



Connecticut Education Association
Capitol Place, Suite 500
21 Oak Street, Hartford, CT 06106
860-525-5641 • 800-842-4316 • www.cea.org
An affiliate of the National Education Association

Affiliate Services & Member Training
Marilyn Mathes, Director
Capitol Place, Suite 500
21 Oak Street
Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 525-5641, 800-842-4316
Fax: (860) 725-6323

Governance
Sheila Cohen • President
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Testimony of Marilyn Mathes

Connecticut Education Association

Before the Education Committee

SB 453 AAC CLASSROOM SAFETY AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Good afternoon Senators Slossberg and Boucher, Representatives Fleischmann and Lavielle, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Marilyn Mathes, and I am CEA's Director of Affiliate Services and Member Training. CEA represents active and retired public school teachers across the state, as well as hundreds of pre-service educators planning to enter the profession. My testimony will address SB 453 An Act Concerning Classroom Safety and Disruptive Behavior.

CEA asked our members to weigh-in on their experiences with violence at the hands of students in their classrooms. As you will hear and read in their testimonies, many of our CEA members feel passionately about this topic and had their own harrowing anecdotes to share. Many did not want to give their names for fear of recriminations. Ultimately, we heard from hundreds of teachers who have experienced aggressive student behavior and many anonymously submitted testimony. Here are just a few quotes taken from their submissions:

- "I work in an early elementary school, and the staff and teachers are attacked both verbally and physically on a daily basis."
- "A colleague and I were both assaulted by a student this year. The student in question pushed each of us. My colleague was in her second trimester of pregnancy at the time. I suffered from a herniated disc."
- "I was physically attacked a few years back. A child kicked me so hard that I needed to have knee reconstruction surgery. I now limp and have intermittent pain."
- "I was physically assaulted by a student last year and had to go on disability leave. I now have permanent back problems."
- "A student physically attacked me and then attacked my colleague as we were trying to keep the student safe. Assaults on school personnel are a major problem that doesn't get addressed. We are punching bags and disrespected on a regular basis. I was put on administrative leave."
- "Several years ago, I received a sexually harassing email from a student, and the principal told me I should be lucky he didn't sexually assault me. I received no support from administration and no action was taken."

- “A good friend and colleague of mine had to give up her running hobby after a student kicked her so hard that her leg fractured and never fully recovered.”
- “I have been violently shoved around in my classroom. The administration and resource officer did nothing. They blamed me.”
- “I know of several students who have assaulted a teacher either with threats or with physical violence, and the interventions taken in all cases were not enough to ensure the safety of our staff and students.”
- “I had rotator cuff surgery and was punched by a fourth-grade student. The punch was forceful and purposeful, and nothing was done about it.”
- “My colleagues who have been assaulted have left the profession because they felt abused and not supported by the administration.”
- “I have been hit, kicked, scratched, and pushed.”
- “I have been assaulted. I have had my clothes ripped and ruined, large chunks of my hair ripped out causing my scalp to bleed, bitten to the point of scarring, and kicked so hard bruises lasted for weeks.”
- “Students are scared and stressed, and the teachers are fearful that if they file an assault report they will lose their job.”
- “There isn’t enough strong action to offer help to students who witness these attacks, which result in decreased learning in the classroom, witnessing the removal of a fellow student, and a guest teacher coming into their room because their teacher is receiving medical attention.”
- “In many schools teachers do not get the backing of their administrators and get reprimanded for strictly enforcing respectful behavior.”

We encourage you, the members of the Education Committee, to read for yourselves the rest of the testimony, attached and submitted directly to the Committee, and support strong measures to include provisions relating to daily classroom safety in safe school climate plans, establish a reasonable student-to-school social worker ratio, and require notification of incidents of violations of daily classroom safety. Thank you for your time and attention to this crucial matter.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

SB 453 AAC Classroom Safety And Disruptive Behavior

March 14, 2018

I was physically attacked a few years back. A child kicked me so hard I needed to have knee reconstruction surgery. I now limp and have intermittent pain.

This particular child had injured many staff members, and was moved from school to school. The excuse was that he was special ed. I now see other staff members working with aggressive students daily. We are expected to put up with this type of behavior on a regular basis. It isn't fair to the teachers or the students to be in constant state of fear. How can we expect students to learn if their classmates are running around, swearing and being physically abusive.

It needs to stop.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

SB 453 AAC Classroom Safety And Disruptive Behavior

March 14, 2018

I have taught in the Waterbury School system for the past 26 years and have experienced a major increase in the occurrences of teacher assaults. I am a Special Education Teacher for students in grades Kindergarten through second grade. Due to budgetary constraints staff is consistently discouraged from recommending appropriate paraprofessional coverage for students. Therefore, schools are forced to group too many high needs students together in the same classrooms. This results in students exhibiting their frustration through acting out in a disruptive manner and frequently becoming physically aggressive towards other students and/or staff. Appropriate consequences for violent students, (especially in grades K-2), is lacking or nonexistent.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

SB 453 AAC Classroom Safety And Disruptive Behavior

March 14, 2018

Schools need to be a safe place for both students and staff. Nowadays, it is a popular belief that disciplining a child will result in low self esteem. Students need to be held accountable! They are not being held accountable even in Kindergarten. Students who struggle are asking for limits to be set! They don't feel good about themselves when they come to school and are constantly disrespectful to staff and peers, and constantly disrupt the learning of others.

