



Advocating for teachers
and public education

**Connecticut Education
Association**

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Shella Cohen, President
Jeff Leake, Vice President
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Thomas Nicholas, Treasurer
John Horrigan, NEA Director
Gary Peluchette, NEA Director

Executive Office

Mark Waxenberg
Executive Director

Policy, Research & Reform

Donald E. Williams, Jr. Director
Capitol Place, Suite 500
21 Oak Street
Hartford, CT 06106
860-525-5641 800-842-4316
Fax 860-725-6323

An affiliate of the
National Education Association

*Testimony of the
Connecticut Education Association*

Before the Education Committee

March 6, 2017

Re:

**HB 7201 AA Applying the Sheff Definition of Reduced-Isolation
Setting to All Interdistrict Magnet Schools in the State**

**HB 7203 AAC A Review of the Impact of the Racial Imbalance Law on
School Districts**

SB 954 AAC The Development of a Plan for Universal Preschool

The Connecticut Education Association represents 43,000 active and retired teachers across the state and promotes their voices in decisions affecting students, teachers, and public education. CEA supports the bills listed below for the following reasons:

**HB 7201 AA Applying the Sheff Definition of Reduced-Isolation Setting to All
Interdistrict Magnet Schools in the State**

**HB 7203 AAC A Review of the Impact of the Racial Imbalance Law on School
Districts**

The state, together with stakeholders, must be persistent in countering the stubborn legacy of racial injustice. Teachers believe that a diverse society enriches all individuals. They believe that our differences, enriched by our commonalities, reinforce the fabric of our society. All schools should foster a vibrant, pluralistic society that authentically reflects diverse heritages and cultural perspectives. CEA supports HB 7201 and HB 7203 as vehicles to advance justice.

In 1996, *Sheff v. O'Neill* determined that the state has a constitutional obligation to correct the educational inequities in schools that are caused by racial and ethnic isolation. Although the court's decision was focused on the impact of racial isolation in the Hartford region, the benefits derived from diverse educational settings apply to all children regardless of where they live or the color of their skin. This is true for students across school districts and within school districts too.

CEA supports HB 7201 and its goal of further reducing racial isolation across school districts and across the state. CEA supports the concept proposed in HB 7201 and resulting policies that would provide resources to all schools in an equitable manner and in a way that does not negatively impact the educational opportunities for students enrolled in existing programs.

CEA also supports HB 7203, which proposes a review of racial imbalance laws and their impact on local school districts. The legacies of racial discrimination and segregation on housing options and educational opportunity are persistent and interrelated. While HB 7203 invites dialogue that risks reinforcing these legacies, it also invites a conversation that could further bend our policies toward justice. CEA welcomes this dialogue.

SB 954 AAC The Development of a Plan for Universal Preschool

The Connecticut Education Association strongly supports universal access to quality early childhood education, including full-day kindergarten. The benefits of early childhood education are well established, and increased access would ensure better school-readiness for Connecticut's children, especially those who are more likely to enter kindergarten less prepared than their peers. It would also provide more equitable educational opportunities to those most affected by our nation's legacy of racial injustice. Together, such potential benefits justify a legislative initiative that would enable more children to enroll in effective programs.

SB 954 is a step in the right direction. However, CEA advocates including provisions in the bill that would ensure that the voices of parents, educators, and community service providers are included in the plan. We further suggest that in preparing the plan, the Office of Early Childhood be given input commensurate with that of the State Department of Education. Also, CEA urges the committee to require in such a plan options for funding mechanisms that could make the vision of universal preschool a sustainable reality for all of Connecticut's youngest learners.

Thank you.