

**Testimony in Support of  
S.B. 24: An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness**

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Education Committee

February 21, 2012

Dear Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee,

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

**First, we applaud the plan to move forward on the creation of a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS),<sup>1</sup>** and we are excited about and grateful for the \$5 million in funding for the TQRIS that the Governor has proposed in his budget. The TQRIS is an important tool for parents and providers to increase the quality of early care and education options for children. High quality early care programs help close the preparation gap for low-income children, and are a critical part of closing the racial and economic achievement gaps in Connecticut. A TQRIS enables child care providers to be recognized and compensated for increased quality, creating incentives for greater quality in all programs. Furthermore, a TQRIS will provide transparency that empowers parents to choose higher quality options for their children. Finally, our timely implementation of such a system should make us more competitive for future federal funding if it becomes available.

While we support moving forward quickly on designing and implementing the TQRIS, we emphasize that the TQRIS is only one element of the broader coordinated and comprehensive early care and education system Connecticut is designing under PA 11-181, *An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education and the Establishment of a Coordinated System of Early Care and Education and Child Development*, which passed last session. We believe that we are most likely to achieve a functioning early care and education system if all of the elements of such a system are designed and/or reformed pursuant to a coordinated plan, rather than developed piecemeal. We continue to support P.A. 11-181 and reiterate our hope that the planning director whom it calls for (a position half-funded by philanthropy) will be hired quickly, so that the process can move forward in coordination with the development of the TQRIS.

**Second, we fully support this bill's inclusion of full-day kindergarten as a remedy for struggling school districts.<sup>2</sup>** Research finds that children in full-day kindergarten experience

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<sup>1</sup> SB 24, Sec 35

<sup>2</sup> SB 24, Sec 18(4)(e)

considerably greater academic gains than their peers in half-day kindergarten<sup>3</sup> and these benefits are particularly strong for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> In light of these significant benefits for all children and especially those with the greatest need, we would suggest the state consider making full-day kindergarten universally accessible and mandatory.

**Finally, we laud the access to competitive funding for districts to better align curriculum between preschool and kindergarten.**<sup>5</sup> We would recommend broadening the scope to cover curricular alignment from preschool through grade three, as research shows significant benefits to children from alignment across this wider time frame. In particular, carrying forward quality enhancements, common organizational structure, and coherent academic and social goals from pre-k through elementary school helps reduce the “fade-out” of benefits from quality preschool experiences.<sup>6</sup>

We caution that alignment must be designed with full awareness of the stages of child development. Curricula must be developmentally appropriate for each age of children, and should recognize the extensively documented social and academic benefits to play-based learning for young children.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, while infants and toddlers would not be included in districts’ academic alignment, we ask that our youngest children not be forgotten. The most extensive brain development occurs between birth and age three.<sup>8</sup> Research shows that it is critical to provide quality early care experiences for our youngest children, especially those most at-risk, to support and enhance this brain development, which forms the basis for future learning.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Lee, Burkam, Honigman, & Meisels, “Full-Day vs. Half-Day Kindergarten: Which Children Learn More in Which Program?” *American Journal of Education*, 112, (February 2006), 29, available at: [http://school.elps.k12.mi.us/kindergarten-study/Full-Half\\_U\\_of\\_M\\_study\\_V\\_Lee\\_et\\_al.pdf](http://school.elps.k12.mi.us/kindergarten-study/Full-Half_U_of_M_study_V_Lee_et_al.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See Ackerman, Barnett, and Robin, “Making the Most of Kindergarten: Present Trends and Future Issues in the Provision of Full-day Programs” NIEER, (March 2005), 8, available at: <http://nieer.org/resources/policyreports/report4.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> SB 24, Sec. 4(7)(a)

<sup>6</sup> See Rima Shore, “The Case for Investing in PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Education: Challenging Myths about School Reform,” *Foundation for Child Development* (January 2009), 6-7, available at: <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/TheCaseForInvesting-ChallengingMyths.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Miller, Edward, Almon, Joan, “Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School,” (College Park, MD: Alliance for Childhood), 2009, available at: [http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/kindergarten\\_report.pdf](http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/kindergarten_report.pdf), and Edward Zigler; and Sandra Bishop-Josef “Play under siege: A historical overview” *Zero to Three*, 30(1): 4-11

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. “From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development,” (Washington, DC: National Academy Press), 2009

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Masse, L. and Barnett, W.S., A Benefit Cost Analysis of the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention (2002); Karoly et al., Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise (2005); Heckman et al., The Effect of the Perry Preschool Program on the Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills of its Participants (2009)