

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6557

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING.

Vote Date: 3/29/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/8/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Section 1: Requires boards of education to annually administer a universal mental health and resiliency screening, including a COVID-19 pandemic stress and trauma assessment, to all students.

Section 2, 8: Require each board of education to maintain, within available resources, the following staffing ratios beginning with the 2021-2022 school year: a minimum of one school counselor, one social worker, and one family therapist for every 250 students, as well as a minimum of one school psychologist for every 500 students and a paraeducator to student ratio as recommended by a nationally recognized paraeducator effectiveness organization. BOEs can apply for an SDE grant for funding to hire additional staff. Also requires all memos of understanding between BOEs and local law enforcement agencies to require SROs to complete the same social-emotional training provided to teachers and administrators.

Sections 3, 5: Requires SDE to establish a state-wide social-emotional support program that provides support and assistance to local BOEs and, by Oct. 2021, student social emotional learning standards for grades 4 through 12.

Section 4: Requires each local BOE to develop and implement a comprehensive school counseling program.

Section 6-7: Adds measures of social-emotional learning to the state-wide performance plan and requires the SEL Collaborative to convene a working group to study the state statute related to school bullying and school climate plans and make recommendations and provide technical support to local districts regarding adoption of the CT Model School Climate Policy.

Sections 9-11: Integrates social-emotional learning into teacher professional development and requires school districts' educational goals to include social-emotional learning in professional development.

Sections 12-13: School Paraeducator Advisory Council study of standards, pay, and other issues related to paraeducators.

Section 14: Requires safe school climate committees to include at least one teacher appointed by the teachers' union and medical and mental health staff assigned to the school

Section 15: SBE in collaboration with the Social-Emotional Learning Collaborative will develop and adopt a model curriculum that integrates social-emotional learning, including strategies to help students who have experienced trauma

Section 16: Appropriates \$10 million in each year FY of the biennium (FYs 22 and 23) to implement the statewide social-emotional learning program.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Charlene Russell-Tucker, Acting Commissioner, State Department of Education:

Mandating specific ratios ignores the need for districts' flexibility to determine and acquire the specific expertise found in student support personnel according to the needs of their student population. District leadership must be able to maintain staffing that is responsive to the needs of their students and families. Social-emotional learning measures need greater evidence of psychometric validity and reliability before they can be considered for inclusion in high state accountability systems. Removing multiple academic indicators without revisiting the overall approach to evaluations could create challenges with summative ratings, placing greater emphasis on the observation and performance portion of the guidelines. Student learning objectives should be created by individual educators, informed by data from their specific students. The role of school counselors should not be dictated uniformly. (Many of these concerns seem to have been addressed by the substitute language)

Sarah Healy Eagan, Acting Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate:

We are long overdue for the meaningful investment in social-emotional learning that our children, and educators, need and deserve. Many schools in Connecticut, including elementary schools, do not have access to school counselors and do not have comprehensive school counseling programs. Teachers and other educational staff also need to us to make sure that support staff is available in schools to meet individually with children, help connect families to needed resources, and offer support and strategies to educators and administrators so they can best meet the needs of their students.

Steven Hernández, Executive Director, CWCSEO:

This bill directly aligns with their priorities, including eliminating disparities regarding educational opportunities and child wellbeing. Evidence-based SEL programming correlates to long-term success, reduced poverty and improved economic mobility. SEL is also a tool for improving school climate, building connectedness, and addressing forms of inequity. This bill would expand on the work many teachers and schools are already doing to bring SEL into the classroom, while aiming to provide equitable access to an important, life-long skillset.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

School Counselors: Leonard J. Adams; Heather Casale, Coventry High School; Kostandina DeRosa, Shelton Public Schools; Edward Hilser, Shelton High School; Sarah Magilnick; Suzanne R. Robinson, H. C. Wilcox Technical High School; Mary Schone; Patricia Thomas, Helen Keller Middle School

Counselors are reaching out daily to reconnect and re-engage students to school. They are learning of unique family circumstances brought about by Covid-19, and they are communicating these issues to school administration and teaching staff while always playing a role in subsequent intervention strategies and academic support. This bill will allow all our students in Connecticut can have access to a school counselor and comprehensive programs.

Stephen Anderson, President, CSEA SEIU Local 2001; Carl Chisem, President, Municipal Employees Union Independent, SEIU Local 506; Jennifer Corbiel, Paraprofessional; Malissa Harber, Paraprofessional; Shellye Davis, President, Hartford Federation of Paraeducators Local 2221; Zak Leavy, Legislative & Political Coordinator, AFSCME Council 4; Loretta Lechner, ParaProfessional; John Murphy, United Auto Workers Local 376; Linda Pasquariello, Paraprofessional; Cynthia Ross Zweig, President, Paraeducator Council, CSEA SEIU Local 2001; Marta Shepard, EVP, Hartford Federation of Paraeducators Local 2221; Mary Yordon, Divisional Vice President, AFT Connecticut

Although paraeducators perform some of the most important duties in our schools, they are consistently underpaid, undertrained, and underappreciated. This bill will begin to improve the work and career development of paraeducators. It will start the process of designing program-specific minimum employment standards, professional development opportunities that will support the standards, and teacher professional development on how to maximize the use of paraeducators in the classroom.

