



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly
Education Committee
Testimony of Commissioner Dianna R. Wentzell
March 6, 2019

Good morning Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and members of the Education Committee. I am Dianna Wentzell, Commissioner of the Department of Education, and I am pleased to have an opportunity to testify before you today regarding a series of important education-related proposals on your agenda.

S.B. 934, An Act Expanding Eligibility In The Care4Kids Program To Parents Enrolled In Other Types Of School

The Department is in support of this proposal which will allow parents to continue their education by making them eligible to receive the quality child care supports and services provided by the Care4Kids program. We would caution, however, that any increase in the eligible population without additional resources would limit the number of people who could benefit from the program.

S.B. 956, An Act Concerning A Comprehensive School Counselor Program

The Department is generally supportive of this proposal. The Department's 2008 publication, *A Guide to Comprehensive School Counseling Program Development*, is currently undergoing revision and upon completion it will address the goals of this proposal. The revision is being done jointly with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, however, with current staff capacity, and to allow full development and vetting by key stakeholders, we would respectfully request that the effective date be changed to January 1, 2021.

S.B. 957, An Act Concerning The Inclusion Of Computer Science Instruction In The Public School Curriculum, Programs Of Teacher Preparation And In-Service Training Programs For Teachers

The Department supports adding computer science to the list of subjects that must be offered in a district's program of instruction. We cannot, however, support any additions to the in-service professional development/training requirements for teachers. Three years ago the department chaired a taskforce that was charged with easing mandated training burden in an effort to provide districts with much needed relief and we are not in favor of moving in the opposite direction. The Department could support training for appropriate staff if additional resources were made available to districts.

We are very supportive of the next two bills on the agenda, **H.B. 7082** and **H.B. 7083**, which would require the inclusion of African American and Puerto Rican and Latino studies in the public school curriculum. We are very fortunate, as our staff continues to dwindle, to still have a social studies consultant working in our Academic Office. After the passage of last year's bill to add the Holocaust and genocide studies to the public school curriculum, our social studies consultant has worked with a

large group of stakeholders to produce curriculum guidelines, and it has taken a significant amount of time. In order for the Department to engage appropriate stakeholders and promulgate two sets of guidelines, we will need the effective dates in these proposals to be extended to July 1, 2021. Given the Department's current resources, we respectfully request this change.

H.B. 7250, An Act Concerning The Improvement Of Child Development Through Play

However well intentioned, the Department cannot support this proposal which eliminates the requirement for 20 minutes of physical exercise daily in favor of 50 minutes of either physical exercise or undirected play. Undirected play is not defined and could be comprised of sedentary activities. This change in statute may promote the elimination of daily physical activity, which a body of evidence shows positively impacts the brain and improves cognition, mood, attention and academic achievement. Student fitness levels have been correlated with academic achievement, including improved math, reading and writing scores. Furthermore, the addition of an additional time block of 25 minutes may be difficult to find in a typical school day.

H.B. 7258, An Act Concerning The Establishment Of A Firm Graduation Date And The Date For The First Day Of School Sessions

We are not able to support this proposal for several reasons. The Department could support allowing districts to set a firm graduation date prior to April first, only if seniors are required to come back after graduation if that date falls before the required 180 days. We believe it is likely that seniors will not return to finish the school year if they are given their diplomas at the graduation ceremony and would like to see some language included that addresses that concern. Secondly, we cannot support the requirement that removes a district's ability to begin school prior to Labor Day. Districts across the state are not uniform in their circumstances and communities need to have the flexibility to start the school year on a day that works best for them.