

## Members of the Joint Committee on Education

I appear before you today as a former teacher, assistant superintendent of schools for curriculum, and long-time employee of the State Department of Education (retired in 2014). In my CSDE role I co-authored the original draft of Connecticut's secondary school reform document, and served as staff to the task force that proposed the original graduation requirement legislation that was enacted under Commissioner McQuillan, subsequently delayed, and would be amended by Raised Bill SB 378. In fact, I am the educator who first proposed to members of Connecticut's original secondary reform task force that new graduation requirements be organized into the cluster areas of STEM, Humanities, and the Arts.

My colleagues and I are here today to propose amendments to Raised Bill SB 378 that will better serve the goal of developing creative, well-rounded students who can personalize their course selection as they prepare for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We applaud the proposal to allow students more flexibility of course selection *within* the STEM and Humanities clusters. However, we are concerned that 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.

We therefore recommend that:

- 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.

We are 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. We therefore recommend that 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.

We all share your interest in helping students achieve a well-balanced, excellent education. Thank you for considering the points I have raised as you amend this bill.

Respectfully submitted this Monday, March 7, 2016 by,

*Scott*

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