



Testimony of  
Mary Loftus Levine  
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Before the Education Committee  
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**Connecticut Education  
Association**

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Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Mary Loftus Levine. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association, representing 43,000 active and retired teachers, as well as our student program. Today I am testifying on several bills before you.

**Raised Bill No. 5348**

**AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL NURSES AND SCHOOL  
MEDICAL ADVISORS**

CEA supports this bill and its goals of providing all students access to a school nurse, addressing the issue of professional development and training for our school nurses, and redefining and updating the roles and responsibilities of a school medical advisor. CEA's recently released document, "A View from the Classroom," speaks to the importance of wrap-around services to improve the health and quality of life of our students. This bill does just that. We ask that you support it.

**Raised Bill No. 5350**

**AN ACT CONCERNING ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL LITERACY  
BY GRADE THREE**

CEA strongly supports efforts to improve literacy and strengthening our ability to teach reading. We applaud whoever brought the bill forward. It is long overdue. We agree with focusing our attention on doing everything we can to improve literacy, providing children with all the resources needed to be able to read at grade level, helping our schools develop great reading programs, creating links to appropriate pre-service training and effective professional development training for all staff.

We suggest however that potentially retaining a child for multiple years, mandating summer school, creating more tests, not being specific about standards for teaching credentials, and demanding that all teachers pass a test while not defining training necessary to pass them are all counter productive strategies to the very goals this bill seeks to achieve.

We suggest a more collaborative approach, talking to the experts, and reframing the strategies to ones we know will work and are feasible, sensible, more clearly defined and research based. CEA and its members stand ready to help make our shared dreams a reality.

**Raised Bill No. 5352**

**AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING**

The title of this bill sounds great...another catchy title, but we have no idea what it means, and would venture to say neither does anyone else, except whoever proposed it.

Thus, we remain neutral on this bill. It seems to be an "inside baseball" bill as evidenced by lines 36-44, whereby superintendents and their association "conduct meetings" with the department of education, and in isolation, develop proposals.

What is more frightening is the concept in lines 45 - 48, whereby "the commissioner may waive any provision of the general statutes or any regulation adopted by the State Board of Education that exhibits the implementation of a plan described in an approved proposal submitted pursuant to subsection (a) of this section.

In short, what is meant by "student-centered learning? And why would this state give \$50,000 to ten districts for such an undefined, non-transparent unknown, non research based, open ended experiment? Surely, we can do better when we all in a financial crisis. In closing, we are tired of this year's trend of slogans substituting for real transformative strategies bills requiring more and more high stakes testing, driven by economically powerful special interest groups. We cannot afford to drive a stake through the heart of the one system that is what made America great and equalized our citizenry - a free democratic and equitable public education for all of Connecticut's children based on transparent and well developed sustainable research based systemic reform.

**Raised Bill No. 300**

**AN ACT CONCERNING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

CEA is once again concerned with this bill's stated standards and credentials for those teaching and working with our youngest and most vulnerable students. We do not support the qualifications as outlined in this bill. See Section 1, (b), (2), (A) - (C), (3), and (4).

However, we are supportive of attempting to establish universal access to preschool. We draw your attention to CEA's document, "A View from the Classroom," which provides research to substantiate that such an investment creates a financial return of 11 to 1.

Providing true universal access to preschool opportunity is the best investment in a proven strategy to begin to close our achievement gap.

Raised Bill No. 303

**AN ACT CONCERNING BOARDS OF EDUCATION**

Although it appears the requirement for training is restored in this bill, CEA has serious concerns about the elimination of democratic elections, the lack of transparency in subsequent local board of education appointments by the commissioner, and the power to control a school system vested totally in one person. Excluding the voters and thus the community, and replacing democratic elections with a top down approach, further weakens what we need for real change to occur - community involvement and empowerment.

This is a dangerous road to embark on. Nation building has never worked for our country and we suspect the same top down, command and control system won't solve the very real problems of poverty and lack of resources in our poorest communities either. We must rethink this bill.