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*Ray Rossomando*  
**Connecticut Education Association**  
*Before the*  
*Education Committee*

Regarding:  
**SB 25 AA Establishing the Office of Early Childhood**

**SB 26 AA Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education**

**HB 5043 AA Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor  
Concerning Education**

**SB 282 AAC The Inclusion of Teen Dating Violence Education in the Public  
School Curriculum**

**HB 5356 AAC The Inclusion of Social Media Education in the Public School  
Curriculum**

**HB 5357 AAC Chronic Absenteeism**

*March 3, 2014*

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, Research and Policy Development Specialist with the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 active and retired teachers across the state.

**SB 25 AA Establishing the Office of Early Childhood**  
**SB 26 AA Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education**

CEA supports SB25 and SB26.

There are rare instances in public policy discussions when so many agree on one thing; expanding access to early childhood is one of them. Governor Malloy's proposal establishing an Office of Early Childhood further coordinates early childhood education opportunities in our state. Coupled with the expansion school readiness programs in HB 26 and increased funding that is part of Governor's Bill HB 5030, enhanced delivery of early childhood opportunities will ultimately improve student achievement while reducing the future costs of governmental programs, including costs associated with special education and child welfare.<sup>1</sup> A recent study found a return on investment in early childhood education of eleven to one.<sup>2</sup> Embracing Governor Malloy's early childhood education proposals is penny wise.

Additionally, Connecticut cannot realistically expect to narrow the achievement gap without addressing the readiness gap. Research shows that when preschool children learn about colors, letters, and numbers they have advantages over those who haven't begun that process until they first step foot in a public school. 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.<sup>3</sup> Expanding preschool access and affordability will go a long way toward equalizing educational opportunity and enhancing learning for all children.

CEA further recognizes that SB 25 preserves the intent of current law requiring those with primary responsibility for pre-school classrooms are qualified and possess certification as early childhood education educators. We urge members of the Education Committee to reject any changes that would delay or weaken this provision.

**HB 5043 AA Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor  
Concerning Education**

CEA supports HB 5043.

HB 5043 primarily addresses magnet school funding relating to Sheff vs. O'Neill and the related goal of reducing racial isolation. For nearly twenty years, the state has substantially increased funding for school choice options. As was shown in a recent study conducted by Myron Orfield in Minnesota, some policies, like magnet school expansion, have been very successful in

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<sup>1</sup> University of Minnesota (2011, February 4). "Early Childhood Education Program Yields High Economic Returns," Science Daily (Retrieved December 17, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Reynolds, Arthur J., Judy A Temple, Barry A.B. White, Suh-Ruu Ou, Dylan L. Robertson. Age 26 Cost Benefit Analysis of the Child-Parent Center Early Education Program. *Child Development*, 2011; 82(1): 379 (Jan/Feb 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Murnane, Richard J. and Greg J. Duncan, "Economic inequality: The real cause of the urban school problem." Chicago Tribune (10/6/2011).

reducing racial isolation. But other choice options may be doing the reverse.<sup>4</sup> Connecticut's experience may be very similar.

CEA commends the Education Committee for its long-term work addressing racial isolation through magnet school expansion. CEA also urges members to assess other choice options and policies, like charter school expansion, and determine whether such policies are intensifying segregation and racial isolation in Connecticut as they have been elsewhere in the nation.

**SB 282 AAC The Inclusion of Teen Dating Violence Education in the  
Public School Curriculum**

**HB 5356 AAC The Inclusion of Social Media Education in the Public School Curriculum**

CEA supports the inclusion of these important topics in public school curricula, but not as a mandate on school districts.

CEA believes that the inclusion of these important topics could be facilitated by requiring the State Department of Education to develop model curricular materials for use by schools and teachers. SDE does this on other important topics and expanding such topics to include teen dating violence and social media education is timely and productive. Such materials could be included locally at the discretion of school boards, administrators, and teachers.

CEA further notes that we – school communities, local boards, and state government – ask that our schools prepare students in many social, emotional, physical, and curricular areas. Important topics like the ones in these two bills are cases in point. Yet accountability has been focused very narrowly on statewide standardized testing that does not capture – and is not designed to capture – all that it is we ask our schools and teachers to do. As a result, there is a fundamental conflict between what we want our schools to accomplish and how we measure success.

We urge committee members to keep this in mind when we ask our teachers and schools to address issues, like the ones being discussed today, that are so important to the education and well-being of Connecticut's children.

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<sup>4</sup> Orfield, Myron and Thomas Luce, *Charter Schools in the Twin Cities: 2013 Update* (Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, (Oct. 2013). <http://www.law.umn.edu/uploads/16/65/1665940a907fdbe31337271af733353d/Charter-School-Update-2013-final.pdf>

CEA Supports HB 5357.

School dropout continues to be a challenge faced by schools across the nation. But until recently, the research on root causes or predictors of dropout have not been particularly instructive. That is changing.

Today we know that chronic absenteeism in the early grades – with evidence as early as first grade – predicts later school dropout.<sup>5</sup> We also know more today about the types of interventions that can reduce chronic absenteeism, ostensibly nipping school dropout in the bud. As noted in “Getting Students to School: Using Family and Community Involvement to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism,”<sup>6</sup> some successful interventions include:

- Conducting parent orientations to explain school expectations and policies regarding student attendance
- Sending home newsletters listing the names of students with excellent attendance
- Providing access to children’s attendance information on the internet.
- Inviting parents to attendance award ceremonies
- Bringing in speakers to talk about the importance of completing school
- Connecting chronically absent students with a community mentor

HB 5357 would establish school attendance review teams in places with significant chronic absenteeism. We believe that such teams, if supported and funded appropriately by their local boards of education, could implement these and more sensible and affordable interventions. The long term benefits to the student, community, and the state could be surprisingly substantial.

Thank you.

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<sup>5</sup> Epstein, Joyce and Steven B. Sheldon, “Present and Accounted for: Improving Student Attendance Through Family and Community Involvement” (2002).  
<http://silverbeach.bellinghamschools.org/sites/default/files/silverbeach/dnew/present%20and%20accounted%20for.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Epstein, Joyce and Steven B. Sheldon, “Getting Students to School: Using Family and Community Involvement to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism,” School Community Journal, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2004)  
<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ794822.pdf>