



Testimony
by Chancellor David G. Carter
Connecticut State University System
Before the Education Committee
March 15, 2010

Good afternoon, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. I am David Carter, Chancellor of the Connecticut State University System, here today to testify regarding House Bill 5489, *An Act Concerning Secondary School Reform*.

I applaud your efforts on the Committee in tackling what is perhaps the most critical issue of our time – assuring that our students have the education they will need to succeed. This is an effort we have already joined wholeheartedly, and we look forward to working with you to accomplish important objectives for our students and our state.

Let me first offer you some context about the Connecticut State University System (CSUS). This year, for the first time in our history, CSUS set all-time records for the number of full-time undergraduate and full-time graduate students in the same year. Our total enrollment now exceeds 36,000, and 93 percent of our students are from Connecticut. Most important for this discussion, especially when so many of Connecticut's young people are leaving our state, is the fact that 86 percent of our graduates stay in Connecticut after graduation, to pursue their careers, raise families and contribute to the economic vitality and quality of life in Connecticut.

We also take tremendous pride in the Dual Admission program we launched with the Connecticut Community Colleges, which will save students both time and money, and the work we are doing with the business community. We are taking concrete steps to develop academic programs that respond specifically to their needs, and their concerns. Engineering and nursing are two fields that come to mind, environmental sustainability and science are two others – and there are countless more examples.

Now, to the matter at hand. Just 16 months ago, the national education organizations *Achieve* and *The Ed Trust* issued a report that raised serious questions and issued critical challenges. The report found that "America's young people are being woefully underprepared for life after high school. While the importance of postsecondary education and training has never been greater, four of every 10 college students need to take remedial courses. Among African-American and Latino students, that number rises to six out of 10. And sadly, students who take remedial courses in college are much more likely to drop out. This preparation gap is taking a real toll on our high school graduates, and on our economy and society as a whole."

That report concluded by pointing out that "There will be people who question whether or not students can rise to the occasion if standards are raised; some will dispute whether or not they need to be raised to begin with. There will be concerns about the K-12 system's capacity to deliver the teaching, curriculum, and support necessary for students to meet the new standards. There will be questions about the state versus district role in areas such as graduation requirements and curriculum. And there will be challenges in getting K-12 and higher education to work together."

But *The Ed Trust* has also highlighted some illuminating success stories and statistics, especially as you consider the bill before you. They found that when challenged with rigorous courses, even low achieving students, often in poor, urban districts not only do better, but thrive academically. The schools pursuing such strategies “provide a rich curriculum coupled with strong, focused instruction. They have high expectations for all students.” They also discuss the need for alignment across the education continuum. They found that a challenging curriculum results in lower failure rates, even for the lowest achievers. They found that a rigorous high school curriculum great increases bachelor’s degree completion for all students. In other words, if we work together, and set the bar high, we can make a difference for *all* students. That is a lesson that should not be lost on any of us.

It is an issue that we are addressing. We are seeing solid results with our Bridges program, which specifically deals with college readiness and establishes academic connections between our universities and local high schools, as well as middle schools. Many of you are familiar with this initiative, which began at Western and is now being implemented at each of the universities, in response to specific local needs. For example, Western, working with Danbury and Bethel since 2005, has seen a reduction of 53% in participating students requiring remediation in math and 90% in those students requiring remediation in writing. The percentage of students placing into writing remedial courses, among those in the Bridges program, dropped from 61% in FY2005 to 6% in FY2009.

We believe these initiatives are especially important.

All of which brings me to this bill, and the proposal to strengthen high school graduation requirements. The bill certainly moves in the right direction, and responds to the challenges we face. Numerous national studies underscore that the most important factor ensuring that students are academically successful in college is the quality and intensity of the high school curriculum, and even academic work before high school. Satisfactory completion of an array of rigorous courses taken in an appropriate sequence is by far the most determining factor for admission, persistence and completion of a college degree. Educational systems across the nation are addressing these issues, and Connecticut would ignore this at its own peril. I know this is a subject that this committee takes very seriously, and I commend you for your commitment.

Let me assure you, you are not alone in advocating new requirements to help our students succeed. I am very pleased to report that the Board of Trustees of CSUS is also moving forward to address these issues. Through Bridges and other initiatives with local school districts and other key constituents, our goal is to assure that more of our students, whatever their backgrounds, are prepared for college level studies.

In fact, the CSUS Board of Trustees voted last year to strengthen the academic admission standards for our institutions – Central, Eastern, Southern and Western Connecticut State Universities. These new standards are scheduled to become effective in 2015. By doing so, we will not only be helping our students academically but financially, saving them money by reducing the need for remedial classes, improving retention, and increasing our graduation rates.

Let me outline our new requirements, and point out where they differ slightly with what is proposed in this legislation. The new CSUS requirements include:

- 4 years of English, including composition
- 4 years of Mathematics, including Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra 2
- 3 years of Science, including two laboratory science courses

- 3 years of Social Studies, with U.S. History required
- 2 years of World Languages
- 1 year of coursework in the arts

Some differences, for the record:

- This bill requires three credits in social studies with at least one-half credit in civics and American Government.
- The bill you are considering would require an additional humanities elective, and additional STEM elective, two career/life skill credits, and a demonstration project, as well as physical education and health.

The bottom line is this. Both the plan approved by our Board of Trustees and the plan you are considering would benefit our students and ultimately our state. Our requirements are scheduled to being in 2015. Requirements pursuant to this bill commence with classes graduating in 2017 and 2018.

We recognize that local districts cannot make these changes overnight. Our new admissions standards were approved in such a way as to allow them time to revise course offerings and graduation requirements as necessary. Action by the state should certainly do the same.

In fact, the Danbury Board of Education has formed a committee that will be reviewing a proposal, now being finalized by the Superintendent's Office, which would both strengthen the overall graduation requirements and make the course requirements much more explicit, especially in the areas of math, lab science and world language. In the proposal, Danbury would be moving toward requirements that would be consistent with the admission recommendations of the Connecticut State University System as well as the proposal by the State Department of Education.

In our view, the academic standards we have established and those that you are considering will provide what students need to succeed, in college and in life. As you proceed, I would anticipate that the CSUS Board of Trustees would be receptive to revisions to our plans in order to be in alignment, if the requirements you adopt are more rigorous. We look forward to working with you as this bill moves through the legislative process.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.