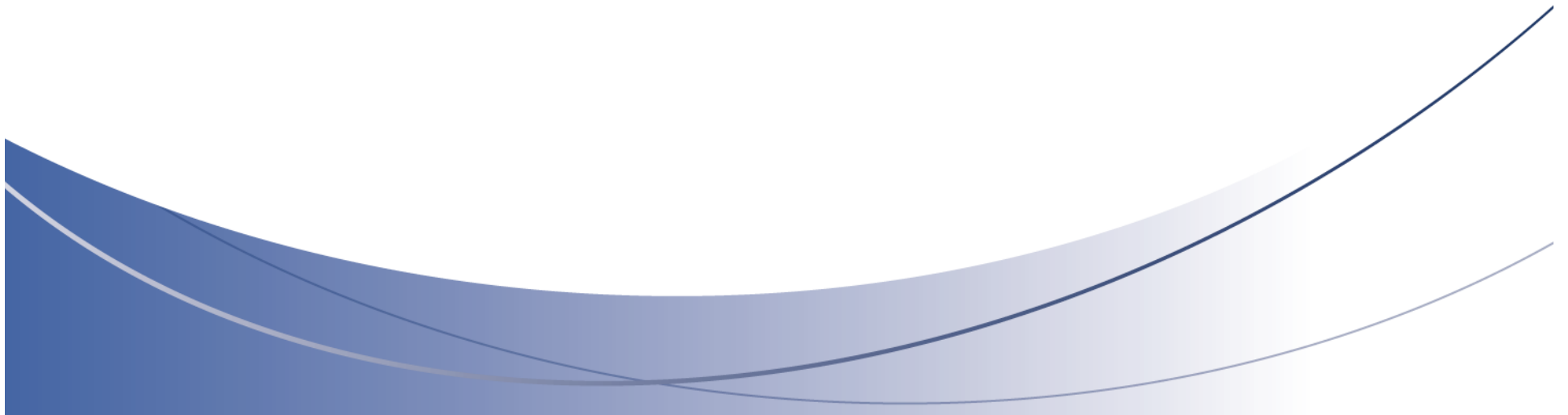


# How Connecticut Diffused The Parent Trigger



# The Parent Trigger

A school that hasn't made AYP for at least 3 consecutive years could be reconstituted, if 51% of parents sign a petition

# The Parent Trigger

Deceptively portrayed as an avenue to provide parents with a voice in the direction of their child's school

Is actually a mechanism used by charter school advocates to organize parents and create support for new charter schools and/or slots

# Parent Trigger Comes to CT

- We knew what happened in CA at the end of 2009, but didn't expect it to come to CT as quickly as February 2010
- AFT Research helped with background on the players and connecting the dots
  - CA Sen. Gloria Romero
  - GreenDOT
  - ConnCAN Executive Director Alex Johnston
- We learned from mistakes made in CA
  - Inflammatory rhetoric
  - Saying "no"

# Connecticut's Parent Trigger Bill

- Pushed by Campaign LEARN, a newly-formed coalition of charter school advocates, minority groups and parent leaders:
  - ConnCAN
  - State of Connecticut Black Alliance
  - Black and Puerto Rican Legislative Caucus
  - Connecticut Parent Power, PTO, etc.

# Looking for Allies

- Other public education advocates wouldn't touch the bill, including lobbying groups representing:
  - Superintendents
  - Administrators
  - Boards of Education
  - Municipalities
  - State Department of Education
- Even CEA thought it would go away if they just ignored it.

# What We Did – Dual Strategy

- Reached out to Co-Chairs and members of the Education Committee, lobbying them to kill the bill
- Met with Legislative leadership to create a backstop

## ***while simultaneously***

- Meeting with Campaign LEARN, the State of Connecticut Black Alliance and the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus
  - Discussed shared concerns
  - Tried to steer them in an ongoing, proactive direction

# The Message

- The Parent Trigger is a singular, negative action. Even the term has a disturbing connotation
- Teachers desperately want to build effective partnerships with parents
- Let's work together, rather than pit school communities against each other
- Build on collaborative successes of New Haven and CommPACT Schools





# Plan A: Kill Mode

- Lobbied hard against the bill and mobilized our members to contact Education Committee members and ask them to kill the bill, AND
- On voting day, we had the votes to kill the bill in Committee, BUT
- The House Education Co-Chair was running for Majority Leader and courting support from members of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, SO:
- He offered to send the bill out as a “work in progress” and with that cover, one by one, many of our “no votes” turned into “yes votes.” The bill passed out of Committee.



# Plan B: Engage the Opposition

- Established a working group of key House proponents and AFT CT, facilitated, when necessary, by the Speaker of the House and his staff
- Dragged CEA along kicking and screaming because teachers had to be united
- Other parent trigger advocates (ConnCAN, parent groups, Campaign LEARN, etc.) were not at the table.



# The Process

- About 8-10 long, tense, passionate negotiating sessions with honest and sometimes contentious dialogue
- Portrayed teachers as willing partners and explained the limits placed on them by administrators, superintendents, etc.
- Breakthrough around session #6, as we agreed on a framework for a common direction
- By then we had 4 days left in the legislative session to finalize the details, write the language and pass the bill in both chambers.



# The Solution Framework

Agreeing to move from a single, negative action that could divide school communities into an ongoing, positive, school-based structure to enable teachers and parents to work together and have their voices heard in the way low performing schools operate.



# The Final Outcome

- **School Governance Councils** - Mandated the establishment of advisory groups comprised of elected stakeholder representatives in consistently low performing schools
- Gave parents majority representation
- Gave Councils authority to recommend reconstitution in third year of poor performance
- Created opportunities for collaboration with teachers, parents and other stakeholders

# If We Had More Time...

- Need more detail for School Governance Councils
  - Election processes
  - Administration/bylaws
  - Consequences for non-compliance
- Name is a misnomer
  - They are advisory and do not have true governing authority

# What Helped Us

- Our approach and history of AFT CT's successful collaborative solutions
- AFT research and strategic support
- Members' ongoing grassroots efforts
- Absence of charter school and parent groups from the table
- Lessons learned from CA



# What Hurt Us

- CEA
- Timeline
- Toxic dialogue from ConnCAN and other parent trigger advocates



# Lesson Learned - No Is NOT an Option

- Engagement works because we
  - Built new and strengthened existing relationships
  - Enhanced our credibility
  - Became the go-to teachers' union, despite our size
  - Stopped the parent trigger and turned it into a vehicle for collaborative success



# Karma

- The chief legislative proponent of the original parent trigger bill lost his re-election in November 2010
- The House Co-Chair lost his race for Majority Leader and has a thorny relationship with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus on education issues

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