Raised S.B. No. 957
Session Year 2019

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.

To include computer science instruction in the public school curriculum, programs of teacher preparation and in-service training programs for teachers.

Prepared by David R. Hanna, Simsbury CT

Hello-

I am writing today to voice my support for SB 957 as introduced by the education committee.

I am a technology professional of 20+ years, and work for one of the largest software and services companies in the world.

As the father of 3 children, ranging from 18 years old to 7, I have seen the importance of Computer Science in curriculum change dramatically from my oldest to my youngest. As a student at CREC Montessori Magnet school, my 7 year old son has the distinct advantage of attending a Computer Science class once a week. It is the highlight of his week and we are very happy that he has this great opportunity. My older children had a functional computer lab in Simsbury public schools, but never received education in programming, coding or other similar skills.

While not everyone who receives coding instruction at a young age will become a software developer, they will all learn critical problem-solving skills that will help in many aspects of their lives. Additionally, learning coding breeds familiarity with computers and technology, and removes barriers to other STEM fields. As a professional in the technology industry, I see the spread of coding and deeper technology skills spreading across every industry. Healthcare, Finance, Manufacturing, even outside of traditional Information Technology jobs. The individuals with strong technology skills rise to the top in all these segments, and that trend will only continue.

As such, we are doing a disservice to our children by not exposing them to computer science on a regular basis starting at the very beginning of public school.

In order to be successful in educating our children in this field, it is also critical to make sure our teachers are prepared. That preparation has 2 aspects in my mind.

1. The ability to understand and teach basic coding and problem-solving principles.
2. The ability to properly leverage the technology investments that have been made in our schools.

Having participated in teaching several “Hour of Code” lessons at our local school, I was disappointed to see that lack of basic understanding of the topic amongst the teachers. There was little desire to engage
on the topic, and it very much felt like one-off lesson with no intro or follow-up. The students however, devoured the material, and it was a joy to watch them learn and rise to the challenges presented by the exercises. I saw many kids shine in this area that weren’t necessarily the ones that stood out in traditional lessons. In the end, it was a Kindergarten teacher that took the initiative to have some follow up lessons, because she saw that even at the youngest ages, the kids were learning valuable skills.

As far as technology investments, we need to understand that children learn differently in 2019. They are used to easy and quick technology access at home. They expect reward systems like those that video games have introduced. Instead of fighting those trends, we should leverage the investments in classroom computers, and smartboards (that we have already made) to teach to the kids in a more dynamic way. Too often these things go unused. The amount of paper that comes home in the form of worksheets is crazy in this day and age. This thought doesn’t apply to Montessori as much as traditional formats, but the CREC MMS adjust for this by having dedicated CS time.

Leveraging technology to teach kids in this digital age is a critical skill to build in our community of teachers. There are many professionals/parents in our communities willing to help, and groups like TEALS https://www.tealsk12.org/about/ that represent corporate partnerships with local school districts.

Thank you for considering this testimony and for your support of this initiative.

David Hanna
Simsbury, CT