



Connecticut
Early Childhood
Alliance

Testimony of Merrill Gay
Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
Before the Education Committee
March 11, 2015

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Merrill Gay; I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, a statewide membership organization committed to ensuring that all children in Connecticut are healthy, safe and ready for lifelong success.

I'm here today to speak in favor of S.B. 1053 AN ACT PROHIBITING OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION FOR STUDENTS IN PRESCHOOL AND GRADES KINDERGARTEN TO TWO.

According to the report released by the State Department of Education last week, there is an overall downward trend in the number of students being suspended or expelled. The exception to that trend, however, is among students under age seven. Over the past two years, there were over 600 more out-of-school suspensions in that age group. When you look more carefully at the unduplicated count, all of the increase in sanctions was among kindergarteners, and virtually all of that increase has been among Black and Latino boys in ten urban "Ed Reform" districts.

The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance is very concerned that schools are handing out harsher and harsher punishments to very young children. It seems unlikely that in two years the behavior of kindergarteners has deteriorated that rapidly. A much more likely explanation of these statistics is a change in the adult reaction to student behavior. As Dr. Walter Gilliam's research demonstrates, there is a correlation between teacher stress levels and their reactions to student behavior. When we place developmentally-inappropriate expectations on kindergarteners, when we squeeze play out of the kindergarten day, we should expect children to be frustrated and act out. Our response ought to be to adapt our practice, not suspend more kindergarteners. When young children misbehave, there usually is a reason. Addressing that underlying cause is much more effective than taking the easy route of suspending the child. I'd like to leave you with this thought, "If suspension was an effective intervention to change a student's behavior, why is prior suspension the best predictor of future suspension?"