

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
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Richard F. Tanasi  
President, State Vocational Federation of Teachers, Local 4200A

TESTIMONY SUPPORTING HOUSE BILL NO. 6370:  
AN ACT CONCERNING A MIDDLE COLLEGE SYSTEM

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishman and distinguished members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of Governor Rell's Bill, House Bill 6370: An Act Concerning a Middle College System.

I find myself in the distinguished company of Representative Carlo Leone, Norwalk Community College President Dr. David Levinson, the J. M. Wright Technical High School Citizen's Advisory Committee and the Greater Stamford Chamber of Commerce – among others – who have declared their support of this bill.

The State Vocational Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals and as such we are concerned with teaching and learning and ensuring that our students are afforded the best educational opportunities available. In my testimony to the Higher Education Committee on February 19, 2009 I emphasized the benefits a partnership like this can provide to Connecticut's workforce, the students in Connecticut, and the quality of life in our great state. While I stand in support of the bill, I remain an advocate for the over 1400 teachers I represent and therefore look to you for specifics about the implementation of a bill of this magnitude.

It is my understanding that the twelve Community Colleges operate independently. The Connecticut Technical High Schools, on the other hand, offer a uniform curriculum and program of studies. Partnerships – such as those among Harvard Ellis Technical High School in Danielson, Quinnibaug Community College and Three Rivers Community Technical College in Norwich can and should be duplicated in every technical high school and community-technical college. The Partnership Program, which allows V-T junior and senior students to enroll in undersubscribed community college evening courses at no cost, is an example of a foundation already established. The College Career Pathway Program, which exists in several of our technical high schools, allows juniors and seniors, in specific trades, to earn up to 15 college credits for academic and technology course work they undertake in high school. This program is another foundation that should be enhanced and expanded through the Middle College Model.

I refer you to the program already established at Harvard Ellis Tech. This collaboration is successfully providing clear pathways for students to move from studying the Electrical trade at the V-T school to studying Electrical Engineering at Three Rivers; from studying Drafting at Ellis to pursuing a career in Architecture at Three Rivers; from Manufacturing Technology at Ellis to Mechanical Engineering at Three Rivers.

The benefits of a well-articulated partnership are infinite:

- It is a motivator for students to not only stay in school, but to improve performance to compete for a slot in the College Career Pathway Program. To participate you must have a "C" or better average. Students are not turned away – but put on a wait list. This encourages the student to improve.
- It provides a very affordable college alternative. Many feel that this economic crisis is not likely to end soon and more and more Connecticut parents are finding themselves unable to afford the high cost of a four-year college.
- Often a high school graduate may be unsure of his or her abilities, thinking that they are not "college material". These programs provide an opportunity to try a college course, meet with success, and realize that college is a viable option for them. This is especially true of the first and second-generation immigrant children who populate our technical high schools.
- Often a high school graduate may not be mature enough for dorm life and the distractions that come with living away from home. The middle college to community-technical college model allows our students to not only get a head-start towards a degree, but to also live at home in a structured environment and keep their part-time jobs. It's a win-win.
- Most importantly, this model will help to keep Connecticut's best and brightest right here in Connecticut. It is no secret that once a student leaves to attend college in Boston, Washington, Virginia, California, or wherever, they seldom return to Connecticut. The Middle College model may help to keep that talent here in Connecticut

I represent over 1400 of our state's most dedicated and talented teachers. The over 10,000 technical high school students whom we teach are a big part of Connecticut's future, its workforce and its citizenry. As president of the SVFT I feel an obligation to provide the members with factual information and to set an example of open-mindedness and

cooperation. The bill before you that merges the Connecticut Technical High Schools and the Community-Technical Colleges has created great consternation among my members. There are too many details that have yet to be worked out. The SVFT leadership is committed to remaining optimistic in thinking that this middle college model will be a positive and forward-thinking solution to economic and educational concerns.

It is my sincere hope that the model will be piloted at two locations: J.M. Wright Technical High School in Stamford and Norwalk Community College, and between Harvard Ellis Technical High School and the community-technical colleges in that area. These schools are located in two entirely different parts of the state; one in an urban, metropolitan area and the other in a much more rural area. Each presents unique challenges and opportunities. This pilot will enable us to work collaboratively over the next year or two to address all of the opportunities and challenges and create a model not just for Connecticut – but also for the country to duplicate.

I thank the Committee for this opportunity and respectfully request the Committee support this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions.