



Testimony by Louise H. Feroe,
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Before the Education Committee
Monday, March 9, 2009

Good afternoon, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Connecticut State University System (CSUS) in support of Senate Bill 944, *An Act Concerning a Plan for Academic and Personal Success For Every Middle and High School Student*.

At the Connecticut State University System, it is our view, as has been reflected in numerous national studies, that the most important factor in ensuring that students are academically successful in college is the quality and intensity of their high school curriculum. Satisfactory completion of a rigorous high school curriculum, taken in an appropriate sequence, is by far the most relevant determining factor in admission, persistence and completion of a college degree.

The State Board of Education's interest in strengthening the educational rigor of the program of study for students attending Connecticut public schools is, therefore, to be commended. Specifically, the proposal to increase the credit load to 25 will mean that every student in every Connecticut school district – regardless of the financial means of the student or community – will have access to an enriched educational experience. The proposed requirement for core courses such as algebra I, geometry, and biology will help to reduce the need for remedial course work when students enter our universities or the community colleges. This will save Connecticut's students time and money, and make college success more likely.

Consistent with this approach, the Connecticut State University System has already embarked on an effort to emphasize the academic skills necessary for college-level work. Having greater expectations for our high school students, and encouraging standards that will make them more likely to be college-ready and workforce-ready, is not only good for the students, it is good for our state. The proposed high school reform would be a major step in that direction. I should also mention that another bill before you, (House Bill 6569, *An Act Concerning Reporting of School Graduation Rates*) which is concerned with the number of high school students who drop out before completion, is also worthy of consideration. Simply put, Connecticut cannot afford to lose these young people, and we believe that by working together we can keep more of them in school, not only to complete high school, but to continue beyond.

Connecticut is not alone in looking seriously at all of these issues. Educational systems across the nation are devising better ways to respond to a recognized need to increase college participation and success. These efforts are driven in part by changing demographics, and this is certainly true in Connecticut and New England, as has been pointed out in the Nellie Mae Foundation's study, "New England 2020: A Forecast of Educational Attainment and its Implications for the Workforce of New England States" (Nellie Mae Education Foundation, June 2006).

In addition, the National High School Center's paper, "Preparing High School Students for Successful Transitions to Postsecondary Education and Employment," highlighted the issue. It found that students — including those with previously low achievement levels — who take more rigorous, academically intense programs in high school will enroll and persist in

postsecondary education at higher rates than similar students who pursue less challenging courses of study (Adelman, 2006; Oakes & Saunders, 2007). Put simply, students rise to our expectations.

Importantly, many students who enter the workforce immediately upon high school graduation now need the same level of skills and knowledge as students entering college (Kline & Williams, 2007). College readiness and workforce readiness are converging. High school graduates entering the workforce need to be able to comprehend what they read, they need to be able to write clearly, and be familiar with the logical thinking required for abstract math, because to be successful, they will need to be problem solvers. High school must prepare them. Therefore, it is important to create a culture of high standards with consistent, school-wide messages about the standards needed for postsecondary success (Schneider, 2006; The Education Trust, 2005) – whether that be college entrance or workplace readiness.

Concern that students' high school experiences are disconnected from the expectations of postsecondary educational institutions and employers has prompted calls to strengthen the connections across the education continuum, from pre-K through college. Such a change would engage elected leaders, education officials at both the K–12 and college levels, and business executives, among others.

One such response is the American Diploma Project, in which states – including Connecticut – have committed to an ambitious agenda with four goals:

- Aligning high school standards with postsecondary and workplace expectations
- Upgrading high school course requirements so that students take a college- and work-ready curriculum
- Streamlining assessment systems so the tests that high school students take serve as readiness tests for college and the workforce, and
- Holding both high schools and postsecondary institutions accountable for student success.

In our view, the proposed plan for academic and personal success for all Connecticut students should also include a world language component, as well as successful completion of Algebra 2, but as proposed it does provide an important start that our state can build on.

We will continue to be supportive in our efforts to align learning goals for students in high school with what is necessary for success in college. There is no more important investment in our state and our nation than preparing all of our children to be productive and thoughtful citizens.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of this important education reform.

Your consideration of this testimony is greatly appreciated. Please feel free to contact Jill E. Ferraiolo, Associate Vice Chancellor for Government Relations/Communications, should you require any additional information or have any questions regarding these matters.



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