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**Connecticut Education Association**

*Before the  
Education Committee*

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- SB 942 AA IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING EDUCATION**
- SB 962 AAC THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM**
- SB 963 AAC A LABOR AND FREE MARKET CAPITALISM CURRICULUM**
- HB 6837 AA ENCOURAGING A GRADUATED RESPONSE MODEL FOR STUDENT DISCIPLINE**
- HB 6834 AAC COLLABORATION BETWEEN BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS**
- HB 6836 AAC THE TIMING OF CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORDS CHECKS FOR SCHOOL EMPLOYEES**

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, Research and Policy Development Specialist for the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 active and retired teachers across the state. I am testifying today on SB942, Governor Malloy's budget implementer proposals affecting education, as well as four other bills noted below.

**SB 942 AA Implementing The Budget Recommendations Of The Governor Concerning Education**

SB942 eliminates many important programs and services that help students most affected by achievement gaps to catch up to their peers. Consequently, CEA does not support SB942.

CEA recognizes that since 2010, and in the wake of significant recessionary challenges, Governor Malloy's budgeting commitment to education was laudable. The governor increased funding to education through the Education Cost Sharing grant and targeted resources to early childhood education as a stepping stone to success. However, the commitments to these critical grants, as well as to the many others that make a real difference in the lives of children, must be maintained

CEA recognizes that since 2010, and in the wake of significant recessionary challenges, Governor Malloy's budgeting commitment to education was laudable. The governor increased funding to education through the Education Cost Sharing grant and targeted resources to early childhood education as a stepping stone to success. However, the commitments to these critical grants, as well as to the many others that make a real difference in the lives of children, must be maintained.

More specifically, CEA supports the basic premise behind the Commissioner's Network Schools. With focused attention, collaborative planning, and an infusion of resources targeted for improvement, schools can help children facing the greatest challenges overcome socio-economic barriers to success.

The governor's bill increases the potential number of Network Schools, but proposes to do so with a significant cut in funding, and without improving Network Schools' operational model. To ensure the implementation of innovative plans, the number of Network Schools permitted in this bill should reflect current per school funding levels.

CEA believes that schools must be about more than simply what happens in the classroom. Many children who thrive in school arrive at the schoolhouse door nourished and healthy and have opportunities to learn from the moment the schoolhouse door closes to the moment it opens the next day. They have received "wrap-around" services as a part of life. But many children who arrive at school in Connecticut's needier districts do not share in this benefit. Consequently, public schooling in Connecticut must be about more than simply what happens in the classroom.

Schools, especially those in Alliance District or designated as Network Schools, must be innovative in marshaling health, counseling, tutoring, services, and other "wrap-around" services that support students' daily readiness for learning. CEA believes that a "Community Schools" model can cost-effectively address a broad spectrum of children's needs, especially for children facing the greatest challenges, through the marshaling of many existing community resources. For your convenience, a write-up of an existing Community School, O'Brien STEM Academy in East Hartford, is attached. The cost-effective and proven Community School model should be required of all Network schools.

Consistent with a Community Schools model, the State Department of Education runs a number of programs that also provide "wrap-around" type services to students. Unfortunately, SB942 eliminates many of these services, including

Early Reading and other literacy programs	Wrap-around services
Summer and extended school hours	Youth centers
School nutrition enhancements	Youth Service Bureaus
Targeted adult education Programs	LEAP grants
School health programs	Parent Trust Fund
Cost efficiency grants	Science grants

CEA urges the Education Committee to reject these program eliminations, to implement the Community School model in Network Schools, and to promote the model's use in other schools serving children with the greatest needs.

**SB 962 AAC The Middle School Curriculum and  
SB 963 AAC A Labor and Free Market Capitalism Curriculum**

CEA supports SB962, which requires the State Board of Education to develop model curriculums on the safe use of social media, investigative detention and arrest, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

CEA also supports SB963, which requires the State Board of Education to develop a model curriculum on the history of labor and capitalism in the development of the American and world economies.

Producing a model curriculum will help teachers better address critical economic issues, such as income inequality, legal protections in the workplace, entrepreneurialism, and job creation, that are always vital topics in civic discourse.

**HB 6837 AA Encouraging A Graduated Response Model For Student Discipline and  
HB 6834 AAC Collaboration Between Boards Of Education And School Resource  
Officers**

CEA supports the governor's bill, HB6837, as well as the very similar language in HB6834. Each bill would help define the roles of School Resource Officers to ensure optimal collaboration between SROs and the students and staff in schools. Additionally, reports on suspensions, expulsions, and arrests in schools will help to identify and correct any disparities or excessive use of these punitive actions.

**HB 6836 AAC The Timing Of Criminal History Records Checks For School Employees**

CEA Supports HB6836, which would require faster background checks of new school employees. HB6836 reduces the deadline for school

44 employers to conduct background checks from 30 days to within 5 days of hire, ensuring greater safety, assurances, and peace of mind for everyone in the school community.

Thank you.

*Please see the Community Schools attachment*

## *From the CEA Advisor February - March 2015 ...*

### **CommPACT Community School model: An exemplar for student and family success**

Effectively engaging parents and community members is a challenge for many schools, but it's one that Robert J. O'Brien STEM Academy in East Hartford, a Network School, has taken on eagerly—and successfully. Thanks to the support of CommPACT, an enhanced community school model in place this year, the school is reaching out to families and the community and providing effective programs, including support services that address problems that make it hard for children to learn.

The community school is concerned about the whole child, including his or her environment and family needs. As such, it provides parents with the resources and services to assist them and their children both socially and academically, offering opportunities for a better future for students and their families.

“We are providing programming based on the needs of our families and the support services they've identified, including English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, access to Husky health care, and other programs,” said literacy coach and Family Engagement Collaborative Co-Chair Kara Levenduski.

Recently the school held several health-related workshops, including a session on lead poisoning prevention and a breast cancer detection screening program that may have saved at least one parent's life. Family and Community Outreach Coordinator, Margie Williams, said parents were quick to say thank you for the free mammogram services when Hartford Hospital's Digital Mobile Mammography bus visited the school.

Parents told Williams they did not have access to health care and would never have had a mammogram if the school didn't provide this free program.

“For one parent, there was follow-up testing needed, which she was able to receive. Thankfully her diagnosis was good. Thanks to the program and the school's focus on family, she is now connected to testing and cancer care resources,” said Williams.

#### **Community school**

O'Brien is part of the CommPACT Community Schools Collaborative. CommPACT—which stands for Community, Parents, Administrators, Children, and Teachers—promotes meaningful family and community engagement in schools based on research and best practices. Working collaboratively, CommPACT guides each school's success by providing resources, materials, and technical assistance.

CommPACT is run by a board of directors that includes CEA and other education stakeholder groups. It has been successful in several Connecticut schools over the last six years, empowering parent and community voices to get involved and make positive changes. Most recently, CommPACT has transitioned into a new initiative with a defined focus on community school

resources, and it is one approach that Connecticut commissioner's Network Schools can select for their turnaround plans.

"Our goal is for our schools, families, and community groups to work together to support learning and student success," said CommPACT Director Michele Femc-Bagwell. "It is a collaborative process that incorporates and embraces all stakeholders' visions."

### **Resources for families**

In early February, O'Brien, a K-6 elementary school with a science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) focus for grades four to six, unveiled a new CommPACT-supported family resource center aimed at increasing family and community engagement.

More than two dozen parents, teachers, administrators, community leaders, and policymakers showed their support for the program by attending the ribbon-cutting ceremony and official opening of the O'Brien STEM Academy Family Resource Center.

Teacher Monique Butler said she is grateful to have the resource center because of the home/school connection. "It allows parents to be participants in their child's education, helping learning continue at home and providing support in the classroom."

O'Brien Principal Lesley Morgan-Thompson said the new resource center is "a great beginning use of Network and CommPACT resources." She called the resource center, a former workroom for staff, "a beautiful space that shows what we can do to support parents."

"Hunger, homelessness, medical needs, and other non-academic obstacles can get in the way of a child's success in school," said CEA President Sheila Cohen. "School-based resource centers ensure that needed supports are provided to children and families to remove barriers that can hinder a child's opportunity for academic success."

The resource center, which is open before, during, and after school, is a place for parents to seek assistance with social, economic, health, and education-related issues. It contains a wide range of tools, including computers, CDs, books, and supplies, for parents and their children.

"There are a lot of working parents facing many difficult challenges, and this resource center can help them with everything from housing to employment searches, medical issues, and education," said CommPACT Family and Community Engagement Specialist Jocelyn Ault.

With the additional funding that comes with the Network School designation, O'Brien hired Williams, a family and community outreach coordinator, to provide programs and services to parents, including evening ESL classes taught by Trinity College staff and students.

