



Testimony before the Education Committee
Re: S.B. 300 – An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education
H.B. 5350 – An Act Concerning Universal Literacy by Grade Three
H.B. 5354 – An Act Concerning Athletic Directors and Incorporating
Physical Activity into the School Day
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Executive Director
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Good afternoon, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. I am Maggie Adair, Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance (Alliance). 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 supports the goal of *S.B. 300 – An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education*. This bill, through a phased-in plan, would expand the existing School Readiness program to all eligible children in all communities by 2018, essentially achieving universal preschool for low-income children. Making preschool accessible to lower-income families who cannot afford to pay, obviously comes with a considerable price tag. Given the substantial research demonstrating the importance of investing in the earliest years, Connecticut cannot afford not to ensure that all children, regardless of income, have access to quality early care and education.

Data shows there is a substantial unmet need for early care and education opportunities for low-income children. In 2011, the School Readiness program served 9,513 children, ages 3 and 4, in the priority school districts, and 826 in the competitive school districts. In the 19 Priority School Districts alone, the State Department of Education estimates that the total number of children not being served is 6,900, of which 5,597 would seek center-based space.

Statewide, it is estimated that about 10,000 children, ages 3 and 4, living in households under 75% of the State Median Income do not have access to preschool, according to Connecticut Voices for Children.

This bill recognizes that there is an unmet need across all of Connecticut's 169 towns, not just the priority and competitive school districts. Poverty and the achievement gap exist in every community in Connecticut. The Alliance urges that the bill, if implemented, ensures that economic and racial integration is addressed, a key provision in the School Readiness program.



While the Alliance fully supports universal access to preschool, it is imperative that we address the developmental needs of children in their earliest years starting at birth through age 8. Universal preschool is one element of a broader coordinated and comprehensive early childhood system that Connecticut is designing under *P.A. 11-181 – An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education and the Establishment of a Coordinated System of Early Care and Education and Development*. Connecticut can build 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 supports the goals of *H.B. 5350 – An Act Concerning Achieving Universal Literacy by Grade Three*, which promotes early literacy for children in kindergarten through grade three. Research shows that the achievement gap begins far before children enter school; we must address oral development and pre-literacy in the earlier years.

We support the bill's inclusion of curriculum alignment, year-end transition planning, using data to track student performance, and parent engagement. These components must also be incorporated at the pre-k level.

The Alliance also recommends that a pre-literacy course be designed and implemented, leading to an approved degree as outlined in P.B. 11-54. This course should be specific to the developmentally appropriate instruction of pre-literacy skills for early childhood teachers.

The Alliance also supports requiring at minimum of 20 minutes of physical exercise daily for children enrolled in grades kindergarten through grade five as outlined in *H.B. 5354 – An Act Concerning Athletic Directors and Incorporating Physical Activity into the School Day*. Physical activity is conducive to student learning and combating obesity. It is concerning that some schools have eliminated daily physical activity for children in order to spend that time teaching to the test. Obesity among children is a national epidemic and our schools must be part of the effort to engage young children in physical activity.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify.