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Subject: S.B. 438, S.B. 440, H.B. 5490, H.B. 5491, H.B. 5493

3/15/10

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

The following are the positions of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) on five bills that are on the agenda of the Education Committee's public hearing on 3/15/10.

S.B. 438 - An Act Concerning Charter Schools and Open Choice Program Funding

CAPSS supports the major increase in per pupil Open Choice Program Funding that is called for by this bill. We regard Open Choice as an effective means for breaking down public school student racial isolation but for the Program to have the appeal that it needs to have to exert a significant impact, school districts who receive students from other districts need to receive more in per pupil funding than is presently the case. The reason for this is twofold. First, some students who are received from other districts have program needs that cost more than the present per-pupil allotment. Second, if districts are to make available a significant number of slots for students from other districts, the receiving districts will need to increase teaching staff thus incurring a cost that is most of the time not covered by the present per-pupil allotment.

H.B. 5490 - An Act Concerning the Minimum Budget Requirement

CAPSS favors the retention in place of what has been for many years the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) because the alteration of only one facet of the state's system for funding public schooling outside of a comprehensive review of the entire system will not only not solve basic problems but will also make that more difficult the solving of those problems. The more that we engage in a patchwork approach to solving educational funding issues, the more we make more problematic the review of an entire system which has serious dysfunctions. The time has come for a thorough review of the entire system both in terms of the spending side and the revenue side. Simply adjusting and/or eliminating the MBR falls far short of doing what needs to be done.

H.B. 5491 - An Act Concerning Certain School District Reforms to Reduce the Achievement Gap in Connecticut

This bill contains two provisions that are difficult to reconcile under one legislative purpose.

1. CAPSS supports the inclusion of student learning data as a factor in the evaluation of public school teachers and principals. The most basic purpose of schooling is to teach students what they need to know

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and be able to do to be successful once they leave the schooling situation. To evaluate teachers and principals without reference to student learning makes little sense.

So that the inclusion of student learning in the evaluation of teachers and principals can be an effective means of improving both programs and instruction, however, the following components need to be incorporated with the evaluation system.

- Student learning needs to be viewed from the perspective of a growth model. It is only fair that teachers and principals be assessed only on how much progress students make while those students are under their care.
- Growth models have to be more sophisticated than the *one year's growth in one year* approach. Different students learn at different paces when learning different things at different points in their lives. So, the *one year's growth in one year* approach has two shortcomings.
 1. Students who are capable of achieving more than what is considered one year's growth in one year but who only achieve one year's growth are considered inaccurately as being indicators of success.
 2. Students who need more than one year to achieve what is considered one year's growth in achievement are considered inaccurately as being indicators of failure.

In other words, the relationship between time and achievement has to be so constructed that achievement is the constant and time is the variable.

- Achievement has to be measured via multiple means.
2. The bill would establish a system whereby the parents of children who attend schools whose students do not make sufficient progress on standardized tests in a specified number of years in a row could by virtue of a 51% petition put before the local board of education one of the school improvement strategies that are specified in federal statutes and regulations. In such cases, local boards would not be obligated to accept the parent petitioned preference but would be obligated to hold a public hearing if they chose to implement an improvement strategy that is different from the one petitioned by the parents.

CAPSS opposes this provision of this bill for the following reasons.

- A. The process mandated by the bill has no place in it for the superintendents of schools. Yet, it is the superintendents who have the readiest access to the data upon which informed decisions regarding improvement strategies need to be based and who will be required to implement whatever strategies are finally chosen.
- B. The process has a great potential to establish the kind of adversarial climate in which no improvement strategy has any great chance of being successful. In addition to potential conflicts between the parents and staff at the schools in question, there is potential conflict between parents of schools in need of improvement and parents of other schools in the district and there is potential

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