



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
**STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**



**Connecticut General Assembly**  
**Education Committee**  
**Testimony of Commissioner Dianna R. Wentzell**  
**February 22, 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. 813, An Act Concerning A Study Of Issues Relating To Early College And Dual Enrollment Programs**

The Department is generally supportive of this proposal, but we do not have the capacity to carry out both charges outlined in the bill. We believe we can, and should, study how data relating to student enrollment and graduation from these programs is being reported by local and regional boards of education and collected in the state-wide public school information system. That is definitely a reasonable ask to make of the Department. We cannot, however, study the various policies adopted by every local and regional board of education concerning weighted grading for these courses for the purposes of calculating student grade point averages and determining class rank. The calculations of grade point average and class rank are local decisions and there are more than 200 school districts in Connecticut. It would be far beyond our current capacity to conduct a study and produce a report on that issue.

**S.B. 814, An Act Requiring Boards Of Education To Conduct Testing Of Water Supplies In Public Schools For The Presence Of Lead**

While we believe it is very important to ensure that our students are learning in environments that have safe drinking water, the Department cannot support this proposal as written. The testing of drinking water should not be a local and regional board of education function. Drinking water is regulated by the Department of Public Health (DPH) in accordance with the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. DPH currently has direct responsibility for monitoring the approximately 170 schools in the state whose water source is their own domestic well. The remainder of schools operate under municipal water supply systems and municipalities are required to conduct periodic sampling of the water quality. Furthermore, the Department of Education is not the appropriate recipient of water testing results, as we have no oversight in this area. Lastly, we also cannot support the proposal because allowing districts to request reimbursement from the Department of Public Health for the costs associated with these tests is not feasible in the current budget climate.

**H.B. 7113, An Act Concerning Education Issues and S.B. 850 An Act Concerning Public Schools**

While we understand that these are both placeholders for what will be more detailed proposals, in their current form they require the Department to conduct studies on various education issues. Regrettably,

we are not in a position to take on this type of additional work without additional resources. We are struggling to meet our existing statutory requirements with a rapidly diminishing workforce and budget, and therefore currently do not have the capacity to take on this work.

### **S.B. 852, An Act Concerning The Inclusion Of Personal Financial Management In The Public School Curriculum And The Establishment Of A Personal Financial Management Pilot Program**

The Department supports the spirit of this proposal as it already provides curriculum guidelines and a model curriculum for Financial Literacy that cover topics including banking, savings and investment, credit and debt, financial planning, budgeting, risk management and middle school personal finance. While we are unable to support a new pilot program that would divert resources from the general fund, we are pleased to report that the wide array of resources already available on our website should fit this need and can be accessed by districts across the state.

### **H.B. 7110, An Act Concerning Enhanced Classroom Safety And School Climate**

The Department is generally supportive of this proposal and would like to sincerely thank the Connecticut Education Association and the many educational partners and stakeholders who generously gave of their time to participate in a working group that I convened on this topic during the interim. As a lifelong educator there is nothing I care more deeply about than the safety of our students and our teachers, and after many hours of thoughtful conversation throughout the summer and fall, I believe we were able to move last year's vetoed bill to a much better place. While we are largely supportive of the proposal, we are still concerned with the requirement for superintendents to report monthly to their local board of education on all instances of disruptive or injurious behavior that occurred within the district on a classroom level. While we appreciate the language that was included in the proposal disallowing the naming of individual students and the requirement to comply with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, we believe there will undoubtedly be instances in smaller communities where students will be identifiable based on grade level numbers alone. We also believe that there will be costs associated with the survey outlined in section 2 and we would require additional resources in order to carry it out. Having said that, we are pleased with the progress this bill has made and look forward to working on it throughout the session.

### **H.B. 7111, An Act Concerning Revisions To The Comprehensive School Health Education Curriculum And The Inclusion Of The Dangers Of Vaping In The Public School Curriculum**

We support this proposal in concept, but continue to have serious concerns with additional burdens being put on the Department that are not coupled with additional resources. The Department recently released a report to the State Board of Education on discipline data that indicates that vaping among students is on the rise and is a growing concern. As such, we believe the dangers of vaping should be included in the health education curriculum, however we no longer have a health education consultant or a Chief Academic Officer to oversee the creation of curriculum guidelines, therefore we could not complete this work. As for the first section of the proposal, based on legislation passed last session we are in the process up updating our Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework by January 1, 2020 and could include the role of consent in that work. However, again, without a Chief Academic Officer, or a health education consultant it will be difficult to meet our current deadline and could not meet the August 2019 deadline outlined in this proposal.

### **H.B. 7109, An Act Concerning Interdistrict Magnet School Program Funding**

While we certainly appreciate the fact that the magnet school line item has not seen an increase in several years, given our current and continued economic difficulties, the Department cannot support this proposal. This language would increase the state's per pupil grant amount for both in-district and out-of-district magnet schools, within and outside the Sheff region, by 5 percent in total. In our estimation, the magnet account line item would need to increase by approximately \$14 million dollars to accommodate this change.

### **S.B. 851, An Act Prohibiting The Disaggregation Of Student Data By Ethnic Subgroup In The Public School Information System**

The purpose of disaggregating data by demographic sub group analysis (ex: gender, race, ethnicity, family income, special education or English Learner status) is to ensure educational equity for all students. In CT we disaggregate data only by the federally required demographic groups. If we do not disaggregate and publish our data in a manner to allow this analysis, we would be obscuring achievement gaps in schools and districts and would put millions of dollars of federal funds at risk. Current data collection addresses these federally required categories in compliance with United States Education Department requirements. Connecticut does not collect information regarding national origin for immigrant students, but we do collect information relating to whether a student is an immigrant. This is for federal grant purposes. Some states are discussing further disaggregation within racial, ethnic, and linguistic populations to identify if there are groups of students who need additional support. We are not considering this level of disaggregation at this time.