CEA
Advocating for teachers
and public education

Connecticut Education Association

Governance
Sheila Cohen, President
Jeff Leake, Vice President
Cheryl Prevost, Secretary
Thomas Nicholas, Treasurer
Kathy Flaherty, NEA Director
Pat Jordan NEA Director

Executive Office
Mark Waxenberg
Executive Director
Capitol Place, Suite 500
21 Oak Street
Hartford, CT 06106-8001
860-525-5641, 800-842-4316
Fax: 860-725-6388
www.cea.org

Affiliated with the
National Education Association

Sheila Cohen, President

Connecticut Education Association
Before the

Children's Committee

Re: HB 6501 AAC Parental Engagement

March 5, 2013

Good afternoon Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and members of the Children's Committee. My name is Sheila Cohen, President of the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 active and retired teachers across the state. I am testifying today in support of **HB 6501 AAC Parental Engagement**.

Teachers support HB 6501 because it is an innovative way to reconnect parents to the work being asked of their children at school. While many employers are tolerant of their employees' requests to attend school activities, there are many that are not. HB6501 would allow parents to take up to 20 hours a year of leave without penalty from their employer. It does not require employers to increase the amount of leave that an employee can accumulate. It simply requires employers to let employees use their existing leave (e.g. vacation, personal leave) or take unpaid leave to attend qualified school related activities.

It is important to note that HB 6501 defines a qualified school activity broadly. Activities can include, but are not limited to, field trips to meetings regarding special education matters (PPTs). This is important because the state should not sit in judgment of what is considered an important activity. That should be up to a parent who wants to be involved in their child's schooling. And, although qualifying school activities are defined broadly, an employer may require an employee to provide supporting documentation from the school.

Twelve states, including nearby Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont, currently provide parental leave for school-related activities. Such a policy addresses the struggle for time that most parents face when work obligations conflict with the educational needs of their children.

The participation of parents in all activities of the school community, including celebrations and successes, is a critical signal to children that school does count and is part of the family culture. Additionally, when students and teachers know that families care enough to be involved – not just when there is a problem – success is a greater possibility.

Further, this bill allows for the participation of single parent households and underscores the importance of community commitment and involvement, especially as we move toward schools becoming the focal point of wraparound services and possible school clinics.

Research on Parental Engagement in School Activities

At CEA, we frequently review research and best practices in our effort to promote continuous school improvement. The research on parents' engagement in their children's education is clear. "When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more."[1] The more parents are involved in their children's education, the higher the children's academic achievement.[2] In fact, the conclusions from more than 50 studies[3] show that students whose parents are involved in their children's education, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to:

- ✓ earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs;
- ✓ be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits;
- ✓ attend school regularly;
- ✓ have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school; and,
- ✓ graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

But parents are working longer hours today than decades ago. The typical American middle-income family worked an average of 11 more hours a week in 2006 than it did in 1979.[4] Today, 70 percent of schoolchildren are in families with either a working single parent or a household where both parents work.[5] Maintaining a healthy balance between work and family creates more opportunities for parents to participate in and reinforce their children's schooling

---

[1] Henderson, A. T., & Mapp. K. L. (2002). A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. Retrieved from http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf

[2] Jeynes, W. H. (2005). Parental Involvement and Student Achievement: A Mete Analysis. *Family Involvement Research Digests.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

[3] Henderson & Mapp, *op cit.*

[4] Mishel, L., Bernstein, J. & Shierholz,H. (2009). *The state of working America 2008-9.* (Americans worked 568 more hours in 2006 than in 1979; average assumes a 50-week year. As cited in Williams, J. C., & Boushey, H. (2010). *The three faces of work-family conflict: The poor, the professionals, and the missing middle.* The Center for American Progress.)

[5] U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. *Meeting of April 22, 2009 - on Best Practices To Avoid Discrimination Against Caregivers: Statement of Heather Boushey, Senior Economist, Center for American Progress Action Fund.*

experience. A healthy balance between work and family also makes for a more productive and positive workforce – a benefit for the employer as well.[6]

We strongly support HB 6501 and urge committee members to support this bill.

Thank you.

---

[6] *"Parental Leave for School-Related Activities: A Continuing Trend Picks Up Steam"* Employment Practices Solutions, Inc. (EPS). (September 2009) Retrieved 2/28/13 from: http://www.epspros.com/NewsResources/Newsletters?find=13502