



Joint Committee on Education

**March 4, 2013, Public Hearing on Raised Bill 1000:  
AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ACADEMICALLY GIFTED ADVANCEMENT  
PROGRAM**

Testimony by Bianka Kortlan-Cox  
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Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Education Committee, on behalf of the Connecticut Association for the Gifted (CAG) I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on Raised Bill 1000, **AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ACADEMICALLY GIFTED ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM**.

My Name is Bianka Kortlan-Cox, and I am President of the Connecticut Association for the Gifted. Our organization is composed of educators, parents, administrators, and psychologists. CAG's mission is to ensure that academic needs of high-ability students in our state are properly identified and served. I am here on behalf of our constituents to speak in support of Raised Bill 1000 which, with proper implementation, has the power to not only enrich educational choices of high-ability students in Connecticut, but also to motivate such students to continue their studies in higher education institutions in our state. In the new economy of innovation, our educational system should promote new and varying paths to future careers.

CAG welcomes this important initiative. It should result in giving high-achieving but often under-scheduled seniors increased options for further academic or early entrepreneurial challenge. It acknowledges that "one size" does not fit all and that children develop at different cognitive, emotional, and academic rates. It creates an incentive for capable students to maintain high levels of rigor and acceleration through the standard curriculum throughout their time in school and gives them a chance to look forward to an early opportunity of in-depth engagement with their emerging passions. In times when Connecticut strives to keep its well educated and highly skilled workers within the state's borders, and when it sorely needs to curtail high school drop out rates of unidentified gifted students, this individualized graduation option would be welcome.

In the longer term, this narrowly drafted legislation has far-reaching potential to positively impact the way Connecticut's schools identify and educate our brightest young minds. Through appropriate implementation of this legislation, we have the opportunity to end the gifted-education-by-zip code reality in place today. It directs our high schools to run this early-graduation option system based on merit. District administrators will need to identify their high ability students early and identify them from within the entire student body, including often still overlooked bright students of cultural and socio-economic diversity. Indeed, this legislation will fully reveal its power if it succeeds to motivate many of our talented students across Connecticut to take advantage of this program and continue to progress with high level studies and challenging learning experiences at their own accelerated pace.

As an added bonus, this increased focus on our most capable youngsters should benefit the whole student population in our public schools because the strength-based pedagogy of higher level thinking and problem-solving skills developed with the gifted and talented students in mind has already proved itself beneficial to

ALL students.

With our full support for the bill, we would also like to add a few cautionary comments. Connecticut will not be the first state implementing a unified early high school graduation policy. It will be a leader, however, in introducing such policy with a focus on high-ability learners. As the debate on this Bill proceeds, you will no doubt consult the successful and not-so-successful features of existing state programs. In addition, I hope you will use the combined experience of our in-state and nationally recognized experts on gifted education before creating a program capable of leveraging Connecticut's education reform ideals, including attention to 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and personalized learning.

**CAG shares the concern expressed** by our colleague Dr. E. Jean Gubbins from UConn's Department of Educational Psychology at the NEAG school of Education in the four areas specifically outlined in her testimony, especially on the importance of establishing multiple criteria for participation in this academically gifted advancement program. In addition, we **would recommend that:**

- Attention be paid to the social-emotional maturity of students being considered for the program;
- High ability students from underserved communities receive appropriate support throughout their entire school experience to ensure that these students also get a chance to avail themselves of the program;
- Program-participation criteria ensure that students leaving school early are truly college or career ready. To that end, CAG would like to recommend that the "Guidelines for an Academic Acceleration Policy" co-authored by our parent organization, National Association for the Gifted (NAGC), be consulted: [http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/resources/policy\\_guidelines/](http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/resources/policy_guidelines/) ;
- A proposal to create an "early college admission" task force be considered to ensure that the participation criteria would meet with approval of state's institutions of Higher Education;
- Scholarship funding: State and community colleges accepting students graduating under the program consider creating special programs for high ability students from underserved backgrounds, e.g.: a successful Meyerhoff Scholars Program in Baltimore: <http://umbc.edu/meyerhoff/>.

In conclusion, we believe that if passed, Raised Bill 1000 will ensure a more effective and meaningful implementation of the PL12-116 Education Reform Law and will significantly enhance the academic progress of Connecticut's high-ability, high achieving students.