"We want parents to know they can come into the resource center, see us, and get help with whatever they may need," said Williams.

### **Parental support**

"Education starts at home, and this program allows parents to have an essential role in what is happening in their child's school," said Levenduski.

Will Alcover, the father of an 8-year old O'Brien student, supports the resource center because he said he understands that "it's important to be involved with my child's school and education."

Kinyarda Davis, the mother of two children at O'Brien and chair of the School Governance Council, said the center strives to provide an inviting, warm atmosphere where parents feel welcome and comfortable to come, get the information or help they need, and get involved.

"The center can help parents with whatever they need and can help minimize any challenging or stressful situation," said Davis. "I am currently in college, job hunting, and using the tools and literature in the resource center. They are very useful to me."

"I hope that parents utilize the resources available in the center, but, more importantly, I hope they use the center as a means to communicate with teachers and administrators, and to assist students at home and support classroom activities," said Butler.

"This resource center provides families and parents another outlet to help them navigate their way through our system," said State Representative Jeff Currey.

Currey, who grew up in East Hartford and attended public schools, said it's all about connecting parents with schools.

"I would love to see every parent walk through this resource center at least once. It can benefit everyone in town."

### **Community Support**

With support from the community, the resource center also provides food to families in need.

"We started the food pantry after teachers noticed many of their students were coming to school hungry," said Williams.

O'Brien provides more than 75 percent of its student with free-and reduced-price lunch during the school week, but teachers were concerned about students on the weekends. They also worried about younger siblings who are not yet in school.

Williams reached out to community members, including Whole Foods in Glastonbury, for support. Residents and community members drop off food items, and every month Whole Foods delivers enough nonperishable food items to fill two large cabinets in the resource center pantry.

Williams said right now they are helping to feed 8 to 10 families in need. She hopes that as word gets out about the program, they will be helping even more families and providing free pantry items like spaghetti, rice, beans, peanut butter, and so much more.

"It's all confidential," she said. "I send flyers home with students, and parents call me, come in, tell me how many children are in the family, and we provide them with food. It's an easy process with no forms or hassles, just help for O'Brien students and their families. That's what the resource center is all about."

### **Involved parents benefit children**

Research shows that children have greater academic success when their parents are actively involved in their education. According to one such study from Southwest Educational Development Laboratory on parent involvement over the past decade, students with involved parents are more likely to excel regardless of family income or background. They earn higher grades and enroll in higher-level programs, attend school regularly, have better skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school.

"It is imperative for parents to be committed to their child's education," said Butler. "Students can have difficulty engaging in classroom work when there is minimal parental involvement. Our

students are ecstatic when they see their parents enter the building. To see their parents learning and being here for them fills their hearts and boosts their self-esteem.”

East Hartford Board of Education member Tyron Harris said the new O’Brien Parent Resource Center provides much-needed services to families and students and is a way to keep communication channels open.

“Parental involvement is very important,” he said. “When parents are involved, they help their children, and education continues at home.”

Fellow Board of Education member Marilyn Pet agreed. She said O’Brien’s goal is to emulate the success of the community resource center in place at the middle school.

“This resource center will help meet the vision of the school, parents, and community all working together to encourage participation and help direct the school,” said Pet. But, she added, it will take time. “It doesn’t happen overnight.”

### **Moving forward**

Through a process organized by CommPACT, O’Brien is forming family engagement coalitions, made up of parents and teachers, to look at ideas for improving family and community engagement at their schools. Their suggestions will be turned into a vision statement and action plan. The coalitions will also survey families to better ascertain what resources and programs would best meet their needs.

Femc-Bagwell said, “The CommPACT Collaborative will be meeting to finalize a vision statement based on a visioning activity that was recently conducted with over 50 parents, teachers, and community members. This feedback in alignment with surveys that the Family Engagement Committee has administered, will be foundational for developing an action plan that outlines programming and activity needs based on teacher, parent, and community recommendations.”

Photo 1 Ribbon cutting 5143-5149



Principal Lesley Morgan-Thompson (left) and Margie Williams, a family and community outreach coordinator, cut the ribbon officially opening the O’Brien STEM Academy Family Resource Center.



Left to right, teacher Monique Butler, parent Kinyarda Davis, and CommPACT Director Michele Femc-Bagwell attended the opening of the new resource center at O'Brien STEM Academy.



With the help of community partners, Margie Williams started a food pantry in the resource center to serve the families of O'Brien STEM Academy.