

CAUS



Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents
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EDUCATION COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
FEBRUARY 22, 2019

Testimony submitted by the CT Association of Urban Schools on
SB 850- An Act Concerning Public Schools

Good morning Co-Chairs McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and members of the Education Committee,

The Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents (CAUS) thanks you for providing us this opportunity to testify on SB 850- An Act Concerning Public Schools. We are Dr. Sal Pascarella, Superintendent of Danbury Public Schools, and Dr. Mark Benigni, Superintendent of Meriden Public Schools—and we are the co-chairs of this association that includes the leaders of the 21 urban school districts located all across the state.

CAUS is a subset of the broader coalition of superintendents of public schools in Connecticut, but oftentimes the unique challenges of our urban districts call for additional advocacy through our entity.

While the Committee undertakes its important work of improving our state’s public schools, we urge you to consider the burden placed on our districts as a result of the implementation of the upcoming new high school graduation requirements. In its wisdom, this Committee passed these requirements nearly a decade ago, however the implementation has been delayed by three Commissioners of Education, with good reason.

CAUS believes that the implementation of the high school graduation requirements should be postponed indefinitely or made optional. Our districts are subject to significant numbers of unfunded mandates. To implement these requirements now—after years upon years of budget deficits— requires us to make decisions, ultimately cutting other budget items to accommodate new state mandates. Our budgets have been cut to the bone, and there simply is no way for us to accommodate these requirements without making catastrophic cuts to current services that will directly impact our students.

The high school graduation requirements are one of the worst unfunded mandates we've dealt with. It will require that significant new instructional time be designated which needs additional staff capacity and resources that we do not have.

The requirements are also overly prescriptive and limit students' ability to personalize their educational experience. They hamper their ability to seek external educational experiences like internships, or to have jobs to help support their families. In a time when we are continuing to ask more and more of our students through testing and other requirements, this would tie students' hands and diminish their opportunity to explore their interests before attending college or entering the workforce.

We welcome a deeper discussion of this topic, but we are pressed for time, as the requirements are due to be implemented this coming year. We offer ourselves as a resource to this committee on this and all critical issues facing our schools and hope you will consider delaying indefinitely or making optional the implementation of these high school graduation requirements.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony and your leadership on behalf of Connecticut's students.

Respectfully,

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Danbury Public Schools
CAUS Co-Chair

Dr. Mark Benigni
Meriden Public Schools
CAUS Co-Chair

*The Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents is made up of superintendents from:
Bloomfield, Bridgeport, Bristol, Danbury, East Hartford, Hamden, Hartford, Manchester, Meriden,
Middletown, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Norwich, Stamford, Stratford,
Waterbury, West Haven, Windham, and the CT Technical High School System.*