



Testimony by Acting Chancellor Louise H. Feroe
Connecticut State University System
Before the Education Committee
March 7, 2011

Good afternoon, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. I am Louise Feroe, Acting Chancellor of the Connecticut State University System (CSUS) and I regret that I am unable to appear before you today. I do, however, wish to submit comments regarding House Bill 6498, *An Act Concerning School Districts*.

In recent years, the Connecticut State University System has applauded the efforts of this 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 stand ready to work with you to accomplish important objectives for our students and our state.

The sections of this bill that address graduation requirements, however, remind me of the concept of “justice delayed is justice denied.” In this case, it is ‘tougher graduation requirements delayed, opportunity denied.’ Although I recognize the fiscal realities, I simply do not believe that Connecticut students, and Connecticut, can afford to delay.

You are very familiar with the need. That is what prompted your action to raise standards in each of the past two sessions. The need has not changed, and it has not diminished. We see that with every class of students that enter our universities. And as you know, 93 percent of our students are Connecticut students.

Connecticut is not alone. About two years 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 greatly 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. For example, 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, saw a reduction of 53% in participating students requiring remediation in math and a reduction of 90% in those students requiring remediation in writing – in just a few years.

But our universities, and colleges and universities collectively, cannot right this ship alone, even with the collaboration of school districts and individual schools that are more than willing to help.

This needs to be done across the board, across the state. This committee recognized that when it set 2018 as the target date. The Board of Trustees of the Connecticut State University System recognized that when they set 2015 as the date for new, strengthened admission standards to take effect for our four universities – Central, Eastern, Southern and Western. That schedule has not changed.

In fact, we have already begun sharing those new requirements with school districts and guidance counselors throughout Connecticut. And we have begun to see some school districts, cognizant of the fact that change is coming, begin to revise their graduation requirements consistent with our new admission standards, and the anticipated new state requirements.

Delaying the effective date may serve to slow that process, and let another year, or two, of students slip by without having the necessary level of college readiness. I don't believe that is a signal we ought to be sending. And I do not believe it is in Connecticut's long-term best interest. 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. And we look forward to working with them to achieve these goals. In fact, just last week, we worked with a teacher in Enfield who had some specific questions regarding our requirements in Mathematics.

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 delay at its own peril.

I am certainly well aware of the budgetary pressures faced by local schools, and local municipalities, but as an educator, I am also aware of this: when students are ready for college level work from day one, we are not only helping them succeed academically but financially, saving them money by reducing the need for remedial classes, improving retention, and increasing our graduation rates. Most of all, we are preparing our students to succeed for a lifetime.

I hope that this information is helpful in your deliberations on this bill. Please contact Jill E. Ferraiolo if you have any questions or require any additional information regarding this matter.