

TESTIMONY OF LOUIS W. BACH
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY
MONDAY, MARCH 5TH 2012

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Louis W. Bach and I'm testifying on behalf of the Connecticut Business and Industry Association. CBIA's 10,000 member companies are among the world's most innovative and productive. The work of this committee is important in ensuring that Connecticut's students receive a world-class education and are ready to compete in the 21st-century global economy.

CBIA supports a comprehensive approach to education reform in the state as outlined in the Governor's reform bill, recently brought before this committee. Indeed, proposals like HB-5351 are included in SB- 24 already. The Governor's bill provides a framework for the type of broad-based effort we need to improve overall student performance in Connecticut and to close our worst-in-the-nation achievement gap.

SB-24 is a well constructed and well thought out piece of legislation, and its components are interdependent. For this reason, our support for some of the measures being heard today reflects our support for concepts to be included in a broader system of reforms. We would also recommend modifying one of the bills before the committee today. CBIA is pleased to comment on the proposals below, but we maintain our commitment to seeing these and other equally critical measures become law under a comprehensive reform bill.

HB-5351 AAC Vocational-Technical Schools. Connecticut's independent technical high schools have been an undervalued asset in our state's system of public education, yet they continue to produce graduates with impressive academic, professional, and trade skills. The schools of the Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS) are unique in their mission, outstanding in their results, and they deserve our support.

This proposal designed to improve and strengthen the system is a welcome sign from a legislature that clearly recognizes the system for what it is: a critical component of Connecticut's future educational success.

Providing the CTHSS with an independent governance board and a superintendent answerable to that body will ensure the system continues to excel as a model for technical instruction in the United States and the world. These steps make the state-wide system more responsive to industry needs and will allow the CTHSS more latitude to develop curriculum in concert with the private sector, as well as the Departments of Labor and Economic and Community Development.

Apart from turning out graduates with a very clear pride and professionalism, our state's technical high school system provides a quality education to students who graduate with both a high school diploma *and* a trade. It is encouraging to see attention paid to improving an already outstanding school system.

SB-305 AAC the Inclusion of Financial Management in the Public School Curriculum. Our state's students are the future drivers of our economy and this legislation would provide them the skills needed to maintain one of our nation's most significant competitive advantages: economic comprehension and management at the individual level.

When a diverse society provides people with both a liberal education and the broad freedom to perform as economic actors, spontaneity and innovation result. Our students need to know how to navigate the economic waters in order to make informed, individual decisions as market participants. This scenario produces an almost unlimited pool of ideas from which unforeseen and unforeseeable advancements may be realized.

As planned economies like China have succeeded in reverse engineering certain aspects of this country's free market system in order to grow economically, it is critically important that we instill in our young people a basic understanding of personal financial management so that they are able meet and beat the competition at our own game. No amount of central economic planning can compete with a vast array of educated individuals with the capacity and resources to make autonomous economic decisions.

HB-5350 AAC Achieving Universal Literacy By Grade Three. It is well known that by grade three, student learning is predicated on the ability to read. If a student is not reading at grade level by this time in his or her school career it becomes increasingly unlikely that they will ever catch up to their peers. Connecticut must emphasize reading curriculum and student literacy through the third grade and beyond.

Adopting a research-driven state reading program that includes early identification and intervention for children who are reading deficient will substantially help those students who – through inadequate reading instruction – begin to fall irreversibly behind after the third grade.

HB-5352 AAC Student-Centered Learning. As part of Connecticut's broader school reform effort, the need to realistically and fairly assess the providers and consumers of public education is a central tenet. Meaningful education reform requires connecting educator evaluations to student academic outcomes, but those outcomes must be in the context of students' individual needs and learning styles.

Student learning needs are widely varied and depend on many diverse factors. Understanding this, and tailoring instruction to those needs, will benefit both the educator and the student. This legislation furthers the effort to understand individual student learning needs and will help teachers identify how best to help their students.

HB-5356 AAC Bridges Between Public Schools and Institutions of Higher Education. As part of a larger effort to improve school performance, assisting priority schools in adopting common core standards is a sensible step. Our graduation rates among low-income students

hover around 60%. Those that enter the state system of higher education typically require remedial training and too often fail to complete their degree. This legislation would take strides towards fixing this trend.

SB-300 AAC Early Childhood Education. Children who arrive at Kindergarten having received some form of pre-K learning opportunity outperform their peers who have not had the same advantage. It is impossible to ignore the connection between a pre-K education and a successful student career.

CBIA's position has been that increased access to pre-K is a vital component of meaningful reform and that, done right, would be predicated on implementing a quality rating system and then expanding access within budgetary constraints.

Eligibility should be determined where a student's family income is at or below the poverty line, without respect to the student's geographic location or school district. Working with a quality rating model, parents may then choose an appropriate pre-school program for their child.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on these important matters.