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*Testimony of Mary Loftus Levine, CEA Director of Policy and
Professional Practice*

Before the Education Committee on March 1, 2010

*Raised Bill No. 275, LCO No. 1387
An Act Concerning Staff Qualifications for School Readiness Programs
for 2015*

and

*Raised Bill No. 279, LCO No. 1389
An Act Concerning Foreign Languages Taught in Public Schools*

My name is Mary Loftus Levine, and I am the Director of Policy and Professional Practice for the Connecticut Education Association, representing over 40,000 educators in our great public schools. I am here to testify against Raised Bill No. 275 regarding the staff qualification's bill.

As educators, we understand the importance of school readiness programs not only for our students as a proven way to close the achievement gap, but for the economic future of our state. Just last week, I watched an interview by Charlie Rose on the latest in brain research on infant and toddler learning regarding language development. We know that for example, children can learn not only their native language but multiple languages before age 3 far more easily than not only an adult but even faster than a teenager, because of the way are brains are wired.

The economist Richard Rothstein (former education columnist for the New York Times) recently reported a study which compared the language development of children of college educated parents to those who are in non-college educated homes. This study shows that the level of vocabulary and the number of words a child hears as an infant and toddler has a direct correlation to that child's achievement levels by third grade. All other research clearly shows it is far more economical to put dollars into early childhood now than into remediation, and in the worst case scenario, into incarceration facilities later - where large percentages of inmates never had the opportunity to even learn to read.

But what has Connecticut done?

Since 2003, Connecticut has been “kicking the can down the road” further and further. In fact last year, the date to require teachers to be certified in early childhood or hold a bachelor’s degree was pushed to 2015. This bill now makes that situation even worse by lowering this requirement even further. If this bill were to pass, only 50% of a preschool staff would be required to have these credentials by 2015.

I would also like to draw your attention to our State Board of Education’s recently adopted February 3, 2010 Position Statement on Early Childhood Education which I have attached, particularly the 8th bullet: “Young children learn best from highly qualified teachers with specific training to effectively address the unique learning needs of young children.”

This bill makes it more and more impossible for us to ever close the achievement gap, to compete internationally with countries where high quality preschool is a right, to say nothing of how further weakening our early childhood education policy contributes to our poor Connecticut economy.

For all these reasons we ask that you not support Raised Bill No. 275.

However, I am here to testify in favor of Raised Bill No. 279 which increases the minimum high school graduation credit requirement to twenty-two from twenty by adding not fewer than two credits in world languages.

We also are in favor of the flexibility this bill allows for students to meet these requirements, but caution you on the lack of standards in lines 62-63 regarding the use of on-line coursework. We are in favor of on-line courses and have worked collaboratively with the Connecticut Consortium for Online Learning and with the Virtual High School in Massachusetts.

We suggest the bill be amended to reflect best practices and to ensure courses are taken from legitimate, high quality providers, ideally with on-site mentors at the student’s high school to provide the support needed for many students to be successful with online education.

Thank you.

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

**Position Statement on
Early Childhood Education**

February 3, 2010

The State Board of Education is committed to high-quality early childhood education that provides children with the foundation for future success. This vision for early learning is aligned with the stated goals for Connecticut's young children and described within: *Ready by Five, Fine by Nine: Connecticut's Early Childhood Systems Framework*. Acknowledging that early learning takes place in a variety of settings the Board envisions comprehensive, integrated programs and services for all children, regardless of where they are enrolled. This will ensure that young children will be physically and emotionally healthy and well prepared for life in a global society. In order to realize this vision, the Board will advance policies and provide guidance to strengthen connections between preschool, kindergarten and the primary grades based on the following key principles:

- School districts should take a leadership role in sharing curricular resources and expertise with the greater early childhood community.
- Young children learn best in high-quality environments that recognize children's individual rates of growth and development and utilize a wide variety of developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant teaching strategies. These strategies must address all areas of development, including the personal and social, creative expression, physical and cognitive domains.
- Early learning across developmental domains and content areas is interrelated; young children's development in each domain does not occur in isolation.
- Families are essential partners in the education of young children and should be involved in early childhood programs in meaningful and culturally relevant ways.
- Curricula are based upon clear, consistent early learning standards and the use of assessment to guide instruction.
- Early childhood programs should celebrate diversity and promote a sense of belonging, positive relationships and high expectations for all children, including those with disabilities and those who are English language learners.
- Strong partnerships between preschool and elementary education promote aligned and coordinated educational practices and support transitions between grade levels and programs.
- * • Young children learn best from highly qualified teachers with specific training to effectively address the unique learning needs of young children.
- Communities should strive to make affordable, high-quality preschool accessible for all young children.

The State Board of Education believes that in order to close Connecticut's achievement gap, state- and publicly-supported early childhood programs must join forces to meet the needs of our youngest learners. All early childhood stakeholders must address the achievement gap early in order to maximize success for all students. Children's earliest years build the crucial foundation for later school achievement and success in adulthood.