Students who attend schools where they feel safe will learn! Their brains will not allow learning when they are afraid!

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

SB 453 AAC Classroom Safety And Disruptive Behavior

March 14, 2018

Discipline is a huge issue in our district, especially for students who have shown violence against teachers. I know of several students who have assaulted a teacher either with threats, or with physical violence. I feel that the interventions taken in all cases were not enough to ensure the safety of our staff and students. The offending students were given the consequence of out of school suspension for a week or two, then they were put right back into classrooms. In some cases, they were put back into the SAME classroom in which they offended. I saw this happen at both the elementary level and high school level. I admit that I do not know if there were any interventions done while the students were out of school, but even so, I do not think the consequences are enough to prevent further violence.

In addition, I feel that student behavior has gotten out of control in our district. There is no respect for teachers because we have no teeth. There is no discipline. The students know they will not get punished, or the consequences are something they want (for example, In school suspension) and so they know they do not have to follow the rules. This is very discouraging for teachers, and it is very hard to run a safe classroom when this is the climate in the school! Many of our good teachers are leaving the profession because they do not feel safe at their jobs. I have often contemplated early retirement myself.

Ignoring behavioral issues in school now, I feel, will increase the risk of those students becoming involved with the criminal justice system later on. If we continue to tolerate disruptive behavior, what exactly are we teaching our children? How can they grow up to be productive members of society if they cannot even feel safe in their own school?

Thank you for your time, and I hope you will consider my testimony when you are reviewing this legislation.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

SB 453 AAC Classroom Safety And Disruptive Behavior

March 14, 2018

Please, this is an increasingly serious problem. As a high school teacher of almost 20 years, I have been violently shoved around in my classroom. I was standing in between a student who threatened another student. The administrators and resource officer did nothing. They blamed me which was worse than the violence that took place. We now have de-escalation professional development to rectify this problem further implying that the violence is all our fault. Mental health issues in my poverty ridden district are rampant in the teens I see. Please help with this risk to students and staff that are posed by this violence in our schools.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

SB 453 AAC Classroom Safety And Disruptive Behavior

March 14, 2018

Schools should be places of learning where every student should feel safe, protected, and free to access their education in a nurturing environment.

Research indicates highly effective, qualified, and trained classroom teachers are one of the biggest factors on the overall academic success and growth of students throughout their educational careers.

More needs to be done to ensure all schools, and the classrooms inside every school building, have the resources needed to ensure teachers can effectively teach and students can learn.

As a classroom teacher I often have to spend a significant amount of my time during the school day attending meetings, filling out forms, documenting data, etc. related to disruptive behavior by a very small portion of my total student population. This scenario is experienced throughout my school building by many other teachers and staff who support students in other roles. The disruption caused by a very small amount of students takes away from the time I need to help the vast majority of my students (and I'm talking well over 90% of my students). More importantly, the behaviors of a small percentage of my students stops and hurts the learning of every other student. While I am concerned for my own safety, I worry more about the safety of my students and the damage that is being done to their ability to learn.

Please do something to help school administrators at the building, district, and state level recognize there is an alarming disconnect between what is actually going on in the classroom and how policy is being written, and then implemented to deal with these issues.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

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March 14, 2018

I started teaching January 2017 mid-year, right out of college. I was so excited to begin as my 4.5 years of preparation was finally over and I knew I was ready. Unfortunately, my experience was not what I anticipated. I was in an urban middle school and the students had no respect for me or administration. My principals told me they would support me and help along the way since they knew I had 5 extremely tough classes. The support never came. I would send kids out of the room constantly to the principals for inappropriate language, disrespect, treating classmates wrong, rights, and other things, but realized it was not helping. I wanted the kids to learn, so I decided to just get through the class and try to keep the kids in the room even if chaos started to break loose. Now it may seem like I didn't have classroom management, being so new, but in all honesty there were no consequences being handed out to the students by administrators, so the kids knew they could get away with anything and everything. Three weeks was all it took for me to regret being a teacher and to question everything about the job. I almost quit, but I stuck it out and had the worst experience of my life. I was called names, I was threatened, I was laughed at, I was pushed into – all by 7th graders. It was humiliating. There was no punishment for them either. I am glad I didn't throw away my hard work. I gave it another try in a different school district and have had a much better experience. It's still not easy, but I am supported at this school. The repercussions are still there – anxiety and occasional depression – but I know I will never be at another school like that again.

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Teacher assaults in public education are on the rise. The high costs to local towns and cities to out place violent students is discouraging school districts to appropriately place these violent students where they are better served. This obviously puts ALL school staff and students in very dangerous and compromising situations. This downfall in public education is discouraging future young people to enter the profession.

