

March 5, 2016

S.B. 378 (Raised) An Act Concerning the Recommendation of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force.

Dear Members of the Education Committee:

As a Health Education teacher I am concerned about the potential impact of S.B. 378, which calls for the elimination of .5 health education credit from the state graduation requirement. I am writing to urge you to vote "NO" on this bill (or reject this bill).

Our country has moved forward with universal healthcare but has fails to promote the immeasurable value of preventative care and rewarding those of us who make an effort each and every day to make a healthier choice physically, mentally, emotionally and socially not only for ourselves but our families and community. Children learn many health habits in the home yet not all of these habits are health-enhancing. In a public educational system, we owe it to our children to provide quality information as well as an opportunity to problem solve and think critically about their own personal well-being along with the well-being of their family, their community and the world.

We, as health educators, are not simply giving out website addresses for services nor are we giving students information that they can find using a basic Google search; we are challenging our students to ask important questions and question the status quo in terms of nutrition, substance abuse and addiction, communication skills, self-esteem and bullying behavior, media messages about stereotypes, reproductive care and healthy relationships and mental health issues and stress management skills. Health education teaches for the "here and now" as well as the future. Health is "Life Skills" that children and take with them well beyond high school. "Core" subjects are important in developing a well-rounded child, however, without preventative health education we have a society that is too sick to give back. Short-sighted vision may be cheaper but if we want well-rounded children who thrive in "non-academic" subjects where curiosity is sparked about the mind, body and spirit, that is a long-term goal worth investing in.

The proposed bill will negatively impact quality Health Education in Connecticut and the well-being of our younger generations in the following ways:

- I. Loss of Title IV funding. Removal of the credit will negate the new ESSA law in which health just became recognized as a critical component to a student's "well rounded" education with the availability of funding opportunities.
- II. Without a required comprehensive quality Health Education requirement what other preventative measure will be in place to reduce risky student behaviors such as smoking, heavy drinking, self harm, drugs and dating violence will become more prevalent in our state.
- III. Loss of support under the The Affordable Care Act in Health Education that teaches students to self-advocate and make healthy choices.

If we want to build a healthier Connecticut, we must celebrate the recognition of health under ESSA as a critical component of a student's education instead of eliminating it. Research has shown that quality health and physical education instruction improves student attendance, test scores, participation, motivation to learn and reduces discipline referrals. Evidence also shows that effective school health education provide students with a foundation for a lifetime of health, wellness and character development.

Teachers help promote the social and emotional learning skills students need to be college and career ready, such as collaborating with others, monitoring their own behavior, and making responsible decisions.

Social-emotional learning is critical to the introduction of college and career readiness standards, which increase the demands on students' ability to engage in deeper learning and shift the focus and rigor of instruction (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010a; NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010b). Health Education plays a critical role in this process. It provides the opportunities for students to develop and practice the following health life skills which directly relate to the development of the whole child through social and emotional learning. These skills include: **Decision-making, Goal Setting, Communication Skills, Resisting Peer Pressure, Assertiveness, Knowing, Recognizing & Managing Emotions, Anger & Stress Management, Relationship Skills, Social Awareness & Empathy, Appreciating Diversity, Using Resources, Analyzing Influences and Health Advocacy.**

I urge you to make a firm commitment on the health of our future generations and vote "NO" on S.B 378. Your continued support of quality health education along with health education credit as a requirement for graduation will set the standard for promoting healthier schools and Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and service as a member of the education committee for Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Sarah Keiser
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"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." — Benjamin Franklin