



**EASTERN
CONNECTICUT
STATE UNIVERSITY**

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Before the Education Committee

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Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Committee on Education. Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of the proposed changes to **Senate Bill 1282** *An Act Concerning Model Early Childhood Learning Programs*. My name is Dimitrios S. Pachis, and I am the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Eastern Connecticut State University.

Many of you are familiar with Eastern's reputation in early childhood education. Eastern prepares the largest number of early childhood education teachers of any four-year institution of higher education in Connecticut. Eastern's early childhood education faculty have received national recognition for their research and innovation in professional development for early care and education providers. Eastern's Child and Family Development Resource Center just celebrated its first anniversary February 27, 2007. The Center features a model early childhood learning program housed in a state-of-the-art research and training facility.

Raised Bill 1282 addresses eligibility for state support for model early childhood learning programs. The proposed change would require that the funded model programs be associated with institutions of higher education. I would like to share with you what makes university-affiliated/associated early childhood learning programs uniquely qualified to serve as model "programs" for the rest of the state.

First and foremost, most university laboratory schools/model day care programs serve as a training ground for future early childhood education teachers. Because of that mission, laboratory schools/model day care programs meet standards of quality that far surpass the average preschool. For example, lead teachers at Eastern's Child and Family Development Resource Center have master's degrees in early childhood education. By contrast, lead teachers in Connecticut's School Readiness programs are required to have only twelve (12) credits of early childhood coursework plus some training as part of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

In addition, preschool teachers in university laboratory schools/model day care programs work very closely with early childhood education faculty to ensure that the school's curriculum reflects the latest research regarding best practices for educating young children. Faculty and teachers collaborate to test new strategies for working with children and families and to implement best practices according to the latest research.

As training grounds for future teachers, laboratory schools/model day care programs provide early childhood students with clinical and field experiences. In the laboratory schools/model day care programs, students practice the teaching methods they are learning in the university classroom under the critical eyes of both faculty and the highly trained preschool teachers. When they graduate, these students bring to their first teaching jobs the skills they learned in the laboratory schools/model day care programs. So not only do university-affiliated/associated early childhood learning programs provide high-quality education to the preschool children attending the program, but year after year they produce a cohort of new teachers who can deliver high-quality education to other preschools throughout Connecticut.

University-affiliated/associated schools are also uniquely positioned to share exemplary practices modeled in the laboratory school with the larger community. For example, Eastern's Child and Family Development Resource Center was designed to provide unique opportunities to partner with and learn from other experts in the field. In addition, Eastern's new high-technology facility allows faculty researchers to capture on video examples of high-quality teaching and other research objectives and to share findings with others in the field, including state agencies and other providers throughout the state. Finally, Eastern's distance learning technology enables faculty and trainers to share best practices and research findings with practitioners regardless of their location, meaning that we can influence the teaching practices of preschool teachers all over the state.

An investment in university affiliated/associated early childhood learning programs pays substantial dividends in terms of the numbers of teachers and programs reached far beyond the school's walls. The quality programming of a laboratory/model day care program impacts the quality of education at many programs, and this impact grows exponentially over time.

Raised Bill 1282 also proposes lengthening the eligibility period to five (5) years. We believe this is a positive change because it increases the proportion of the funding period that will be spent on implementation. As you know, implementing any new program requires a certain amount of planning and time to hire essential personnel. Moving to a five-year funding eligibility would ensure that the program's start-up phase would take up a much smaller proportion of the overall grant period. A five-year funding period would also allow university faculty to conduct more complex and longitudinal research projects as part of the model program and still have time to disseminate research findings within Connecticut's early childhood education field.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I urge you to support the proposed changes as a way to maximize the impact of the funding for model early childhood programs in Connecticut. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.