

# Education Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-5342

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY BEST PRACTICES

**Title:** REGARDING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING.

**Vote Date:** 3/14/2018

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/8/2018

**File No.:** 129

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Education Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

HB 5342 establishes a task force to study issues relating to best practices for the promotion of social-emotional learning in schools. The task force must (1) identify successful models of social-emotional learning that are being implemented by school districts in Connecticut or other states, (2) analyze the suspension and expulsion rates, prior to and after, a successful model has been implemented in a school district, and (3) make recommendations for how such successful models can be expanded and implemented in other school districts throughout the state. It must report its findings and recommendations to the Education Committee no later than January 1, 2019

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Dianna Wentzell, Commissioner, Department of Education**; supports the intent of this proposal and is committed to Social-Emotional Learning, while sharing support of efforts to support the emotional intelligence of students, teachers and leaders. There is shared concern to amend the work, add other key state agency and community partners to the task force and extend the deadline of January 1, 2019 with concern that it is not feasible to develop an actionable report.

**Steven Hernández, Esq., Executive Director, Commission on Women, Children, and Seniors**; supports this bill sharing their continuous work with different departments and schools regarding social and emotional skills building aimed prevention as well as stress and trauma informed interventions. There is a recommendation that this task force works alongside the Commission and designate a Board Liaison who would work directly with the

Chair of the Task Force to appoint members, determine a schedule and questions to be addressed at each meeting.

**Sarah Healy Egan, Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate**; supports this bill stating that it will examine, how, as a State, Connecticut can develop the social-emotional development of students. There were a few recommendations that were shared including, further amending state law to prevent and eliminate the use of out-of-school suspensions for young children, and instead adding the option of “therapeutic removals” to take place in the school building.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Amy Alamar, EdD., Resident, Avon, Connecticut**; supports this bill stating that as an educational consultant who works with in different areas of a school system, a task force would serve as research to help build policies that will better support the social-emotional growth of students.

**Kathryn Scheinberg Meyer, Esq., Center for Children’s Advocacy**; supports this bill with a number of recommendations, including, having parent representation as a stakeholder in the taskforce, as critical members in a school system. It is also stated that the bill should be amended to include language that decreases the use of exclusionary discipline for young learners, only allowing suspension for one school days’ duration, for students in kindergarten through second grade, in which time schools can coordinate services so the student can be more successful upon returning to the classroom.

**Patricia Charles, Center of Excellence for Social & Emotional Learning, Central Connecticut State University**; supports this bill stating that research shows that students participating in social-emotional learning programs demonstrate immediate improvement in mental health, social skills, and academic improvement. It is stated that preparing students with skills to be caring and civil, good decision makers, productive problem solvers, and respectful and ethical individuals is imperative.

**Virginia DeLong, Board Chairman, Connecticut School Counselor Association**; supports this bill stating that as a school counselor, it is evident that over the last 14 years, there has been an increase in student’s emotional and mental health needs, sharing data from the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning that student’s social-emotional competencies, prosocial behavior, and academic performance improved overall when schools were implementing social emotional programs.

**Peg Donohue, PhD, Counselor Educator and Assistant Professor, Central Connecticut State University**; supports this bill sharing that it is an essential step in the process of enlisting research to inform policy. It was stated that at any age, competencies like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision-making skills are significant building blocks for positive mental health and students exposed to SEL programs are better prepared for those competencies and are more likely to stay away from substance abuse and other perilous behaviors.

**Judy Goldberg, Vice President of Government Relations, Connecticut Parent Teacher Association**; shares support of this bill along with the 38,000 members of the PTA stating

that social emotional learning is becoming a coordinating framework for how educators, families, and communities partner to promote students' social, emotional and academic learning, which is continued at home by families, expressing the importance of social-emotional learning inside and outside the classroom.

**Susan Kelley, Director, Alliance for Children's Mental Health**; supports this bill stating that there is no effort in the state that is specifically looking at identification of effective SEL programs and establishing these programs throughout the state that the Alliance is aware of. Coordinating these topics under one umbrella could potentially lead to more efficient trainings and grouping topics together at one sitting or presentation. There are concerns that parents/family members should be included in the task force as well as Scarlett Lewis of Newtown, a mother to a Sandy Hook victim and founder of the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Foundation, a successful SEL program.

**Karissa Niehoff, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Schools**; shared testimony supporting this bill stating that the proposed task force will address critical issues in schools right now, noting that socio-emotional intelligence is fundamental to the success of other intervention strategies such as Restorative Justice, SRBI, etc. which reactive rather than proactive.

**George Sugai and Brandi Simonsen, Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut**; supports this bill stating that addressing the social, emotional and behavioral growth of and supports of all students in Connecticut schools is critical in maximizing academic achievement and establishing a positive school climate and culture.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Anne Manusky, Resident, Easton, Connecticut**; strongly opposes this bill stating that public school students are no longer receiving an education, but an indoctrination from Common Core and those not able to "handle" Common Core are sent to be assessed by Response to Intervention. There is concern that this task force would cause stressors and anxieties created by the push for these assessments.

**Reported by: Zoë Gluck**

**Date: 04/06/2018**