

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5336

AN ACT CONCERNING THE FUNDING OF THE STATE EDUCATION

Title: RESOURCE CENTER.

Vote Date: 3/19/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/8/2018

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following Joint Favorable Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

HB 5336 requires that beginning in FY 19, the budget for the State Education Resource Center (SERC) must be a separate budgeted agency from the Department of Education.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

DIANNA R. WENTZELL, COMMISSIONER, STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:

Commissioner Wentzell testified on behalf of the State Department of Education stating support for HB 5336 if it changes State Education Resource Center (SERC), which provides important services to the public and schools, to a “separately budgeted agency.” SDE Commissioner stated that the SDE hopes the Legislature can provide the necessary funds to support SERC’s work. SDE can no longer provide the same levels of funding for SERC as they have in prior years due to the current appropriation from the Legislature for SDE.

Ingrid Canady, Executive Director, State Education Resource Center (SERC):

Ms. Canady testified on behalf of the SERC Board of Directors stating support for HB 5336 because without this bill SERC would either have to close or it would have to significantly increase the service fees charged to districts, which goes against their mission to provide districts “with no- to low-cost supports and resources on behalf of the DOE.” SERC provides supports to educators and families to ensure equitable educational outcomes to “underserved learners: students with disabilities, students of color, and students acquiring English.” Since 2014, SERC has made organizational changes which have resulted in “increased efficiencies, formalized procedures, and reduced expenditures” to maximize annual funding.

Continued funding, at six million dollars, is essential in order for SERC to keep providing their services.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Marilyn Calderon, Executive Director, CT Parent Power:

Ms. Calderon spoke in support of HB 5336 on behalf of CT Parent Power, a parent-led organization that engages, educates, and mobilizes parents to fight for equitable state-wide policies. She stated that SERC is a unique agency that focuses on racial and economic disparities in education and that their extensive library collection helps parents learn and understand their children's development. For seventeen years, CT Parent Power has partnered with the State Department of Education to work on pushing for state-wide equitable educational policies and opportunities for students of all races and economic status. SERC helps train educators to implement best practices, including being culturally responsive to and building strong relationships with their students, which ensures that all students receive an equitable education.

Richard Porth, member of SERC's Board of Directors:

Mr. Porth stated support for HB 5336 echoing the testimony of Ms. Canady above.

George Coleman, Acting Chairman, Board of Directors of SERC:

Mr. Coleman stated support for HB 5336 because continued funding of this agency ensures continued support in the following areas:

1. SERC "supports and extends the work of SDE" especially in the area of special education including teacher training that helps teachers successfully integrate students with special needs into the mainstream classroom.
2. SERC provides high quality professional development for teachers for free or at a low cost which is especially helpful in the current Connecticut budget crisis. Some of this training focuses on English learners and minority populations which are growing in many communities.

Amanda Pickett, MSW, SERC Consultant:

Ms. Pickett stated support for HB 5336 citing the work she does for SERC providing teachers and staff with training in areas such as social-emotional development, restorative practices, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Ms. Pickett stated that there is great demand for this type of training as there is a lack of it available. Students are coming to school with more challenging needs and behaviors than schools have experienced in the past and the staff is unprepared to competently and effectively handle. SERC provides essential, quality professional support and development to Connecticut schools.

Joshua D. Smith, Superintendent, New Milford Public School District:

Mr. Smith stated support for HB 5336 citing the affordable, expert professional development that SERC provides for the New Milford school staff which helps the staff meet the demand of supporting an increasingly diverse student population to master rigorous standards. Due to increased cuts to education funds, New Milford cannot afford to provide this training to their staff any other way.

Samantha Sciucco, Special Education Teacher:

Ms. Sciucco stated support for HB 5336 citing her professional use of the SERC Library which has an extensive collection of testing kits which districts cannot afford to purchase but which are essential in determining a student's eligibility for special education services. Without access to these materials, it would not be possible to assess a student's complete learning profile and needs.

Sarah L. Jones, SERC staff member and member of Manchester's Board of Directors:

Ms. Lundy stated support for HB 5336 citing both personal and professional experiences with the organization. SERC's work in training schools to accommodate students with disabilities helped Ms. Lundy's sister, who has Muscular Dystrophy, be integrated successfully into public school which gave her the skills needed to complete college and get a successful career. SERC was crucial in supporting the staff of Manchester High School, where Ms. Lundy was a teacher, in learning how to successfully support an ever diversifying (both racially and students acquiring English) student and staff population through professional development that included challenging assumptions and raising awareness of implicit bias-challenging but crucial work. Ms. Lundy stated that she uses the knowledge she gained through SERC trainings in her current work on the Board of Directors because she is able to identify and articulate ways that decisions the body makes may "limit access to resources," deny power to some in the community or that perpetuate stereotypes.

