

Good morning,

As a resident of Hamden over the past eight years, and as an educator for the past 15 years, I appreciate your ongoing support for education, both as a Board of Education member, and as a state Representative. In fact, I even have personal thanks to extend for your efforts on behalf of my daughter and her lemonade stand to raise money for Smilow Cancer Hospital back in 2013.

I see that you are a member of the State's Education Committee and I would like to express some concerns I have regarding bill SB 378, which changes the graduation requirements for high school students in the state. I am speaking as a member of the Connecticut Arts Education Association (CAEA), and as a teacher of Computer Graphics, Digital Animation, Photography, and Digital Publishing at Wilton High School in Wilton, Connecticut

I am encouraged to see that the proposal allows students more flexibility of course selection within the STEM and Humanities clusters. I agree that these subjects are important and appreciate any efforts to empower students to personalize their own education. However, the sheer number of credits required in these areas **would significantly reduce students' ability to elect and sustain their involvement in arts courses**, resulting in far fewer students achieving depth and excellence in content areas that spark their interest and passion. Such an outcome could hardly be called "personalized" education.

The proposed increases of 2 credits in Humanities requirements and 4 credits in STEM - the latter almost doubling the current requirements - will reduce students' ability to personalize their high school curriculum, by:

- * Reducing the number of elective courses students can select;
- * Dramatically impacting district staffing, forcing districts to almost double staffing in STEM subjects that are chronic teacher shortage areas, at the inevitable cost of reduced staffing and course offerings in the arts and other core content areas; and
- * Squeezing students' schedules so that they cannot maintain participation in arts classes for four years, as many students currently do.

Increasing STEM requirements at the cost of study in the arts runs contrary to research on the background required for success in the fields of science and technology. On the contrary, [research by creativity expert Robert Root-Bernstein](#) among others reveals that the most distinguished scientists - including more than 90% of Nobel prize winners (!) - are also artists... and not just dilettante artists, but often highly accomplished, exhibiting and performing artists.

One need look no further than Steve Jobs, who as an originator some of the most revolutionary technology of the past 100 years, surrounded himself with artists and designers and was notably as obsessed with the aesthetics of the user experience as the engineering behind it. There can be no comparison to the impact that this marriage of art and technology has had on global society as a whole.

Therefore, I would like to endorse the recommendations of the CAEA and ask you to consider the following amendments to the proposed bill:

- * STEM requirements be increased to 7 (rather than 9), an evolutionary increase of two from the current 5 credit requirement;
- * Humanities requirements be maintained at their current level of 7 credits;
- * **Technology-based arts courses such as Digital Animation and Graphic Design, Digital Music Studio and Composition be counted as STEM courses; and**
- * Connecticut's new arts graduation requirement be increased to two credits, as is now true in Washington State and was proposed in the Connecticut State Department of Education's original drafts.

The CAEA is also concerned that the proposed High School Graduation Requirements Council will have sweeping authority, but - as currently proposed - will lack expertise in several of the core subject areas as defined by the new federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA. ***As you may already be aware, music and the arts are listed as core content areas in ESSA.***

Therefore, in addition to the above recommendations, I would like to also forward these other requests proposed by CAEA:

- * Connecticut's key arts professional associations - the Connecticut Music Educators Association, the Connecticut Art Education Association, and the Connecticut Arts Administrators Association
- each appoint one representative to serve on the Council.

Thank you again for being a strong advocate for education, and for considering these points as the bill moves forward in the process. Please contact me if you have any further questions or concerns.

Greg Theriault
932 Dunbar Hill Road
Hamden, CT 06514