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Considering all the tragedies that have struck the schools in this country, I am dumbfounded as to why I need to write testimony for somebody to consider taking action against violence in the classroom. Students need a safe environment to learn. If their safety concerns at school are not met, how can they be expected to care about imaginary numbers, dead presidents, or dangling participles? Teachers should not have to work in a toxic environment of constant high threat alert, and parents should not have to worry about their children coming home!

Administrators need to take this problem seriously and be empowered to take appropriate disciplinary action and/or be given the resources for other behavioral interventions. Ignoring this issue does a huge disservice to these students in need, puts all students and school employees at risk, and truly discourages those from entering or remaining in the teaching profession. Teachers should not need hazard pay for working with children.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

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March 14, 2018

My name is Jessica and I am special teacher in an inner city public school system. I teach all students in a k-5 elementary school. The issue of classroom safety and disruptive behavior needs to be addressed. There are many factors that are contributing to this issue including: lack of, or inconsistency in implementing consequences for disruptive or violent behavior, lack of administrative support, and ignoring behaviors which can escalate and increase risk to students and faculty. Teacher assault is a problem and it needs to be remedied.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

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Teacher assaults, bullying, and school violence are a rampant every day occurrence in our schools. We need to put more programs and support personal in place. As a veteran elementary school teacher, I have seen my fair share of violent situations that have escalated, teachers who have been hurt, as well as students. When does it end? Open a newspaper or turn on the news and you know that this is a daily occurrence. We need help to fix the system, not sympathy.

We will never alleviate all violent situations but at least, let's have a viable goal in place!

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

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I have worked in the field of special education for 25 years.

It is critical that legislation be enacted that increases the safety of our schools for students and the adults who work there. As a school psychologist, I can testify to the impact of trauma induced in witnesses to physical and verbal assaults of school staff by students who have issues with self control and anger. Learning is maximized in an environment that is safe for all. While I understand students' right to a free and appropriate education, a clear message must be provided to all students by the education, mental health and judicial systems that assaults will not be tolerated and that there will be clear mandatory consequences for such actions coordinated across all the systems that impact students. I can only imagine what schools will be like for students & staff if we do not send clear and consistent messages that violent acts have no place in our schools and will not be tolerated.

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Connecticut Educator

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I am 100% in favor of protecting teachers and students from violent students.

In 2017 I was punched by a 4th grade student while the class was leaving my room. The punch was forceful and purposeful. The child ran and nothing was done about it. The horrible part is that I had just had rotator cuff surgery in the same arm three months prior.

We now see all types of "complex behavior" as our administration calls it. We are all in constant fear of getting hurt. Many of us have decided to leave teaching. Yes, we have been told by our vice principal to leave if it's not for us.

Do parents know? Some children are afraid but many see it as normal in the classroom.

Honestly what I see in the future is a class action teacher lawsuit created to call attention to our unsafe work environment; what do we do about it? I have chosen to retire earlier than planned as a result.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

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I believe teacher assaults to be a major concern in schools today. Although I have not been physically assaulted; I have been threatened and verbally abused by students. I am only one of many teachers who experience this on a daily basis. I do not think this is taken seriously enough by administration and I often fear for the safety of myself and my students. My school lacks the necessary support staff to service the needs of our most challenging students. The student population is 800 and we have a guidance counselor who we share with another elementary school in the city. We can do better, and have to, if public education wants to attract the best teachers.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

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I am a special education teacher in a collaborative classroom. Over the years I have become more involved in behavior management than in ensuring students who have IEPs have access to the curriculum. The most problematic students are not those with learning or behavioral challenges serviced in an IEP, but the non disabled students who have no interest in, or desire to adhere to school policies or take part in the learning process.

Education is an entitlement, not a privilege, in our country. So that fills the classroom with many students who are disinterested and unwilling to perform the most basic of requests. Cellphones have become an overwhelming distraction and the majority of conflicts between students and staff are regarding the unauthorized use of phones in the classroom (and no they are not using it for learning purposes).

Teachers are and have been the victims of verbal abuse, threats, and physical abuse. The belief that all students are eager and willing participants and have a stake in their learning is a fantasy at best. Students lash out because of upbringing, teachers are viewed as peasantry in the public service world, and most importantly there have been no real consequences for these students. Out of school suspensions are all but gone unless a weapon or drugs are brought to school. Administration will say a student isn't challenged or we need more differentiated instruction to build their skills which will build their confidence and make them want to be better. That will solve all our problems!

