

**February 16, 2012: Testimony to Higher Education and Employment Committee**

**Re. SB 40, HB 5029 & HB 5028**

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1. My background

- 1) Many years working in youth development, including the last 10 years coordinating life skills learning for Casey Family Services, the Direct Services Arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, from which I just retired.
- 2) My interest and focus now to turn my experience and remaining energy toward “access” and “success” in postsecondary education, especially for challenged students (e.g., first generation, lower-income youth, foster youth, LGBT youth, even military veterans).
- 3) To this end, I will be partnering with Goodwin College, the National Center for First Year Experience, CAHS, Hartford Consortium for Higher Education, and others, to put on a conference on “Retention to Graduation”, later this year.

2. Good ideas, if planned and implemented within a broader context, including financial feasibility.

- 1) **SB 40** re. “any” student being able to take a credit course (vs. a remedial course). This makes a lot of sense as a way to encourage challenged students that they can succeed. But it only makes sense if schools, especially community colleges and state universities, can provide “remedial” support services – both academic support for deficits and non-academic support for learning how to be a college student – “campus competence”. In other words, provide the remedial help outside the classroom, perhaps starting the summer before or through the types of bridge programs envisioned by the other two bills.

Remedial education is often a dead-end for too many freshmen. They get discouraged. The President of one of our community colleges told me that of all the students that went into their lowest level of remedial course, only 7% ever got out of developmental education.

In addition, as cited in “Fulfilling the Promise of Community Colleges”, from the National Center for First Year Experience”:

*Because self-concept and quality of life are intertwined with career choice, career development is an essential component of comprehensive first-year programs, especially in the community College...students who are more involved in thinking about their future careers have a better chance of pursuing the academic programs that can help them achieve their goals.<sup>i</sup>*

In other words, tie first year experience programs directly to career interests and aptitudes, ideally identified before students set foot in freshmen classes, to give students a dose of reality tied to their interests, and tied into their future. College counselors can be trained in career development. Manchester Community College does an especially good job of this.<sup>i</sup>

- 2) **HB 5029** re. “early readiness” for college, addressing achievement gaps, and developing “remediation plans” for students with deficit. Again, this is a very good idea, ideally even begun earlier. Many high schools already do this, more or less, and this should become stronger as the “Student Success Plan” model gets implemented. But such assessments are not necessarily connected, re. content, with college requirements. That takes a lot more work that not all school systems may be willing to do, which is why HB 5028 is a good idea.
- 3) **HB 5028** re. “bridge” programs and “alignment” in course materials between high schools and colleges, are now happening all over the country, and were highlighted in the P-20 Council’s excellent publication, “Connecticut College and Career Readiness Toolkit”, based on the good work done for Connecticut by the Educational Policy Improvement Center.<sup>iii</sup>

Many of our state schools are doing this work, but some are in much deeper and longer than others, such as the “evidence-based” work being done at WCSU, where the retention numbers speak for themselves. The more recently begun partnership between MCC, Manchester High School and East Hartford High School also points to the value of such alignment.

However, faculty and administrators at both levels – secondary and postsecondary – often resist such work for a variety of reasons: time, lack of financial incentives, professional pride. Perhaps this bill will lower barriers to an otherwise good idea and encourage more such partnerships, financial barriers notwithstanding.

3. Thus, I think these are ideas with promise, but that need further discussion among affected parties. Effective alignment and bridge programs are resource-intensive, and we do not need more “unfunded mandates”.

One of our community colleges has a good bridge program but will have to curtail it drastically without new funding – hence, the need for substantive State, and likely private philanthropic, support for significant expansion of such good ideas.

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<sup>i</sup> “Career Development: An Essential Component of First-Year Experience and Student Transitions”, pp. 127 & 133, by Patricia Stanley, Chapter 9 in Fulfilling the Promise of Community Colleges,” National Center for First Year Experience, 2011.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>iii</sup> See pp. 36-44, and profiles of bridge and alignment programs at MCC (p. 52) and WCSU (p. 53).