

**Testimony on HB 6358**  
**High School Graduation Standards**

Peter J. Cummings, Ed.D  
Principal, Conard High School, West Hartford, CT

The provisions of HB 6624 that allows students to earn credit based on mastery of rigorous standards is a significant step in our goal to have each and every student graduate from high school college and career ready. To meet the demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> century education, we must allow our system of education to grow so that it systemically nurtures and mirrors the traits of adaptability, creativity, persistence, and innovation we know are hallmarks of success for both individuals and organizations in our rapidly changing world.

The mission of Conard High School summarizes our work with students: “We challenge and guide our students to be active learners and productive citizens.” Our teachers are guided by the idea that all students can achieve at high levels, no matter what. We believe that each student should find a “passion” and be an integral part of guiding the learning process. We also firmly believe that all students should be able to access high level courses. In our current system guided by Carnegie Units, we must overcome regulations based on state-mandated seat time to create these learning options. A flexible standards-based system would allow students to progress at the pace best suited to their learning needs. This system would generate important data to help teachers guide instruction and would indicate when a student has reached mastery. The end result would be a system structured and guided by learning outcomes rather than compartmentalized routines and a high school diploma that represents mastery of rigorous standards and readiness for the expectations of college and career.

All students need to be able to problem-solve and think critically, communicate in a variety of modes, think flexibly and innovatively, understand and apply technological advances, and contribute positively to a diverse community and society. Educators across the state are engaged in designing ways to teach, support, and reinforce these learning expectations over time and across the curriculum. Our current structures limit the opportunities for the cross-curricular work expected in the Common Core Standards at the high school level. Additionally, the demands of a Capstone project as well as the credit expectations of the Secondary School Reform legislation require a rethinking of the regulatory processes that guide Connecticut schools. States including New Hampshire, Oregon, Maine, and Vermont have already recognized the discrepancy between the old regulations and the new demands being put upon schools; Connecticut should do the same.

The knowledge, skills and habits of mind developed in schools are the framework for the ongoing learning that will be a part of our children’s lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Very little of that learning will be compartmentalized into 45 minute blocks for 180 days a year. We cannot prepare students to meet the demands of the future in a system designed to fulfill the requirements of the past. Our goal is to have each and every high school graduate enroll in the college of their choice or engage in other meaningful postsecondary education not as an end unto itself, but as a stepping stone to fulfilling life and career choices. HB 6358 allows schools and teachers the flexibility to create such an educational paradigm by opening the doors to innovation.

I urge you to support HB 6422, especially the focus on revising the Carnegie Unit regulation.