Janet N. Y. Zarchen, SERC consultant:

Ms. Zarchen stated support for HB 5336 citing SERC's leadership in the following areas:

1. Educating people about racial equity in education including hosting an annual conference on dismantling systemic racism
2. Supporting students with disabilities including "the development and implementation of scientific research-based (SRBI) interventions" and the extensive library with a focus on special education materials
3. Educating English Learners: SERC was the first agency to offer workshops with two experts in the field: Jo Gusman and Fay Shin. After the workshops, many organizations invited these speakers back to speak to their staff.

Ms. Zarchen stated that she believes that SERC is the only state educational organization that can effectively address the "intersection of race, language, disability and content."

Kimberly Mearman, Public School Administrator:

Ms. Mearman stated support for HB 5336 citing both professional and personal experiences.

1. SERC's extensive library resources related to children with disabilities:
 - a. Families can access resources to make informed decisions regarding what testing they want or need for their children.
 - b. Districts can borrow assessments to field test them "for reliability and validity" before making a costly purchase.
 - c. Ms. Mearman's district borrows the expensive, but not often given, Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule allowing them to meet evaluation obligations without a steep financial cost.
2. SERC staff offers neutral perspectives for parents of children with disabilities providing information, resources and insight which help parents effectively advocate for their children. Ms. Mearman stated that she often refers parents to SERC to seek the information they need.

3. SERC has been integral in helping to educate school leaders and staff in the implementation of protocols to improve the integration of students with intellectual disabilities into mainstream classrooms which supports schools in fulfilling their legal option for providing the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities.

Dr. Joan E. Venditto, Director of Education Programs, Albertus Magnus College:

Dr. Venditto submitted testimony in support of HB 5336 citing the quality of pedagogical support SERC staff has provided to Albertus instructors and students in the teacher prep programs and the extensive library of educational test and testing materials.

John Flanders, Executive Director, Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC):

Mr. Flanders submitted testimony in support of HB 5336 on behalf of CPAC, which is Connecticut's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandated Parent Training and Information Center. He stated that his organization relies heavily on the professional development that SERC provides to keep CPAC trainers up-to-date and well informed about best practices relating to special education. Without the support and resources of SERC, CPAC would be less able to "ensure appropriate educations for all 77,000 students in the state."

Carl Gross, President, and David Scata, Executive Director, ConnCASE:

Mr. Gross and Mr. Scata jointly submitted testimony on behalf of ConnCASE in support of HB 5336 citing several key functions SERC provides such as:

- The high quality professional development and technical assistance which is even more important in this time of reduced state funding for district budgets
- "They function as the program "arm" of The State Education Department Special Education Bureau that provides them with a program framework, and likely cannot fund any other work in this area without S.E.R.C and its budget."
- SERC provides "access to evaluation instruments and intervention programs, which is particularly helpful when districts face short timelines and may quickly need unanticipated items."

Finally, ConnCASE would like to know where federal and state funding currently allocated to SERC would go if SERC were dissolved.

Joanne Kelleher, Director, Early Childhood Collaborative of Southington (ECCS):

Ms. Kelleher submitted testimony on behalf of ECCS in support of HB 5336 because when state funding was cut from the Office of Early Childhood's Community Plan line last year, SERC became one of the providers of cost-effective, high quality trainings and a resource for materials (via the SERC library) for the family and child care provider members of ECCS. Ms. Kelleher concluded her testimony by stating, "by establishing funding, Raised Bill No. 5336 would guarantee that SERC's leadership in the areas of inclusion, equity, collaboration, and high-quality, research-based professional learning will continue to be at the forefront of the state's agenda.

Leigh Jones-Bamman, Senior Program Manager of The Governor's Prevention Partnership:

Ms. Jones-Bamman submitted testimony in support of HB 5336 citing work she did in collaboration with SERC staff to create a report providing guidance about how school officials can legally and appropriately issue consequences for violent behavior exhibited by students with IEPs and/or disabilities for all districts in the state.

