

A tip of the Iceberg - unrecognized crisis 119K

As a volunteer in my community, I served 2 years as Chair of the Quinnipiac East Management Team and 5 years as a leader in a community butterfly garden, Mariposas del Mundo, to **educate** about the Monarch butterfly life cycle, native plants and more. My background is growing up in poverty with a single mom since age 10 and 4 younger brothers. I graduated college with a major in math and secondary teaching credential. I worked more than 2 decades as an engineer, then after very early retirement 2 decades as an educator, tutoring and training tutors.

Although I'm very good tutoring math, in 2007, I became convinced that reading and literacy are a more basic necessity. In the 1970s and 80s, about ½ my high school and college students needed to review math basics to fractions. By the turn of the century it was almost 100%. Then I found that from 4th grade on, it was a lack of basic literacy, they didn't understand the instructions or the word problems. They could do a mechanical operation but lacked conceptual understanding or application of what they were trying to study.

I respect the value and volume of data collected and analyzed in the 119K Commission report "Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis." As Mr. Ferguson of Dalio Education stated in earlier testimony that I watched, each **data point** is a life, an individual who is part of our cities and towns across the state.

I genuinely believe that each person is basically good and in some way wants to help. Parents want the best for their children and hope they will have a better education, better relationships, better job and better life. The "American Dream" and parent's hopes have been lost on these 119K disconnected young adults. I submit this topic of "Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis" is the visible tip of the iceberg.

The Commissions report has dug deep below the surface to uncover and highlight many contributing factors. These are symptoms of an earlier problem which has now been exacerbated by the pandemic. Before 2020, approximately 1/3 of grade school students were proficient in reading and math. After the pandemic it's hard to collect complete data for a variety of reasons. However, the composites I have found indicate now it is less than 20% (at least in New Haven) that are proficient at grade level. That might suggest that 80% are now at risk for all these things cited by the Commission.

Addressing point #2 of your 3 questions tonight, I'm here tonight to suggest that the biggest “**gap**” is at the 3-4th grade reading & literacy level. Educators have claimed for decades that a child “learns to read up to 3rd grade” and then “reads to learn” after that. We learn by observing and doing. We learn by teaching or coaching from others we come in contact with. **Reading opens the doors** to learn from anyone anywhere who has written something about wherever our curiosity or need for information takes us. Going back more than a decade, the movie “Waiting for Superman” documented some of the crisis at the 3-4th grade level. Arizona prisons look at 3rd-4th grade reading level to estimate prison beds needed in 20 years. Among the incarcerated, reading levels average 3rd grade and lower.

Yes, the 119K Commission has alerted us to a crisis impacting the work force and communities right now. This is vital to continue your forward progress.

At the same time, I would like to engage with people who want to dive deeper into the iceberg and address literacy at the 3-4th grade levels. If those students have basic literacy and tools to help them **LEARN and apply what they learn**, more than just

good grades in school, then the crisis will be over long before they reach post-secondary education and workforce readiness.

I further agree with the Mayor of Torrington and others who have touched on the need for personal interaction, a mentor, a role model an adult who cares and makes a difference in the young person's personal choices for their own best future.

I have met 2 college graduates who were functionally illiterate. I also tutored a smart boy in 8th grade who had never been taught to read. These are tragedies.

In California, I became very familiar with Waldorf schools where they don't teach reading until 3rd grade, yet by the end of the year, students are totally on track with early readers from other education programs. I could go on. However, the first year I trained tutors for a phonics based program, one young woman confided to me that she didn't learn to read until 4th grade when someone took the time to help her. You can bet I gave her all the 4th graders I could find that couldn't read. She could honestly share her story with them and give them great hope. Let's bring curiosity and the joy of learning back to 3-4th grade students by first giving them literacy. There is no one size fits all program to do this. It will take 1:1 or very small groups to give the love and care for the individual student to bring them up to speed and back on track for success.

Following this theme, I suggest that the majority of these 119K disconnected young adults lack sufficient literacy to forge ahead for their own success. They may have lost any purpose or goal or ray of hope for their own future. It will take personal contact to reignite their hope and dreams for their own future. Literacy and a friend can help close this gap.

Thank you for listening.