

March 15, 2010

Testimony

H. B. 5489: An Act Concerning Secondary School Reform

Dear Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee:

Hello, my name is Kim Yannon and I am President of Connecticut Music Educators Association, a 25-year veteran of the teaching profession and a music education doctoral candidate at the University of Hartford. I am excited for the opportunities this legislation will afford to engineer educational experiences that will more effectively prepare our students for the challenges of the 21st century workplace. Although I love this profession, it is true that education has historically been reactionary in its growth and development. We reacted to the launching of Sputnik in 1957 by increasing students' accountability in math and science. We reacted to "A Nation at Risk" by instituting outcome-based education, standards-based education and, most recently, high stakes standardized testing. We have a chance here to be proactive: to create reform that is forward-looking and that will put into place the necessary configuration of curricula that will prepare our students for a workplace which will demand skills beyond the 3-R's. As coined by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, students will need skill training in the 4-C's: collaboration, critical thinking/problem solving, communication and creativity/innovation. While the arts do not have a monopoly on teaching the 4-C's, nor should they, the emphasis on high stakes testing in other core areas and the effect that emphasis has had on curriculum makes the arts uniquely positioned to deliver this training.

In his article *Creativity, Content and Policy*, Samuel Hope states that "...there is a strong connection between the type of thinking necessary for creative work in the arts and the type of thinking necessary for creative work in other fields". Of the 12 "understandings" held by those trained in creativity, according to Hope, the most relevant to this discussion today is the following:

The more I learn, the more fluent I become with various frameworks and languages and the more sophisticated I am in understanding the work of others, the more I can see that many problems have multiple solutions and the better I am able to deal with complexity.

In developing the National Standards in Music Education, MENC, Music Educators National Conference, held as one of its goals for standards-based education in the arts to help students become proficient in the language of the arts: to help them communicate as artists in at least one of the four fine arts areas: visual art, music, theater and dance. As most states, including Connecticut, have arts curricula based on the National Standards, students are becoming fluent in the framework and language of the arts.

Increasingly, colleges and universities are recognizing the importance of the 4-C's and have made the necessary changes to include study in the arts as a requirement for admission. These include, most recently, our own Connecticut State University system.

In their article, *Teaching for Creativity: towards sustainable and replicable pedagogical practice*, Erica McWilliams and Shane Dawson speak about the higher education shift towards creativity as central to research and teaching:

The complex questions of the future will not be solved "by the book," but by creative, forward-looking individuals and groups who are not afraid to question established ideas and are able to cope with the insecurity and uncertainty that this entails.

Samuel Hope also speaks about the disconnect between what we instinctively know is best for students and the policies instituted that make what *should* be done all but impossible. He reminds us that goals bring requirements for achieving them. If our goal is to better prepare students to succeed in the 21st century, the requirement is that we demand of them study in the core areas which will best prepare them. Requiring arts education for high school completion makes educational sense and is a forward-thinking approach to high school reform.

We ask that you support the proposed matrix including one dedicated credit in the arts requirement for graduation, that the matrix remains an intact proposal and that no reform would impact a student's desire to study music for all four years of high school.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Yannon