Accountability is never put on students, the parents or society. They're just kids. "They need a break" is often heard. This takes all responsibility off the student. There must always be a clear, unwavering line of what is acceptable and what is intolerable. Verbal abuse, threats, aggression, and physical assault on a teacher is intolerable. Our profession must be viewed in the same high esteem as a police officer, firefighter, mayor, council person, or any other public servant. Though we work with youth, support for teachers and teachers who have been victimized by students must always be upheld and just consequences for those who would be prosecuted in any other arena carried out.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

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I've always taken pride in my ability to build trusting relationships with students so that they were "kept in line"; in fact, I was the ideal urban school teacher who dealt with behavior on her own and who never contacted the office. Even though I was never personally assaulted, I've seen firsthand how dangerous and downright scary it was for my fellow colleagues who were assaulted. It got to the point where my peers began leaving the profession altogether because they felt "abused" and "not supported" by administration. I've contemplated leaving teaching myself and, even now, working as an interventionist in a high-achieving district, I routinely question my role in education. There are only so many intervention strategies I can recommend to teachers. It's gotten to the point where we as teachers are putting out fires rather than teaching curricula (with ambitious expectations). Have we become punching bags who inadvertently encourage this intolerable behavior? Can something be done to change this common belief?

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

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March 14, 2018

I would like you to please help us teachers protect ourselves. When I first went into teaching over a decade ago, I never thought that my life would be on the line and I would be responsible for the safety of students as I am not trained to do so; I am trained to teach a skill. The administration is not taking the problem seriously and is failing to provide necessary services, resources and training. Some students can become violent against teachers and there are no consequences or appropriate interventions for violent students. Not only are teachers lives ok the line, most importantly the safety of other students in the classroom is at risk. This along with the way education is going in this country will discourage teachers to remain in the teaching profession. Ignoring behavioral issues in the school now increases the risk of those students becoming involved with the criminal justice system. Please help us!

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

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March 14, 2018

I am a pre-k teacher in CT. I have been a preschool teacher in a diverse childcare center, as well as in a non-profit suburban preschool facility throughout my 16 years as a preschool teacher.

The best way to describe being assaulted by a preschooler is by comparing it to being attacked by a chihuahua. Yes, they are small, but they can be impulsive and inflict serious pain. I have been hit, kicked, scratched and pushed. As a teacher tries to carefully redirect the student (#1 because she needs to de-escalate the situation and #2 because she doesn't want to lose her job for removing him in a way that may cost her a visit from DCF and/or lose her job that she attends daily, subconsciously knowing that she and her peers are undervalued), she is risking the opportunity of being bit, scratched, hit/punched, kicked, and/or spit on by the student. This also poses risks for injuring oneself simply to redirect an oppositional student to a safer area.

We (pre-k classrooms) take this into our own hands at our school, as the administration has asked us to call them in "emergency" situations. Our principal has NEVER stepped into our classroom during school hours at least over the past year and a half. He has NEVER asked us how it is going. Although we have asked for support several times in the past, there has been a severe lack of concern for what we believe to be the foundation of learning. We believe if we can nip behaviors in the bud now, it will not only help the teachers in the following years, but more importantly, it will help that child maneuver more positively through life.

We are always trying to keep our students safe AND we are constantly educating them on how to handle peer conflict and how to acknowledge and self-regulate their feelings.

We want positive, productive, proactive citizens in our community! We cannot have that if we are struggling on a daily basis. We need support from the top down. We need consequences for these students. We need support, not band-aids.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

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March 14, 2018

I have been an educator for 20 plus years. I have worked in public schools since I graduated from graduate school. I have worked in many capacities, guidance counselor, school social worker, and clinician.

Recently, I have been placed on administrative leave because I refused to allow a student to harm a colleague further. The student physically attacked me, and then attacked my colleague who along with myself was trying to keep the student safe.

The parent came and complained to the board and I have been out of work since. Assault on school personnel is a major problem that doesn't get addressed. We are punching bags and disrespected on a regular basis.

Administrative support is minimal at best. There needs to be a change in support for school staff.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

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Behavioral issues within the classroom, especially in urban districts, not only disrupt the learning process for students who come to school ready to learn and want to be engaged, but creates a toxic environment that is often demoralizing to students and teachers. Disruptive students take control of the classroom and threaten other students and the teacher when either attempts to speak against their disruptive behavior.

I have experienced this in my own classroom. Each day my team and I felt exasperated because we felt a lack of support from our administration and from the district. We enacted positive measures such as a point system with rewards, and made several attempts to discuss the issue with a parent or guardian. When there is a lack of parental support, a lack of resources, and a lack of support from administration and the district, you create a child that becomes empowered and willing to take greater negative risks because they have no motivation to do better and there are no consequences for their actions. While I agree suspension is not an answer, urban school districts do not have the money or resources to provide the needed emotional and mental supports for these students.

Recently a student from the SOARES program in Bridgeport became a student in my class. The Special Ed. teachers strongly advised against his removal, but his mother insisted. Daily he interrupts the learning process for my other students. Daily, he acts in a threatening manner toward other students. Many of my students are afraid of him. We, his teachers, are told to document. We do daily and I know that it is possible, several weeks from now, that he can be removed, but before that time frame his teachers and other students are not only missing out on their education, but feel threatened. This is just one of example of what goes on in the classroom and sadly the only reason we will have any support is because he came from this program, but we encounter students like this all the time that are not identified or are and refuse to get services.

