

In Support of HB 5870 An Act Concerning Minor Changes to the Education Statutes

Good afternoon Representative Fleischmann, Senator Gaffey and members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Jessica Bonafine and in addition to being the Government Relations Manager for the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, I am a mother of 4 public elementary school students and a former early childhood educator.

I am here today to speak in support of House Bill 5870 An Act Concerning Minor Changes to the Education Statutes. There is language in this bill that has been supported in SB 270 An Act Concerning School-Family Partnerships-a bill JF'd to this committee. I ask that you consider the support expressed at the Children's Committee public hearing for that bill. SB 270 has received support from the CT PTA and CT Parent Power.

We applaud the General Assembly for passing legislation last session that enhanced the State Department of Education's role in working with schools and district's "in need of corrective action" to develop and implement turn around plans. Upon examination of the statute and the implementation plan that was developed by the State Department of Education, we were disappointed that families were not included as a stakeholder group that must be engaged in the process of turning around schools. Within SDE's Bureau of Health and Nutrition Services and Child/Family/School Partnerships lies a tremendous resource on school-family-community partnerships that should be engaged in these turnaround districts.

As a former early childhood educator, I can tell you from my own experiences that children perform better when the adults in their lives are working together. Partnerships form quite naturally between high quality childcare/ preschool providers and parents; I have found that often parents who are extremely involved in their child's early years are not as involved, for a variety of reasons, when the child starts kindergarten. I have had many conversations with parents that came out of the HeadStart program that support my observations as well. They were well prepared to be active in their child's learning environment via the Parent Policy Council but now feel a void because they had nowhere to put that energy in their child's elementary school. It is critical that they have opportunities to get involved and stay involved through their child's educational career.

The bill proposes a survey to be administered to families, teachers and administrators. This tool would help identify, through a readily accessible set of data, schools that are successful in engaging parents as well as providing critical insight into the barriers to parental engagement in those schools where parents are not as fully engaged.

I urge your support and favorable passage of this bill.