card.

- Continued to provide technical assistance to the Children's RBA Report Card Working Group to develop a Web-based platform, which is developing into “a central source for all the data collected now and in the future on the well-being of Connecticut's children and youth.”

- Co-hosted a public forum titled *Here to Learn: Chronic Absence and the Achievement Gap*, with the Committee on Children, the CT Kids Report Card, the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, and the State Department of Education. The four key indicators in the Children's Report Card are related to children's health, safety, stability, and future success. The stable domain includes a number of indicators related to children growing up in a stable environment, and is reflective of three dimensions of a stable family: environment, parental engagement, and child resilience. The spotlight indicator, displayed in this report card, is the percentage of students who are chronically absent from school.

**Proposed strategies to turn the curve:**

- Track longitudinal data on chronic absenteeism to continue to inform policy and legislative agenda to turn the curve on chronic absenteeism, which can exacerbate persistent gaps in
academic achievement along racial and socio-economic lines. The story behind the curve on chronic absenteeism is critical to understand the reasons that children are absent from school and how to prevent chronic absence.

- Link parent awareness of the Report Card so the consumer can apply the data in community engagement and in family choices about programs and policies. Inform mayors, through the Children’s Subcommittee at the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), about the Report Card and how it can be used by towns. Link the Report Card to town websites once the data are available.

- Link Report Card information to children’s forums and policy debates so the data helps drive the content direction.

- Create a consumer-friendly system to access the data that is simple, accessible and offers more and more tiers for depth.

- Ensure staffing for continuous updating of the Report Card.

- Link the Report Card data to the Results First data (see below), where the content intersects to create an integrated system of best practices for the consumer, regarding children.

**Indicator 2: Return on Investment (Results First)**

**The story behind the baseline:** Since the start of the recession in 2007, the state of Connecticut has had to make difficult budget choices, reducing public services for many of our neediest residents. This is especially troubling given the dramatic increase of families living in poverty in the past few years. As noted by the Pew Center on the States of the Pew Charitable Trusts, policy makers increasingly seek programs and policies that yield the greatest benefits in the most cost-effective way.

In 1983, the Washington legislature established the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) and its method of rigorous analysis of available research (Results First model) to help state leaders: (1) systematically identify which programs work and which do not; (2) calculate potential returns on investment of funding alternative programs; (3) rank programs based on their projected benefits, costs, and investment risks; (4) identify ineffective programs that could be targeted for cuts or elimination; and (5) predict the impact of different policy options.
Using this model, bipartisan majorities in Washington decided to invest in crime-prevention and treatment programs that, among other things, have contributed to savings of $1.3 billion per two-year budget cycle, eliminating the need to build new prisons and making it possible to close an adult prison and a juvenile detention facility. The programs have also resulted in the crime and arrest rates among juveniles to drop below the national averages.

WSIPP is now sharing its cost-benefit analysis tools for state government in a pilot program with other states. The Commission, working with the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and the legislature’s Appropriations Committee, applied for a grant from the Pew Foundation to bring the WSIPP model to Connecticut. In late 2011, the Pew Center on the States and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, with additional support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, chose Connecticut and 12 other states to participate in Pew’s Results First initiative. The Initiative adapts the proven research and analysis model developed and implemented over 15 years by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP).

The Results First model uses the best national research to identify evidence-based programs that work, and applies those findings to Connecticut-specific population data to estimate the fiscal and policy impact of potential investments in programs that are designed to reduce crime and recidivism.

The first stage of the Results First model in Connecticut is focusing on criminal justice, but it is anticipated that the model will be expanded to evaluate critical programs in, child welfare, pre-K–12 education, adult and children’s mental health, and substance abuse.

**What the Commission did in 2013:**

- Continued to serve as the policy coordinator for the Connecticut Results First Initiative, which is chaired by Representative Toni Walker and Office of Policy Management (OPM) Undersecretary Michael Lawlor.

- Participated in the Results First Data Working Group, which continued to work with the Results First Staff at Pew to analyze programmatic data at DCF, Corrections, and the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch, including establishing programmatic fixed and marginal costs.

- Staff presented and participated on a “Connecticut Panel” at the annual Results First State Convening in Denver, CO on July 25-26, 2013. This was a unique opportunity to present the on-
ongoing work that CT is doing develop its own cost-benefit model derived from the WSIPP model in Washington State, and collaborate with colleagues from across the country to tackle technical and policy challenges with implementation.

- Worked with the legislature to establish the Results First Policy Oversight Committee, upon which the Executive Director of the Commission on Children serves as a statutory member (P.A. 13-247).

**Proposed strategies to turn the curve:**

- Work with state agencies that provide programmatic services, particularly to children and youth, to generate sufficient and accurate data to ensure Connecticut has the best information on programmatic fixed and marginal costs to evaluate return on investment.

- Continue to participate on the Connecticut Results First Policy Oversight Committee and Chair the planning and policy workgroup to recommend procedures and policy directions based on return on investment findings and work with all policymakers interested in return on investment findings and implications for prevention policy for children, youth, and young adults as well as the family.

- Work with the Pew Charitable Trusts and legislative partners to creatively interlace the Results First and Results Based Accountability metrics models to ensure accountability and return on investment from our state programs and services.
Indicator 3: Setting the National Standard for Family Civics

The story behind the baseline: Parent engagement and leadership is growing throughout the states. However, accountability and evaluation are modest in this new policy arena. The Commission on Children has become one model for Connecticut and other cities and states in rigorous family civics evaluation. We are asked to share our methodology with foundations, states, cities and the federal government.

An evaluation model in parent leadership emerged from the creation of the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI). PLTI is a statewide family civics initiative created by the Commission on Children in 1992 to bolster child health, safety and learning. Parents attend twenty weeks of classroom instruction and develop leadership skills to engage as partners for children in their neighborhoods, schools, communities and in state and local government.

Since its inception, PLTI has taught more than 3,000 parents across Connecticut how to lead for their children and other children. They take on leadership roles in Parent Teacher Organizations, Parental Involvement Committees, School Governance Councils, Boards of Education, City Councils, School Readiness Councils, non-profit boards and in the General Assembly.

In 2005, the Commission also partnered with the Connecticut Center for School Change (CSC) to create a parent leadership training initiative, Parents Supporting Education Excellence (PSEE), focused on educational excellence. Annually, PLTI and PSEE are offered in 25 communities. Connecticut has developed a comprehensive array of parent leadership trainings over the past two decades, setting the national standard for family civics.

The Commission on Children worked with the Legislature and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to create The Parent Trust Act. This Act creates a funding stream for proven family civics programs, with requirements for data, proven quality, diversity and community input, in a public-private partnership. It is currently housed with the State Department of Education, in an extensive public-private partnership, and with oversight of both state and philanthropic partners.

To measure the effectiveness of the PLTI and PSEE trainings, parents are asked a series of questions when they start and end the leadership training. The pre & post-test scores are compared to document the impact of the training and measure change along several key civic measures. Along with this short-term data, the Commission has partnered with nationally recognized research entities to study the longitudinal impact of the training.

A narrative paradigm has also been created for us by Anne Henderson, national scholar at Annenberg Institute, on transformation through the parent leadership training. This narrative
methodology offers questions for parents as they graduate and also interviews members in the community on the parent’s community impact. Concurrent with this, research is being done to study the impact of peer network expansion, resulting from increased civic knowledge, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Liberty Bank Foundation is now working with us to expand our evaluation to include on-going analysis of where graduates are, what they are doing and how to track gains as parent leaders contribute significantly to improved child outcomes.

The 2004 evaluation conducted by the University of New Hampshire and the 2009 study conducted by RMC research Corporation revealed that parent leadership training alumni:

- Gained better understanding of how state and local government works;
- Experienced more frequent use of civic skills;
- Perceived a greater sense of civic empowerment in responding to community issues and problems; and
- Increase their engagement in civic activities.
  - 66% practice what they learned on a weekly basis.
  - 90% engage or work now with parents and communities that are different from them in race or culture.

The Kellogg Foundation and the Connecticut Civic Health Advisory Council have both recognized PLTI as a national best practice in family civic engagement. The Kellogg Foundation provided funding for national replication of PLTI in 2010.
What the Commission did in 2013:

- Tested and improved an electronic version of our state evaluation model for parent leadership in Connecticut and in our national replication project, funded by the Kellogg Foundation. Evaluation performed by RMC Research.

- Added narrative stories from parents to the evaluation paradigm, designed by Anne Henderson of the Annenberg Institute, funded by Kellogg Foundation.

- Created a study group of researchers looking at the impact of social networks from parent leadership, funded by the Kellogg Foundation.

- Met with Liberty Bank Foundation to begin design of longitudinal data collection on parent graduate outcomes over a multi-year span of civic participation.

- Shared parent leadership outcome data with the public, policy leaders and in civic state forums.

- Presented at the National Academy of Science on the civic projects of CT parents in child obesity and nutrition, resulting from PLTI training.

- Created a platform at the LOB for doctors to learn how they can work with parents as partners in medical homes. Outcomes were discussed.

- Shared outcomes of both parents and early care providers in their experience and perceptions of one another. Showed the potential collective impact if parents and early care providers were more authentic partners together for child development.
Proposed Strategies to Turn the Curve:

- Expand public information on parent leadership outcomes and methodology.

- Identify additional funding for more comprehensive, longitudinal research on the civic impact of parent leadership training, as discussed above.

- Develop a common tool to measure civic gains across all parent leadership training programs funded through the Parent Trust in Connecticut.

- Assist other states in replicating the Parent Trust Act.

- Identify and implement strategies to create a family engagement system that is integrated and comprehensive, starting with the early years.

- Develop funding and strategies to track the impact of parent leadership training on children’s academic and social success.

- Show how different policy areas in health, safety and learning benefit from parents as partners, utilizing the evaluation information.

- Showcase civic projects of parents in PLTI to offer a sampler of community impact of parent leadership.
2013 Honors for the Commission on Children

The Public Broadcasting Services (PBS) selected the Parent Leadership Training Institute as a model of innovation for its “Breakthrough” series.

Connecticut Parents as Teachers (ConnPAT) presented its “Champion of the Year Award” to Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman for her work on home visitation.

The United Way of Fairfield County honored Commission founder Laura Lee Simon and Chair George Coleman for legacy work and leadership on children and youth over a decade.

The Keep the Promise Coalition of Connecticut presented Elaine Zimmerman with its policy leadership award for 2013 for her work on mental health policy.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation selected the Parent Leadership Training Institute as a model and best practice for the states in parent leadership.

Harvard University selected Elaine Zimmerman to be a guest speaker at its March 13 Askwith Forum, along with John Merrow of the PBS NewsHour and Marian Wright Edelman of the Children’s Defense Fund.
Commission on Children Members and Staff, 2013

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