



Testimony before the Education Committee
Re: S.B. 24 – An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness – Early Childhood
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Executive Director
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The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance (Alliance) would like to thank Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and distinguished members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify regarding *S.B. 24 – An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness*. The Alliance is a statewide advocacy and membership organization committed to improving outcomes for all children, birth to age eight, in the areas of early learning, health, safety, and economic security.

The Alliance applauds the Governor for proposing \$5 million in bonding in his budget to create a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS). This bill addresses TQRIS in Section 35. A TQRIS creates transparency and provides a tool for parents to choose quality early care settings for their children. A TQRIS will provide guidelines for providers, which will create a pathway to increase quality and workforce compensation. As the Governor stated in this budget address, one reason why Connecticut did not win the Race to the Top –Early Learning Challenge Fund was the lack of a TQRIS, which is in place in some other states. Implementation of a TQRIS should make Connecticut more competitive for future federal funding.

While the Alliance supports 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 in the 2011 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. The Alliance continues to support P.A. 11-181 and reiterates 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.

The Alliance also supports the bills call for full-day kindergarten as an optional remedy for schools that are failing (Section 18). Research demonstrates that children enrolled in fall-day kindergarten do better academically than peers enrolled in half-day kindergarten.

We also support the inclusion of alignment of curriculum between preschool and kindergarten as one option under conditional funding for high-need school districts (Section 4 (7) (a)). We recommend that the Committee consider expanding this effort to align preschool through grade 3. Alignment through grade 3, research shows, results in better student achievement, particularly reading at grade level by grade 3.



While we acknowledge that this section of the bill addresses alignment at the district level, we cannot forget the importance of supporting the development of our youngest children. Mounds of brain research demonstrate that learning begins at birth. From birth, all children need language-rich, developmentally-appropriate, stimulating environments that encourage brain development, language, early literacy skills, and social-emotional competence. This is the foundation for strong academic achievement. By age 3, the brain has reached 80% of its complete growth and has made more than 1 trillion neuron connections. The earliest years are the most vital and what happens during that time can alter the path to success. Investing in providers caring for our youngest children is imperative to ensure children are ready for preschool so that they can flourish in kindergarten and succeed in learning and in life.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.