Teachers are exhausted mentally, emotionally, and physically. Connecticut, you are driving teachers out of the classrooms where they are most needed because they are not provided the supports they need to teach and educate our children. As a mother, I would never allow my child to attend certain schools, NOT because the teachers are below standard, but because the system the teacher works is failing the teachers and therefore failing the students. I wonder when it became the teacher's job to be a secretary, administrator, parent, social worker, psychologist, corrections officer, and someone who might need to take a bullet for a child? Why are teachers not honored? Why are they not supported? Why are we allowing a few students to steal the education of the masses? I hope the Connecticut realizes the disservice it is doing to the students of this state and begins supporting our teachers by allowing them to do what they entered the profession to do: teach.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

SB 453 AAC Classroom Safety And Disruptive Behavior

March 14, 2018

I am a teacher in Greenwich, Connecticut. The ugly truth is that there is a discipline issue in schools that is adversely affecting the learning environment for students. One cause of this issue is that many children have become traumatized and volatile due to their negative home life. Another cause is that many special needs students are being placed in the general education setting because this is the cheapest place for them to be or the district philosophy does not align with the reality of the general education setting. The needs of these students are not adequately being met.

This discipline issue is putting the safety of teachers and students in jeopardy because these students are acting out aggressively towards teachers and other students. Students and teachers are getting hurt, both physically and emotionally. Many children are witnessing these aggressive acts, which is compounding the issue and causing more trauma.

We have to address this issue and provide these students with additional supports. Administrators are not taking this issue seriously. Most of the time there is no follow up on the behavior, which is leading students to believe that acting this way is okay. This will have a negative impact on their long-term well-being because they are not getting the help they need to learn self-control. Teachers are very frustrated and many are contemplating leaving the profession. Students are uncomfortable and are scared to come to school.

You need to step in to help and give teachers and schools the resources we need to support these students. All of these school shootings have been caused by children who have fallen through the cracks. We can't let students fall through the cracks anymore. Please help!

Thank you!

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

SB 453 AAC Classroom Safety And Disruptive Behavior

March 14, 2018

I work in early elementary and the staff and teachers are attacked both verbally and physically on a daily basis. Classrooms are destroyed by students who need social/emotional support; support that the schools/teachers are not equipped to handle. While I do feel like my school administrators support us and understand the daily struggle, the upper administration doesn't seem to see the urgency. Good teachers are leaving the profession because they are just burned out by the constant disruption of these traumatized students. When I was questioned about my test scores, I pulled out my notebook that documented all the instructional times that were disrupted by one student screaming and tearing apart my classroom. Even though we have many classrooms who do not have these behavior issues, they are impacted by the screaming in the hallways or lose special time because a child has torn apart the art room or gym. We have also had soft lock downs because of severe behavior issues in the halls. Teachers and staff are documenting the bruises and bite marks on their cell phones. Our union tells us each assault needs to be documented and the police contacted, but upper administration won't allow this. They do not see a 5 year old as capable of assault.

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I work in a smaller suburban school, and I see the need to add additional safety laws to protect teachers. Our job has changed over the past 26 years. Many students and parents have had to endure so many external stressors from living in Connecticut. The family isn't necessarily a nuclear family and many students live in a split custody situation and move from one house to another during the school week. The loss of jobs and higher taxes put stress on our families, especially the children.

Children need to show their stress, and some children become aggressive and act out against others.

It is alarming to see the increase in the problem and the decrease in the ages of these troubled students. In just this past month, even with all the snow days, we have had 2 adults feel the pain and anxiety of a child losing control and hurting their teacher or para. There isn't enough strong language to force help to be given to the student. There isn't enough strong action to offer help to the students who witness these attacks, which result in decreased learning in their classroom, witnessing the removal of a fellow student, and guest teachers coming into their room because their teacher is receiving medical attention.

Bad as this sounds, the real travesty hasn't even been mentioned. The next day, everything starts out the same, nothing has changed. The teacher wonders if it will be safe to be in the classroom today. The students wonder if they will be able to learn and sing songs without being ushered out of their classroom. The aggressive student is sitting in their chair in the classroom looking at the other children, wondering what what they are thinking about them.

The student is scared, the other classmates are stressed, and the teacher is fearful that if they file an assault report they will lose their job. I come to work because I want to be a teacher. It is my passion, my calling, and my life's work. I just never realized I and my fellow teachers would have to choose being a teacher or to leave the job we love because we don't feel safe.

What is really sad is that this letter is being signed anonymous because I have been told my job is not safe if I complain.

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I am writing to bring attention to the problem of violence against teachers, specifically in the elementary schools. When this occurs, teachers are often told that it is "one time" or "they are just little kids". Administration is not taking the problem seriously or failing to provide necessary services and resources. There are no consequences or appropriate interventions for violent students. They are reprimanded and left in the exact same setting with the exact circumstances.

The risks to the safety of other students and educators in the classroom are ignored. It is exasperating, to say the least. It is as if the educators' physical (and mental) well being are less important than keeping the status quo. It is quite a message being sent to teachers and certainly discourages teachers to remain in the teaching profession.

