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Testimony before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
February 16, 2012

Re: S.B. 5028, An Act Concerning College Readiness Assessments
and S.B. 5029, 1145 - An Act Concerning the Alignment of Common Core State Standards with College Curriculum

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Good afternoon, Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the committee. My name is Liz Dupont-Diehl and I am the Policy Director for the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS seeks to end poverty and empower all families to build a secure economic future. CAHS produces research and analysis on child poverty and other issues as needed to drive advocacy, and has long been concerned with the "developmental education gap." CAHS has researched this topic extensively, with reports in 2009 (http://www.cahs.org/pdf/CTs%20Challenge.pdf) and 2011 (http://www.cahs.org/pdf/DevelopmentalEd.pdf).

This gap is serious and growing. I'll just touch on some increasingly familiar indicators:

- Some 400,000 working adults in Connecticut now lack a high school diploma or GED or the basic skills to get a job.
- As community college enrollment soars, **61%** of community college students required at least one developmental education class
- Students taking developmental education classes fail to complete a degree or credential in alarming numbers -- Just 25% complete a degree or certificate in eight years, compared to nearly 40% of students **not** taking developmental education classes.
- 41% of adults in CT have low literacy levels, according to the Working Poor Families Project.
- Governor Malloy's education session is rightly focusing the achievement gap, which continues into college.

One key cause is a disconnect between public schools and higher education. Many educators attest that public schools do not have a tangible understanding of the demands and needs of colleges. I speak today in support of SB 5028 and 5029 for their simple yet powerful ability to bridge this disconnect. Pilots or programs that use similar elements to connect public schools and higher education now show tremendous results.

S.B. 5028, requiring boards of education to work with the Board of Regents and UConn to align K-12 Common Core Standards with college level programs, is an excellent first step. This should be revisited periodically to ensure it remains responsive to changing workforce and educational needs -- and these partnerships could also include community colleges and universities.

SB 5029, requiring each tenth-grader be assessed for college readiness, would accomplish a similar goal Teachers, administrators, students and families would now have to understand concretely what colleges are looking for, and to show whether students are really on track or not ...in time to do something about it. This will get all students thinking about life and goals beyond high school and it will show schools how well they are doing.

CAHS continues to explore solutions with numerous stakeholders. We are surprised at the degree of agreement from these very different systems – colleges, adult education, workforce development and business. There is also a universal frustration that while many pilots are doing great work, they are small in scale and continually struggle for funding.

A continuum is needed, that begins pre-K and continues through college and postsecondary education and into the workforce, with each phase linking to the one before it and the one after it, with articulated expectations and alignment of content.

Links such as those called for in 5029 and 5028. Testing and preparation could well start earlier. But these two simple steps go a long way towards setting up a structure where alignment will occur between high school and higher education, and create a structure for this alignment to solidify and take root.

I am happy to answer any questions and thank you for your time attention.

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