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Farmington High School



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Testimony: Senate Bill 944 Timothy M. Breslin March 9, 2009

I will speak in support of Senate Bill 944, An Act Concerning a Plan for Academic and Personal Success for Every Middle and High School Student.

Commissioner McQuillan's original draft, which had great potential for furthering education's essential mission – to ensure that all students achieve at high levels, preparing them to learn, to work, and to be contributing citizens in a global, democratic society – was enhanced by his willingness to gather the opinions of various constituent groups, resulting in the credible document approved by the state board in October.

Now it appears that lack of funding will result in the postponement of the plan's implementation. This postponement will be harmful to Connecticut's children because two emerging conditions have substantively changed how educators must go about their work:

The first is the astonishing change in the world economy as described by Thomas Friedman in *The World is Flat*.

The second, not entirely distinct from the first, is the emergence of technology that not only increases the rapidity with which we can generate and process information, but also changes how young people think and how they view the world.

Friedman argues that anyone entering the job market will flourish in the 21st century only if they have developed skills in critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication. Moreover, they will need to collaborate, lead, and work hard in a world that is fundamentally different from the one their counterparts entered twenty, ten, or even five years ago.

To prepare students for this world, schools will have to provide them with learning experiences that are fundamentally different from the ones we now provide them. In *The Global Achievement Gap*, Tony Wagoner addresses these differences:

1. Instead of treating students as receivers of knowledge, schools will need to treat them as participants in the acquisition of knowledge.
2. Schools will need to motivate students by tapping into their interests.
3. Schools will need to understand that students will work hard, but only if they feel ownership of what they do and how they do it.
4. Schools will need to train teachers as mentors, who know students well, treat them as partners in learning, and help them discover what most interests them.

The board's plan contains measures that, if enacted, will change schools so that they effectively prepare students to meet 21st century demands in that:

1. It establishes rigorous expectations for all students, and it allocates resources in ways that address the achievement gap among those students.
2. It addresses the need for students to acquire deep understanding of critical knowledge and concepts, enabling them to objectively analyze and make intelligent use of the avalanche of information that will come at them throughout their lives.
3. It personalizes education through mentoring and individual success plans, culminating in a capstone project requiring students to demonstrate mastery of key learning.

Under good circumstances, with proper funding, this plan would take several years to show results. I believe that the need for the reform provided for in this plan is so important for the welfare of our children, that funding should, at least, be provided to support the 25 school districts who have volunteered to begin planning. I encourage you to provide that funding.