

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
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Testimony Supporting Senate Bill No. 24

AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and distinguished members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill No. 24, AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS.

Governor Malloy is serious about eliminating the achievement gap and preparing Connecticut's students for college and career and its youngest students for Kindergarten. In order to do this, major education reform and an infusion of funding are needed. Since FY 2009, the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Grant has been flat funded, making any reform efforts to turn around student achievement difficult at best. Governor Malloy's budget infuses much needed funding in order to affect these reforms and increase student achievement. Funding is infused into the ECS formula as well as other funding streams for intensive change in the lowest achieving districts, for increasing teacher and leader performance and for early childhood access and quality.

For the 2012 legislative session, Governor Malloy has outlined six priorities for education reform which will help the state narrow the achievement gap and restore Connecticut as a model for academic excellence. These priorities were a road map to the legislation proposed in SB 24.

1. Enhance families' access to high-quality early childhood education opportunities

In order to affect meaningful change, reform must start at the preschool level. To that end, section 35 of this bill calls for the incorporation of a Tiered Quality Rating and Information System (TQRIS), this will improve early childhood program quality and inform parents about the quality of early childhood programs. In an effort to continue the consolidation of early childhood programs called for in Public Act 11-181, the Governor is recommending the reallocation of Connecticut Charts-a-Course funding from the Department of Social Services (DSS) to the State Department of Education (SDE) as another step to build a coordinated early childhood system (sections 12 and 13

of Senate Bill 30 – An Act Implementing Provisions of the Budget Concerning Human Services).

To increase access to quality school readiness programs, the Governor’s budget includes:

- \$4 million in funding for an additional five hundred school readiness slots;
- \$5 million in bond funds for early childhood education facility improvements;
- \$5 million in bond funds to develop the Tiered Quality Rating and Information System (TQRIS) for Early Childhood; and
- \$3 million in professional development and incentives for using the new system.

2. Authorize the intensive interventions and enable the supports necessary to turn around Connecticut’s lowest-performing schools and districts

Sections 6 and 18 create a “Commissioner’s Network” of the lowest performing schools and the recommended budget includes \$24.8 million for its implementation. Comprised of the lowest performing schools, the network would position SDE to intervene in and provide support to low performing schools. Teachers and school leaders in network schools would be eligible for significant compensation and other incentives to work – and remain – in turnaround schools. These incentives could include signing bonuses and pay increments in return for minimum length of service.

3. Expand the availability of high-quality school models, including traditional schools, magnets, charters, and others

This bill and the Governor’s budget includes additional funding to expand and replicate high quality school models, including charter, magnet and CommPACT schools. Section 7 integrates charter school funding into the ECS appropriation to ensure financial security for these schools. The recommended budget includes:

- Additional funding to implement section 7 of this bill that increases the state per-pupil Charter School grant from the current \$9,400 to \$11,000 per-pupil as well as expand the number of slots for charter schools. This section also establishes a municipal share of \$1,000 per student that a sending district would pay to charter schools that its resident students choose to attend;
- \$5 million to fund an increase in the per pupil grants for non-Sheff magnet schools per section 13 of this bill, which would begin to phase in parity for those magnet schools with the Sheff magnet schools;
- \$750,000 for the Vocational Agriculture Program to support a new competitive grant per section 34 that aims to increase the number of students coming from Priority School Districts (PSDs) while also increasing overall enrollment; and

- Increased funding of \$7 million for compliance with the Sheff settlement through the reallocation of \$5 million from the Interdistrict Cooperation grant, plus \$2 million in additional state funding in order to reach the FY 2013 desegregation requirement of 80 percent of Hartford students' demand for an education in a reduced isolation setting, or 41 percent of Hartford minority students in a reduced isolation setting. This funding would be used to increase participation in the Open Choice program by providing additional financial incentives for receiving districts per section 23 and to establish an innovation schools pilot program per section 21.

Sections 53 through 71 establish a new Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS) governance structure and make various conforming changes to the statutes. The new board would consist of 11 members: four who are recommended by regional chambers of commerce and business associations to the Governor and are executives from Connecticut based employers; five appointed by the State Board of Education (SBE); the Commissioner of Economic and Community Development (DECD); and the Commissioner of Labor.

4. Unleash innovation by removing red tape and other barriers to success, especially in high-performing schools and districts

Beyond the legislative process, the State Department of Education is working on ways of reducing red tape, including a significant reduction in data reporting requirements in districts.

5. Ensure that schools are home to the very best teachers and principals - working within a fair system that values skill and effectiveness over seniority and tenure

The Governor's recommended budget includes funding in the Office of Financial and Academic Affairs for Higher Education to attract the best teachers by awarding loan forgiveness funding to new teachers who graduated from top education-preparation schools and choose to teach in Connecticut's lowest performing schools. Section 17 establishes the "Attract the Best" Teacher Incentive program. The budget also includes \$12 million in funding for:

- Recruiting and developing the best education professionals (section 24 establishes the Connecticut School Leadership Academy);
- A new performance-based system for tenure, in which teachers will have to demonstrate proficiency (section 29); and
- New ways to develop talented teachers and strengthen recruitment of quality teachers and leaders (section 25).

6. Deliver more resources, targeted to districts with the greatest need - provided that they enact key reforms that position our students for success

The Governor is recommending \$50 million in additional general Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding per a new funding formula outlined in sections 1 through 3 and

section 7. \$39.5 million of this new money will go to the lowest performing districts, based on their ability to achieve the reforms outlined in section 4 of the bill, such as a tiered system of interventions, a plan to strengthen the foundational programs in reading to ensure reading mastery in grades kindergarten to three, additional learning time, teacher and school leader recruitment and career ladder policies that draw upon the teacher evaluation guidelines to be issued by SDE.

I would like to again thank the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony. I respectfully request the Committee support this bill and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.