I urge you to consider these points when making decisions going forward. Violent behavior should never be allowed or tolerated.

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When we signed up to be teachers we never thought we would have to worry about being physically assaulted by students. There are very few consequences for negative behaviors of students in school. Educators should not have to worry about being assaulted or worry about shootings. We should be concerned with educating our youth! We need people on our side, not always against us.

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Thank you for taking the time to read this. Teacher assaults are a major issue and need to be stopped. Administrators are not supportive and as soon as any parent makes a threat towards the school the administration caves. Several years ago I received a sexually harassing email from a student and the principal told me I should be lucky he didn't sexually assault me. She planned to take no action against the student until I threatened to go to my union. Even then her action was minimal. The following year, one of our football players pushed his way into my room and shoved me across my own classroom. Though I had called for help prior to that occurring, no help came until the student was long gone. The student should have been expelled, but was not because the parents complained. He was given minimal consequences. This is wrong. This needs to stop. We need to value our teachers and care about their well being. Who wants to go into the teaching profession in conditions like these? How will we continue to educate the future of this country when the teaching profession is so undervalued and disrespected? Please help us because helping us means helping the future of our country.

Written Testimony of

Connecticut Educator

Before the Education Committee

SB 453 AAC Classroom Safety And Disruptive Behavior

March 14, 2018

As students have more difficult emotional problems, teachers are more and more often put in danger. We need more training and more support. Administrators do not always support teachers when students are violent or aggressive, labeling these incidents a "classroom problem". In addition, teachers are asked to deal with more and more troubled children, as budget issues move students out of specialized programs so that districts can save money. This is a disservice to all students and their teachers, as it affects the learning environment and safety for all.

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I am deeply concerned that there are no longer consequences or appropriate interventions for violent students; educators have had to secure their classrooms by closing and locking doors while a student is having temper tantrum in the hallway as crisis team member supervises safety or if the violent student is in classroom/refusing to leave -having to try & usher the rest of the class safely into the hallway and attempt to continue teaching in the hall without materials until the situation is under control. One child who is willfully misbehaving can hold everyone else "hostage" for as long as they want - peers are unable to leave locked classroom to use the bathroom, go to the nurse or lunch.

If a teacher or another student is pushed or hit by an object the violent student has thrown - nothing is done if there isn't an injury. The violent student quickly "learns" what they can so and get away with and not be suspended. This emboldens the school bully and increases the frequency of their choosing to repeatedly offend.

When the purposeful misbehavior expands outside of school then it is likely they'd end up in the juvenile/criminal justice system where there actually are consequences.

I am choosing to send testimony anonymously as many administrators feel just as concerned and helpless to protect staff and students from a few aggressive students.

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I have served over 30 years as an educator for a school system in the state of CT. Over the years, I have seen an increase in student violence, behavioral issues and lack of accountability. There is a great emphasis upon inclusion in the classroom, even students who have emotional behavioral challenges and are violent. There seems to be a great emphasis on keeping the number of suspensions and expulsions down, in order to give the appearance that school climate is good. The numbers lie. I have actually seen an increase of violent acts being done by students and due to lack of funding, students who would typically be out placed are now dumped into the regular schools, often in regular education classes without para support. The challenges that my special ed. population now faces is unlike anything that I have dealt with over the years. I have seen teachers and paras hit, kicked, spit on, get broken noses, stitches, scratched. I have been hit and kicked and had been bit. The low numbers of disciplinary issues does not reflect a drop in student misbehavior, it reflects a drop in the number of cases reported. With many of the tragedies that have occurred recently with school violence, I question the logic of some to go after legal gun owners Second Amendment Rights and wonder how many of these mass murderers had a history of violence within their schools that not addressed, due to political correctness. I have a feeling that their misbehavior was often ignored by school officials or sugar coated so they would not be "labeled". I truly feel that we as educators are partly to blame for the rise in student violence when we refuse to face reality and address what is really happening in our schools. Years ago , one would get a student or two in a class that was a minor discipline problem. Now it is common to have students who have serious enough problems (in elementary school) that they are taken to a hospital with police escort for a mental evaluation (often to be returned the next day and put directly back into class). I would love to see order restored in the schools and teachers allowed to teach. I would also like to see students who actually want to learn, learn in an environment free from emotionally disturbed, violent behaviors.

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I started teaching in 1972 and stopped in 1977 to have a family. During those years students were respectful and obedient. I never had to call a parent to discuss their child's poor behavior or was nervous that their child would harm me or my students. In 1999 I went back to teaching in a public school. Since that time I have witnessed the decline of children being respectful, obedient, and hardworking. Why has this happened? In my eyes it's a combination of many things; parents not doing their job, parents making everything so easy for their child, children not having any coping skills, board of education caving into parents demands, and administrators who are afraid to discipline students. In many schools, teachers DO NOT GET THE BACKING OF THEIR ADMINISTRATORS AND GET REPRIMANDED FOR ENFORCING STRICT RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR. Many times there are no consequences or appropriate interventions for violent students. Ignoring behavioral issues in the school now increase the risk of those students becoming involved with the criminal justice system later on. I am also concerned about the risk to the safety of the other students and educators in the classroom.

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Teacher assault is a major problem that must be addressed!

As an experienced teacher I am very concerned about:

- Administration not taking the problem seriously or failing to provide necessary services and resources
- No consequences or appropriate interventions for violent students
- Risks to the safety of other students and educators in the classroom
- Discouragement of teachers to remain in the teaching profession

Ignoring behavioral issues in the school now increases the risk of those students becoming involved with the criminal justice system later on.

Please pass SB 453 An Act Concerning Classroom Safety and Disruptive Behavior.

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In my experience teaching in urban districts where the school-to-prison pipeline is a major concern, lack of funding and lack of support at the district, state, and federal levels have caused many districts to reduce student absences and suspensions by diluting the system of consequences. For example, when the district was forced to begin counting in-school suspensions as absences, administrators simply assigned in-school suspensions less often by choosing weaker consequences, further emasculating the school's power to maintain order. While the numbers look good on paper, the climate in these schools is swiftly deteriorating and incidents are becoming increasingly violent. Last year, despite the presence of school resource officers and hired hall monitors, a high school student was brutally attacked by five students and suffered head trauma so severe that the student was hospitalized for several days. While incidents of students physically attacking staff in my district have been seldom (but certainly not unheard of; verbal abuse occurs daily), they have typically been debilitating. A good friend and colleague of mine had to give up her running hobby after a student kicked her so hard that her leg fractured and never fully recovered. It is only a matter of time before the violence spreads should the system remain unchecked and unsupported.

With the NRA continuing its rhetoric of arming teachers, school climates are only going to get worse. Firearms should not be in school facilities, period - violent students will find a way to access them and endanger the safety of themselves and others. I will not feel safe with firearms in such close proximity to myself and my students. I am also terrified of what could happen if an armed teacher was suddenly assaulted in an effort to obtain the weapon. Some schools already feel like prisons; let's not complete the picture by bringing guns into schools. These students need help before they become involved with the criminal justice system; their families need guidance and support; their teachers need some semblance of authority in order to do their jobs. Without a guarantee of safety or of administrative backing, teachers will continue to leave the profession.

After reading the proposed bill, I'm concerned that the state is once again putting the onus entirely on schools. Who is going to perform the duties of "safe school climate specialist?" Will the state be providing funds to hire such staff? Or is the assumption that guidance counselors do not already have enough to do? In addition, how does the state plan to support families who do not return phone calls or comply with requests to attend intervention meetings? What happens when parents are absent or complicit in addressing their child's behavior? There is currently no support system in place for these cases and this proposed bill seems to provide "training" only for school staff. What will this training entail? Will families be involved in the training, since they are ultimately responsible for the growth and development of their children? What models will the Department of Education use to train teachers and will those models be representative of schools from multiple demographics?

While I appreciate the committee's intentions in addressing a national issue, this bill falls woefully short. Once again, the support for public schools will only be on paper. It is more of the same - the onus is completely on schools and the Department of Education will be sitting comfortably, analyzing the "data." Legislators, let's try again.

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As a school psychologist, I have witnessed the long-term affects on teachers of student assaults. Even a small incident that does not require medical intervention, leaves the teacher feeling fearful of his/her students and traumatized by the lack of basic safety and respect from students. Teachers who had previously enjoyed their profession have had to seek long-term mental health services following incidents that erode and destroy their sense of safety around their own students. Thank you.

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The children in this school have taken control and teachers are taking the brunt of it. Administration does not support the teachers because they are afraid of the parents and children. The children are out of control because they are children and we let them. Stricter rules and consequences are in order.

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I have been assaulted by special education students in past years. Having this violent child in my classroom for most of the year resulted in a hospital stay in the ICU for stress related hypertension. I was scared to go into work each day, and the other students in my classroom were terrified of this student as well. After getting punched in the stomach, the district finally removed the student from my classroom and got a 1:1 para for him. It took two years to get my blood pressure under control after that year.

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I am in my seventh year as a third grade teacher and have had experiences with teacher assault. It is a problem that seems to be getting worse over time. My greatest concern is that there are not consequences or interventions for violent students. Their behaviors are constantly swept under the rug by administration. These students are risking the safety, well-being and education for themselves and their peers. To be honest, I don't know that I can see myself teaching for the next 23 years and feeling safe about it.

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It is unthinkable that any employee of any organization should feel unsafe at work. Teachers make thousands of decisions each day and absolutely should not have to worry about being assaulted, or not protected at work.

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I have been employed in the Bridgeport School System for almost 20 years. During that time I have witnessed teachers being assaulted by younger and younger students. Many times, teachers feel helpless about what to do, and ashamed that a 5 year old gave them a good sized bruise! Often, when brought to the attention of an administrator, the child is "talked to" and sent back with no further consequences. Not like the "real world" at all! Many parents think that their child's behavior is the fault of the teacher - "they never act that way at home". So now, teachers aren't receiving back-up from either parents or the administration. I am tired of feeling like I am walking on eggshells dealing with student assault - and I teach at an elementary school - I cannot imagine what it is like at the middle or high schools where kids are adult sized and have adult strength.

