

## **NEW LONDON GREEN PARTY EDUCATION PLATFORM 2013**

### **DRAFT • April 2013**

The success of this city and its appeal to current and potential residents is enhanced by the quality of public education it offers. We need to improve the perception and the reality of New London schools, so they meet the educational needs of all students and prepare them for a lifetime of opportunities. The values of social justice, nonviolence, respect for diversity, and responsibility can uplift our educational system, the life of young people in New London, and our entire community.

#### **Closing the readiness gap**

Children's early experiences, before they enter our public education system, have a powerful influence on their readiness to be successful students when they enter kindergarten. To close the readiness gap among our students, we must close the gaps among our schools, our city's cultural and economic resources, and our families. An investment in early education has been demonstrated to provide a boost to economic development, as well.

#### **The student experience**

Respect: At the core of education is respect - for students and their families, teachers and other staff, and the community at large. Respect manifests in many ways: maintaining clean facilities, making sure students have materials they need, and communicating tolerance and caring throughout the day. Students are encouraged to build relationships with mentors within and outside of school, and our schools should support these efforts and provide a means by which favorite former teachers can continue to mentor students

as they progress to graduation.

Respect also includes making the commitment to fulfill students' physical needs during the course of a school day. The importance of rest, play, and healthful food cannot be overlooked as we strive for academic excellence

School environment: For teaching and learning to occur, a safe school environment is essential, but punitive and exclusionary controls like suspension and expulsion, used more frequently in urban schools than in wealthier and less diverse districts, frequently lead to academic failure and increased drop-out rates. We call for a new approach based on restorative justice to create an orderly and peaceful school environment. As students learn to communicate, empathize, solve problems and consider options for restitution, they become stakeholders in creating a sense of community and improving school security.

Linking with the community: Though New London has limited financial resources, it is astoundingly rich in culture: history, the arts, colleges, diverse traditions, civic activism. Some connections have been forged between the schools and our local resources, but we can do more. Schools can and must become an integral part of the community; to this end, we propose to welcome and foster parent involvement, to open our schools wholeheartedly to community events and organizations, and to increase the visibility of our students in the community-at-large.

In these difficult economic times, we must look carefully at how we use the resources available to us, as a flat-funded education budget will likely become the norm. Working in collaboration not only with centers of higher education, but also with local artists (music, theater and visual), historical associations, health and food initiatives can leverage our dollars while enriching the education and lives of our students, as well as the adults who get to know them.

In addition, we support the work of CCJEF (CT Coalition for Justice in Education Funding), which seeks adequate and equitable funding for all districts. We also urge the full funding

of PILOT (Payment In Lieu of Taxes), which would create fairer taxation that does not discriminate against urban centers.

Educating students in our multicultural, multilingual city: The goals of bilingual education should be: to provide instructional support to English Language Learners using the native language as a tool for new language development; to enable English speakers to learn a new language; to develop a deeper understanding of language structure and the connections between languages; and to place value on the native language and culture of all students.

## **Closing the opportunity gap**

The "New London Promise" ensures the opportunity for a higher education reality. We believe that if we want to change students' behavior, we must first change their expectations. The City should ensure that a New London education becomes a gateway to meaningful post-secondary education by guaranteeing the payment of tuition to college or to post-secondary vocational school to all New London students who graduate in good standing. And, to implement the "promise," NL middle and high schools need to have enough guidance counselors to provide all students with all the information necessary to choose their future path.