Dear Legislators,

I am writing to express my support for the bill SB 957, specifically with regard to fully supporting the mandated inclusion of computer science instruction in the school curriculum in all our public schools as well as in teacher preparation programs. Obviously, there is a need for such exposure and instruction beginning at the earliest grades and continuing through secondary schools. Early instruction in and exposure to computer science, coding, programming, and technology awareness has become the essential first step to making certain our students are prepared for the world we live in and will be able to function effectively after graduation.

As a recently retired teacher who has taught at the elementary, middle and high school levels for over 40 years in urban, suburban and magnet schools, I have seen firsthand the value and the necessity of computer science exposure and instruction at all levels. Thirty plus years ago an urban school where I worked expanded their (Apple) computer lab offerings in an elementary school, however at that time many of the extra computer science related opportunities were primarily reserved for the gifted program students. Fortunately, over time the computer science opportunities were expanded and eventually all students and classes were offered some computer instruction on a regular basis. The benefits of regular technology instruction and exposure were obvious even way back in the late 1980’s but since there were no requirements for such instruction at the elementary level and since budgets have been and will always be tight, that meant that most students at least at the elementary level in most districts did not have the exposure and opportunities with computer science that one would wish for. Over the course of my decade teaching in that district I watched as computer science education expanded and then levelled off as initial excitement/publicity subsided and budget challenges became a greater priority than computer science education. It appeared to some that short term interests in new test score preparation methods and materials overrode potential longer term benefits of maintaining focus and growth of computer science education.

The last 16 years of my teaching career were spent in another district as a library media specialist where I offered computer instruction and technology assistance as part of my role in overseeing the computer lab in a magnet elementary school in Hartford. I witnessed firsthand the many benefits that significant technology exposure and regular instruction had on students beginning in kindergarten. I worked with
many students who asked to learn to use the computers so they could write and design their own stories in kindergarten. On several occasions, our students in kindergarteners all the way through 6th grade ended up winning recognition in different statewide writing competitions for the stories they wrote and illustrated on the computers. Quite a number have had their works published.

Their creativity and abilities were maximized by their exposure to and instruction with technology and their success might never have come about had the technology and the instruction not been available to every student. Some of those students whose pieces won recognition had horrendous spelling and penmanship at that time in their lives but their instruction in and access to technology allowed them to overcome those obstacles and succeed despite their extra challenges. A few years back, one of my 6th grade students, whose early efforts and exposure to technology began in my library in kindergarten, ended up being recognized in Washington DC as the top award winner in the national competition for writing. Perhaps she would have done something similar without the early exposure and instruction in computer science and technology, but I venture to say it certainly helped her feel more comfortable with the different technologies she has encountered and mastered since then. The update to her situation is that she recently received a full scholarship to attend a prestigious private CT high school.

In another situation, other students volunteered to stay after school with me three years ago to work on programming robots as part of a national competition. One of the two groups I worked with took first place in the elementary school division in Connecticut but much of their interest and knowledge related to programming began to really blossom due to the addition of a new position in our school for a dedicated technology teacher who offered regular weekly classes for ALL students. The addition of the full-time technology teacher brought about an increased interest in robotics, coding, computers, programming, and just about every other area of technology you can imagine. The technology teacher became one of the most sought-after teachers in the school and the effects in terms of interest in, and expertise at, coding has been obvious from the start. The computer science classes are the most popular offerings and students are always disappointed if they have to miss a class for any reason. Most of the students are self-motivated in this area and after each new computer science area lesson was introduced by their technology teacher, I noticed the number of students who flocked to the library computer lab to further investigate that area surged accordingly.
It should also be mentioned that when our school added the position of a dedicated technology teacher, whose role has been expanded each year since then, this provided all of the students with a much more robust and regular technology program with the added benefit that district and state test scores in a variety of areas have also shown improvement.

It did make me feel very fortunate to be working in a school that offered that opportunity to all of the students there. At the same time I was saddened by the inequity that I knew existed because so many public schools, especially at the elementary level where the foundations of so much of future success are laid, do not have a computer science teacher or even a developed computer science program that classroom teachers can introduce in their classrooms. This situation isn’t fair and needs to be corrected. A first step is this legislative bill including computer science as a required part of the school curriculum.

In conclusion, while I do not feel that this bill goes far enough in advancing and defining the expectations for mandatory computer science education in our state, it is at least a step in the right direction and I urge it be approved.

Sincerely,

David Adamson

347 Baldwin Ave.

Meriden, CT