I also worry about the ramifications for the future of these children. Society will NOT allow them to hit their work supervisor and not be held accountable.

We must work together to bring sanity back into the schools - parents should be held accountable for teaching their child how to behave in schools - schools should be focused on academics!

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There is no continuity in discipline for students, administration does not support teachers, the risk of injury to staff, faculty and other students has increased greatly in recent year,s and yes many of us consider leaving the profession that we chose to keep ourselves safe from harm. I recently had to call for security to remove a student from my classroom and it took 25 minutes, and the only reason someone finally came was because I emailed the head principal directly! Someone could have been injured or dead by then. I do not feel safe in my school at all.

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I am a kindergarten teacher in CT, and the only reason I am writing anonymously is that I fear repercussions from administration. They absolutely overlook violence in the classroom so that they do not have to formally discipline the student. It looks bad for them if they have too many in school suspensions, out of school suspensions or expulsions. So, they choose to placate the teachers and victims with words and no actions. How can a kindergartener be violent? At least three times a week I am attacked by a girl with very challenging behaviors. She targets other students with hitting, pinching, kicking and shoving chairs and tables into people as hard as she can. I will stand between her and her peer victims, but never put my hands on her, and then she targets me. This has been happening this entire school year. We have had meetings about the behaviors, had meetings with the parent (who is very supportive to me and has voiced that the consequences are not tough enough for her own child) and nothing has changed. Her peers and I continue to be attacked almost every other day. The child in question is young and rarely leaves lasting marks on anyone, and my administrator actually said to me, "Are you really reporting this? She can't hurt you." The level of injury is not in question here, it is that the problem is not being addressed in any meaningful way and will continue to escalate as she gets older. This is happening in my school at all grade levels. Teachers need help.

Thank you for your time.

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When will we finally do something about the violent students in school? There are few consequences and interventions for their behaviors.

I am of retirement age and I am in no position to deal with violent students. I will never ever recommend teaching as a profession to a young person. There are too many risks involved, and way too much paperwork. The lack of respect is the biggest reason. We are not respected by you. If you don't respect your teachers how will society? You need to set an example and stop violent students. If you funded mental health programs in our schools you would let everyone know we are all worth caring about. After all, we are creating your future leaders.

Lets stop behavioral problems when they are young instead of waiting until later.

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As school social worker, I know my job is to work with all kids, no matter what. I often engage with kids at some of the lowest points in their day and frankly their lives. I know my profession is a calling and I am passionate about "my kids" educations and futures. However I have been in multiple situations (some years daily) where I have been assaulted. I have had my clothes ripped and ruined (with no payment to cover the ruined clothes) large chunks of my hair ripped out causing my scalp to bleed, bit to the point of scarring, scratched to the point of scarring and kicked so hard bruises lasted for weeks. I am a woman of child bearing years and I had a traffic cone rammed into my stomach so hard it caused bruising. I have watched kindergarten student cry in fear of their classmates because they do not want to be punched again. 3rd grade students frustrated because their class needed to be evacuated and when they returned their work and personal belongings were demolished. Something needs to be done to make students, teachers and all feel safe at school. Physical aggression should be zero tolerance. I would love to go a school year without getting injured. I have been a school social worker for 7 years and that has yet to happen.

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Teachers need support from administration regarding teacher assaults. We should have clear consequences and guidelines concerning students. A policy should be put in place so that educators and students feel safe to be at school. Schools need to be a place of academic rigor and not a place where students are focused on other students' behaviors. Students need support to help them find a healthier way to express their anger or frustration. Schools need more support staff to help assist teachers when an incident arrives at school. When students are presenting challenging behaviors it makes the teachers job to teach a lesson extremely difficult.

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It is imperative that administration take seriously the safety of teachers. Teachers are putting their lives at risk every day just by going to work. Teachers are not offered additional hazard pay for the risks they take. The students that are violent and a danger to the teacher or other students must have swift and definitive consequences to ensure the safety of teachers and students alike. Why are we bending over backward for the single students at the expense of the majority? Additionally, when we excuse behavior now and allow students to get away with things with no consequence, they will likely end up in trouble with the law later because they have had no penalties for their misconduct as juveniles. One need look no further than Bentham's research that shows that criminal behavior will be avoided only if the punishment is swift, severe, and certain.

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Let me be clear - I will do whatever it takes to make my classroom a safe home to my students. I listen to them when they're upset, I soothe their fears, I reach out to families to ensure their children are my priority.

I have been lucky so far. I have only been sworn at, had my papers shoved off my desk, and only once had a student grab my arm - and then only in an attempt to reach something I had taken to keep him on task. But I know others have been hurt. That should never happen.

We teach students not to put their hands on anyone - THAT INCLUDES TEACHERS. Make this clear.