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An affiliate of the
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Ray Rossomando

Connecticut Education Association

Before the

Appropriations Committee

Re: SB340 – AAC A Two-Generational School Readiness Plan

March 7, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, a research and policy development specialist with the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 active and retired teachers across the state.

CEA supports SB340.

Connecticut's teachers witness the impact of cyclical poverty every day. They hear the challenges of poverty in the stories of their students. In some cases, the stories remind them of the children's parents who faced similar challenges in their class just a short generation ago. They understand that overcoming cyclical poverty takes a multi-faceted approach that addresses multiple points of influence.

Teachers know that young children who have more and richer opportunities to learn – opportunities that are often cost-prohibitive to families with lower incomes – are better prepared to learn than those without such opportunities. They know that providing children with quality early childhood programs leads to a stronger foundation and readiness to learn. They know that parental engagement in their child's schooling improves that child's growth and development. And they know that parents' educational levels positively correlate with their child's achievement. Teachers believe that these multiple points of influence must be addressed holistically – focusing on just one point of influence will not break the cycle. They also know that schools can't do it alone.

For their part, teachers, acting through CEA, continually advocate for innovative programs that can increase parental engagement in their child's education. CEA has participated – physically and financially – in locally-developed programs that connect parents to their child's school, classroom, and teacher. In many cases, these programs enhance parental engagement in their local school. For others, the opportunities that these programs provide help bring parents into their child's school for the first time, breaking down long-standing barriers that hindered their engagement. Regardless of any parent's past experience, lasting connections can be made that result in positive long-term impacts on student learning.

As positive as programs like the ones we've promoted can be, they can only address a portion of the challenges associated with cyclical poverty that many families face. The two-generation programs, such as those proposed in SB340, recognize and address the many factors associated with multi-generational or cyclical poverty. Two-generation programs can triangulate core components of cyclical poverty by coordinating three programmatic goals to provide access to:

1. Early childhood education, such as those provided through school readiness programs;
2. Programs that help new parents improve child interactions, enhance the learning environment at home, and connect them to their child's school; and
3. Adult education that improves functional literacy and promotes economic self-sufficiency through job training and improved earnings.

Two-generation program approaches have been used for over 20 years. They have been implemented through Head Start (Head Start Family Service Centers), Even Start (US DOE), the Comprehensive Child Development Program (US Department of Health and Human Services), and through other public and private partnerships.

The results have shown to improve students' classroom behavior, attendance, grades, and eventual job competitiveness. Results are also associated with reduced special education placement, delinquency, and dependency on governmental benefits.

But in Connecticut, the need for such programs still vastly outpaces the supply. SB340 would help address this by developing a plan to promote the goals of a two-generational program within the context of Connecticut's other related programs and services.

Thank you.