Emily Johnson, reading teacher at Barkhamsted Elementary School (retired):

Ms. Johnson submitted testimony in support of HB 5336 citing the high quality professional development SERC provided their rural school staff. “One workshop leader showed how the best teaching techniques for ELs are also the best for all students. I felt that the classroom teachers (and I) learned how to bring the best out of all our students.” SERC also provided “a nationally known expert” in the Writing Workshop model who “met with classroom teachers and conducted demonstration lessons in classrooms, with debriefing sessions afterwards. “

Teresa Perleche, Home Care Provider New Britain, CT:

Ms. Perleche, a home care provider for infants through school age children, submitted testimony in support of HB 5336. She stated the SERC trainings she has participated in have helped her grow as a professional and improved the quality of care she provides the children in her care and that SERC is an important resource for our state.

Karen V. Wilson, mental health professional, Winsted, CT:

Ms. Wilson submitted testimony in support of HB 5336 stating the importance of SERC’s “documented success” in training school teams in the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS implementation helps improve school climate by reducing and preventing incidents of disruptive and violent student behavior. Ms. Wilson stated that helping students learn better self-control and anger management while in the school environment is especially important in this era of increasingly risky youth behavior and violent incidents including school shootings perpetrated by young people.

Karen Chekas, American School for the Deaf:

Ms. Chekas submitted testimony in support of HB 5336 echoing the importance of their PBIS training mentioned in Ms. Wilson’s summary above.

Nicole Hendry, SERC consultant:

Ms. Hendry submitted testimony in support of HB 5336 based on her 13 plus years working for SERC as a consultant. Ms. Hendry has helped parents “learn about the IEP process and how to work with educators in their child’s school.” Ms. Hendry listed multiple ways that she has supported numerous educators in implementing state priorities and initiatives such as:

- planning for students in their least restrictive environment
- supporting children of color and English learners
- implementing the Connecticut Core Standards, Scientific Research-Based Interventions, Positive Behavior Supports and Interventions, Writing Standards-Based IEPs
- instructing teachers on how to incorporate Universal Design for Learning into their lessons

Ms Hendry concluded with, “In a time when the districts are facing many cuts to their funding, SERC at least provides an option for the districts to receive low cost or no cost training, technical assistance, and resources.”

Rebecca Blake, Special Education Teacher:

Ms. Blake submitted testimony in support of HB 5336 because SERC provided her with tools to work effectively as a special education teacher in a small private program. Ms. Blake elaborated on the unique support SERC provided her students while working at the STAR Program in Meriden. The student population was boys of the ages from 8 to 14 years old who were sexual abuse survivors who became sexual abusers of other children. Eight SERC staff members became pen pals with Ms. Blake's students and they even came to visit the boys. This writing project led to a poetry slam event which two SERC pen pals attended; they even read their own poems. The special memories that the SERC staff provided for these students helped validate the lives of the young boys, Ms. Blake stated.

Vernice L. Jury, M.A., CCC-SLP, Speech Language Pathologist:

Ms. Jury submitted testimony in support of HB 5336 because the SERC staff and library of resources were frequently helpful in her work in Ellington Public Schools. The professional development provided by SERC that Ms. Jury attended gave her the knowledge she needed to help classroom teachers appropriately and effectively integrate disabled children into their mainstream classrooms. Ms. Jury was able to borrow an assessment for a student with very unique special needs which she used to help develop an appropriate Individualized Education Plan. Ms. Jury stated that the knowledgeable SERC staff was always available when she needed help and could steer her toward the best resources or other professionals for answers.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF SUPPORT

The parents listed below have used SERC services to assist them in getting information on how to best support their special needs children and support HB 5336:

[Dayana Boutin](#)
[Martha Calleros](#)

The following individuals support HB 5336 in continuing to fund SERC because of the essential support and training SERC provides to educators so they can effectively and equitably teach all the students in their classrooms:

[Linda Harris](#), Manchester, CT
[Geoff Luxenberg](#), Manchester, CT
[Laura Boutilier](#)
[Donald Briere](#)
[Edith Folta](#), West Hartford
[Leora Matison](#), Southbury, CT
[Jennifer Micacci](#), Southington, CT
[Nancy](#)
[KC Nelson-Oliveria](#)
[Rose Pergola](#)
[Dorothy Potter](#)
[Karell Rose](#), South Windsor, CT

The following educators submitted testimony in support of HB 5336 because SERC has an extensive resource library which teachers and parents use regularly; and SERC provides invaluable professional that supports teachers in providing equitable educational outcomes for all students:

[Rosanne Casale-Daigneault](#), former SERC employee and CCSU adjunct faculty member
[Dr. Diane D. Clare-Kearney](#), Director, Manchester Adult and Continuing Education
[Dianne Ciarcia](#), Kindergarten Teacher, St. Mary's School, Simsbury, CT
[Joanne Haddad](#), Assistant Principal

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Tamara Morris

Date: March 27, 2018