

**Testimony Regarding
S.B. 476: An Act Concerning the Academic Achievement Gap**

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Education Committee

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Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children supports making all kindergarten programs full-day. S.B. 476 would move the state in this direction by incentivizing all Alliance districts to provide full-day kindergarten (FDK). However, we urge the legislature to expand the proposal to require that all districts in Connecticut provide FDK, and to fund this mandate.

Full-day kindergarten should be part of every comprehensive early care and education initiative. Full-day kindergarten is crucial to maintain and build on gains young children make in pre-kindergarten, and to “enable children to develop the academic, social and emotional skills they need be to successful.”¹ In light of the Governor’s proposed expansion for prekindergarten, it is especially critical to view prekindergarten and kindergarten as a continuum, with each an essential part of a young child’s education and development.² Without full-day kindergarten, the benefits of high-quality prekindergarten may well be lost. It is crucial for states and school districts “to improve both pre-K and the early elementary grades to have the most positive effect on student learning and development in the long-term.”³

The benefits of full-day kindergarten are numerous. In particular, as the National Education Association explains, full-day kindergarten:⁴

- **Increases student achievement.** In studies across the country, students who attend FDK perform better in reading and math at the end of kindergarten and continue to show better performance through first grade. A Pennsylvania study found that FDK students were 26% more likely to be promoted through third grade.⁵ FDK can produce long-term educational gains, especially for low-income and minority students.⁶
- **Better prepares students for first grade.** Teachers in FDK spend more time on reading, math, and social studies compared to teachers in half-day programs.⁷ For example, 68% of full-day but only 37% of half-day classrooms dedicate at least 60 minutes to reading instruction each day. Perhaps most significantly, 79% of full-day teachers read aloud to their students every day, compared to 62% of half-day teachers.⁸
- **Results in healthier and happier children.** The National Institute for Early Education Research found that FDK offers social, emotional, and intellectual benefits to kindergarteners.⁹
- **Is cost effective.** Studies show that students who attend full-day kindergarten are less likely to be retained, resulting in long-term cost-savings to districts and the state.¹⁰

- **Is preferred by teachers and parents.** In a 2000 National Center for Education Statistics study, 100% of parents with children in full-day kindergarten and 72% of parents with children in half-day kindergarten responded that they would have chosen full-day kindergarten for their child if given the opportunity.¹¹

Given the overwhelming benefits of full-day kindergarten, it is important that this practice be adopted not just in Alliance Districts but statewide. Currently, approximately 74% of Connecticut kindergarteners are enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs.¹² In the 2012-2013 School Year, 103 school districts, seven charter schools, and 11 magnet schools provided full-day kindergarten to all their students.¹³ Seventy-seven percent of Alliance districts (23 out of 30) already have full-day kindergarten.¹⁴ Full-day kindergarten benefits all kids, and should be mandatory across the state.

Just as Connecticut provides funding for full-day first grade and full-day second grade, it must provide funding for full-day kindergarten for all students. S.B. 476 would permit Alliance Districts to apply for Education Cost Sharing grant (ECS) increases to support the implementation of full-day kindergarten. However, these FY 15 increases were already appropriated to Alliance districts in the FY 14 budget. Therefore, it is likely that many Alliance Districts already plan to use their FY 15 increases for other necessary and important reforms permitted under current law, such as literacy programs, extended school day, and increased wrap-around services. Most are low-income districts, already struggling to serve challenging students, and are without the local property tax base to fund new initiatives. Furthermore, districts may require their ECS increase to support unavoidable new education costs such as contractually obligated salary increases or rising special education costs. It does not make sense for the state to force its most challenged school districts to choose between full-day kindergarten and other important reforms. Full-day kindergarten should not be thought of as an intervention, but rather as an essential element of a high-quality educational spectrum. The state should provide additional funding to all districts to ensure that the costs of full-day kindergarten do not crowd out spending on other important educational improvements.

S.B. 476 takes a first step toward expanding full-day kindergarten to Connecticut’s children in some of its highest-need districts. As Connecticut increases access to high-quality prekindergarten, we urge the committee to provide full-day kindergarten to all children, to ensure that all children are getting high-quality experiences beginning at age three and continuing throughout their schooling.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ “Full-Day Kindergarten: An Advocacy Guide,” National Education Association, (2006), available at: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf_kadvoguide.pdf.

² For a discussion on full-day kindergarten in New York’s debates around prekindergarten expansion, see Al Baker, “Need for Full-Day Kindergarten Is Lost in Pre-K Debate, Critics Say,” The New York Times, (March 6, 2014), available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/07/education/full-day-kindergarten-not-pre-k-should-be-new-yorks-goal-critics-say.html?_r=0.

³ Laura Bornfreund, “Building Bridges Between Pre-K and Kindergarten,” EdCentral, New America Foundation, (December 6, 2013), available at: <http://www.edcentral.org/building-bridges-pre-k-kindergarten/>.

⁴ “Full-Day Kindergarten Facts,” National Education Association, available at: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf_fdkfactsheet.pdf.

⁵ Andrea Del Gaudio Weiss, Ph.D and Robert M. Offenberg, Ed.D., *Enhancing Urban Children’s Early Success in School: the Power of Full-Day*

Kindergarten,” School District of Philadelphia. Summary available at: http://www.pema.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/document/597463/ecer9_pdf.

⁶ “Full-Day Kindergarten Facts,” National Education Association, available at: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf_fdkfactsheet.pdf.

⁷ “Full-day Kindergarten: Indicators on Children and Youth,” Child Trends Data Bank, (August 2013), available at: http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/102_Full-day-kindergarten.pdf.

⁸ Debra J. Ackerman, W. Steven Barnett, and Kenneth B. Robin, “Making the Most of Kindergarten: Present Trends and Future Issues in the Provision of Full-day Programs,” National Institute for Early Education Research, available at: <http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/Kindergarten/report4.pdf>.

⁹ “Full-Day Kindergarten Facts,” National Education Association, available at: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf_fdkfactsheet.pdf.

¹⁰ “The Full Story on Full Day: An Analysis of Full-Day Kindergarten in Washington State, Economic Opportunity Institute, (July 2007), available at: <http://www.eoionline.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/full-day-kindergarten/FullStoryOnFullDay-Jul07.pdf>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “Kindergarten Enrollment by School Districts School Year 2012-2013,” Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Early Learning & Development, available at: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/KindergartenProgs.pdf>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* In the 2012-2013 School Year, these districts include Bloomfield, Bridgeport, Derby, East Hartford, East Haven, East Windsor, Hamden, Hartford, Manchester, Meriden, Middletown, Naugatuck, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Putnam, Stamford, Waterbury, Winchester, Windham, Windsor, and Windsor Locks. In addition, Danbury, Norwich, and Vernon each offer full-day kindergarten to some children.