I am Dr. Karissa Niehoff, Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Schools. We represent school leaders in approximately 900 member schools - public, Vo-ag, CTECS, parochial, charter and magnet. Our member schools serve students in grades PK-12; from rural, suburban and urban settings. Testimony from CAS reflects the voice and experience of building leaders; those responsible for implementation of policy at the ground level, management of the day-to-day operations of schools, and provision of a safe, healthy learning environment for students and adults alike.

We offer testimony on the following bills:

SB 359- AA PROHIBITING THE DISAGGREGATION OF STUDENT DATA BY ETHNIC SUBGROUPS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL INFORMATION SYSTEM

While we appreciate the intent of the bill to protect student personal information, we want to clarify that the disaggregation of data by demographic sub group is important in our efforts to provide educational equity. Current practice in Connecticut is to disaggregate subgroup data according to federal requirements. This helps schools and districts to monitor learning progress across all subgroups, and to better plan targeted learning interventions. The data is also linked to critical federal grant programs. These grant dollars target the learning needs identified in subgroup performance data.

SB 363- AA CONCERNING IMMUNIZATION RECORDS THE DEFINITION OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND REQUIREMENTS FOR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES CONCERNING TRUANTS

CAS supports this bill. We appreciate that an “immunization records absence” would be excluded from the calculation of a school district’s chronic absenteeism rate. I have spoken with several principals who report high numbers of students without immunization records or required school physicals. Urban schools are particularly plagued by this issue; many reported absences are due to missing medical records. We suggest that the language be expanded to include missing health physical forms as well.

We also appreciate that contact with a parent would replace a required meeting. On many occasions, students come to school without immunization records or physical forms. When principals attempt to contact parents they are often unsuccessful; scheduling meetings with parents can be even more difficult.
THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS

HB 5342- AA ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY BEST PRACTICES REGARDING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

CAS commends the Education Committee for raising this bill and we appreciate being named to the task force. Over the past few years, when surveyed about professional development needs, member principals have reported that training and resources in socio-emotional learning have been of the highest priority. In response, CAS has provided extensive professional development for school and district leaders, guidance counselors, and students in the area of socio-emotional learning. Our organization has worked closely with experts in this field, including the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. The proposed task force will address perhaps the most critical issue for schools right now. Socio-emotional intelligence is fundamental to the success of other intervention strategies such as Restorative Justice, SRBI, etc. which are more reactive than proactive in nature.

SB 360- AA ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY BEST PRACTICES REGARDING RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

CAS supports the creation of a task force to study best practices in response to intervention (RTI). We respectfully request that we be included as a member of this task force. The current language includes district leaders and teachers as task force members but no administrators. As the voice of school leaders, CAS can bring the very important perspective of principals and assistant principals; often the people who oversee and implement RTI strategies.

HB 5337- AA CONCERNING A STUDY OF VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS

CAS supports this bill requiring the study concerning the implementation of virtual learning and distance learning in Connecticut. As we continue to expand mastery-based approaches in our schools, and as the number of virtual learning platforms increases, it is important that we identify best programs and best practices in the virtual education world. Virtual learning can provide wonderful options for students in schools that may not offer coursework in a particular content area or coursework that can extend learning beyond traditional school offerings (i.e. college level/advanced study). However, some virtual learning programs are not accredited and many mislead students and families into spending significant money for a lesser quality online experience that does not align with Connecticut standards. CAS member schools (high schools in particular) would appreciate a study of virtual classroom opportunities as well as a “clearinghouse” of those programs deemed best quality options for students and schools.

CAS appreciates the work of the Education Committee and stands ready to offer assistance and the perspective of school leaders in Connecticut.

Thank-you for considering my testimony.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff