

February 13, 2006
Testimony Submitted to
Joint Education Committee

In Opposition to

H. B. No. 7047 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL DISTRICT
ACCOUNTABILITY

The Connecticut Education Association is opposed to RB 7047. The bill appears to have the intent of superceding the collective bargaining statute and sets the stage for an unprecedented level of state intrusion in local control of public education in Connecticut.

We understand the need to have a statewide framework for accountability. We supported the Connecticut School Accountability framework in place prior to the passage of NCLB and most recently we supported the recommendations of the accountability subcommittee of the Governor's ECS Commission. We support the accountability proposal in the Governor's implementer bill – Bill 1114 which more closely follows the recommendations of the commission.

The federal education law has created a situation which will inevitably lead to the over-identification of schools and districts in Connecticut and around the nation as failing. CEA has produced two independent studies of the impact of AYP on Connecticut's schools that indicate that close to 90% of our schools will fail to make AYP in 2014 - the year in which all students are required to reach proficiency. Already in Connecticut, in 2006 a total of 390 of our schools did not make AYP. Thirty-two of our school districts did not make AYP and 22 are identified as being "in need of improvement". Of these, 21 districts are in year 3 of district improvement. The federal government has challenged every public school to accomplish what has never been accomplished before – bring 100% of all students to proficiency by a time certain. While raising the bar to unprecedented levels, federal support for achieving this goal has declined with each succeeding budget.

Last week Senator Kennedy, Chairman of the Health Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, held the first of a series of roundtable discussions and hearings on the reauthorization of NCLB. The topic was strategies needed to turn around struggling schools. The committee heard compelling testimony on the changing role of state education agencies from basically compliance monitoring to a mode of service delivery in a standards-based accountability environment. They also heard predictions of the impact that the inexorable increase of underperforming schools created by the algebra of the law will have on all SEA's ability to deliver the necessary support.

We accept the goal of the law as vital to our future, but we also recognize that currently we do not have the capacity to achieve it. Like most state education agencies around the country, the State Department of Education in Connecticut has neither the staffing levels

nor the knowledge base to assist local districts in implementing the kind of systemic change at the scale necessary (let alone the assumption of control over them). The Governor's bold education finance initiative recognizes that if we have any hope of retooling our education system for the 21st century we must provide the resources to do it. There is no body of evidence suggesting that the radical restructuring promoted by the federal law has done anything significant anywhere in the country to raise student achievement. The most recent study by the Rand Corporation of the largest experiment in private management of public schools in Philadelphia casts further doubt on these types of interventions. In a summary of their findings they state, "In short, after four years of intervention, achievement gains in privately operated schools and sweet 16 schools, on average, are no different from Philadelphia's district-wide gains." (see Rand below)

We urge members of the committee to reexamine the recommendations of the governor's Commission on Education Finance on accountability. The Commission attempted to counter the over-reliance on single test scores that is the core of NCLB with a recognition that there are many more elements that are indicators of school achievement and require the state department to gather consistent data and establish benchmarks for schools in these areas. The Commission puts radical restructuring at the end of a long process and places a stronger emphasis on meaningful and supportive interventions.

Finally, we include for your consideration as you deliberate further on the issue of accountability the following documents:

- *Projecting AYP in Connecticut Schools* Prepared by Edward Moscovitch Cape Ann Economics March 2004 and its follow-up study
- Testimony of Paul Reville, President of the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy before the HELP Committee, US Senate, Feb. 8, 2007
- "Student Achievement in Privately Managed and District-Managed Schools in Philadelphia Since the State Takeover" a research brief summarizing the findings presented in *State Takeover, School Restructuring, Private Management, and Student Achievement in Philadelphia* a study conducted by Rand Corporation