Kristine Anthis, Professor of Psychology, Southern Connecticut State University; Jennifer Babb, Teacher; Brianna Barkauskas, Wolcott High School; Gabriel Chase; Danielle Cornish; Sarah L. Evans Zalewski, Clinical Counselor; Arielle Holloway; Kathryn Goldberg, ADCCA, Achievement First Amistad High School; Wilson Lima; June Kozloski, Teacher; Christina Lavigne; Joseph Luchene; McKenzie Newton; Erik Martire Interim K-12 School Counseling Curriculum Leader, SPS; Cory Rioux; Marte Ostvik-de Wilde, Director of School Counseling, University of Saint Joseph; Jennifer Parzych, School Counseling Program Coordinator, SCSU; Rae Slattery Jill Portera, Teacher; Nicole Swan, Teacher; Andrea Woodman Osker

Fewer than 25% of elementary schools in CT have a school counselor. Counselors impact positively the academic achievement of their students; students' greater success turns into later greater successes, which is good for the students, their families, and all citizens. When school counselors have enough time to engage in direct services with their students the data show they clearly provide invaluable career and emotional support. Our students need more from their school counselors, and their counselors can give them more if the state supports bills like this one.

John Board: Coming out of the pandemic it is essential that we have support systems in place for our k-12 students, so then we can set them up for success and they can reach their full potential. If we have learned anything from the last year it is the importance of human connection and to be more compassionate towards each other.

Amanda Brenner, National Alliance on Mental Illness Connecticut; Tom Lawless; Robert Keder, Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician, CT Children's Medical Center; Hilary Meza; Daniel Pearson, State Director, Educators for Excellence-Connecticut; Rakshita Ramakrishna, Mayor's Youth Leadership Council

By providing SEL education, we are investing in our state's youth. We are putting faith in their goodness and talents. Not only is this the right thing to do to improve quality of life for everyone in the school system and the secondary actors who have relationships with these children, but it will save the state a considerable sum. This bill will establish a universal behavioral health and resiliency screening and include in student success plans an assessment of students' school connectedness and risk of suicide, are positive steps that have the potential to help children.

Connecticut School Counselor Association: Samantha Collins, Board of Directors; Michelle Catucci, Director of School Counseling; Lisa Kilcourse, VP Fairfield County; Virginia A. DeLong, Government Relations & Advocacy Chairman; Erin Severns Eileen Melody, Governing Board; Kaitlin Smedberg, Treasurer; Sharon Veatch, Executive Board; Curtis Darragh IV, Middle Level Liaison; Kiley Flynn, Graduate Student Liaison

Connecticut is 37th in the nation in student to school counselor ratios at 457:1. School counseling positions were cut in some districts during a global pandemic in which the students of Connecticut need access to social emotional, academic, and career support more than ever. Funding needs to be directed towards student support services. It is unfair and unethical that students must bear economic and health-related stress with less support.

Peg Donohue, School Counseling Program Coordinator, CCSU:

We're ready to train the next generation of school counselors at the 5 universities with graduate programs that lead to 068 certification. Our current students are courageous, generous, knowledgeable, patient, and well informed about what works in schools. They will help diversify the profession in our state. Most importantly, they are ready to be the person they needed when they were younger.

Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut: We have made schools the first responders for students with emotional needs. Community mental health services are limited, underfunded, and ill-equipped to deal with the tremendous need that exists. This bill creates a needed screening mechanism and embeds social emotional learning and restorative justice in all elements of the educational establishment. Social-emotional supports are a way to finally rid Connecticut schools of exclusionary discipline.

Connecticut Education Association: Tom Nicholas, Vice President; Robyn Kaplan-Cho; Kate Field, Teacher Development Specialist

This bill 7 lays the foundation for the safe space schools need to explore innovative ways to support students' SEL needs. The overemphasis on testing, implicit bias, curriculum pacing guides, developmentally inappropriate academic standards in the early grades, reduced recess and play-time, more homework, and a punitive educator evaluation system has made schools more stressful, less joyful places to learn and work.

Glenn Lungarini, Executive Director, CAS-CIAC:

Provide our boards of educations and superintendents with the fiscal resources necessary to drive change. Reimagine educator evaluation to support principals in implementing innovative pedagogical practices and school culture designs that inspire our teachers as well as our students. Repurpose the use and pressures of standardized testing so that it becomes a meaningful tool for our educators and students that drives learning experience beyond individual limits, while providing structured support.

Hamish MacPhail, Policy and Research Director, ConnCAN; Kathryn Scheinberg Meyer, Director, Speak Up Initiatives, CCA

This bill completes a mental health audit for all CT students, which helps professionals set a baseline for student need. Our students will benefit from meeting, learning about and receiving support from mental health professionals. This work will help support student academic goals and outcomes as they will be in a better mental state to access lessons.

Rebecca Ruitto, Chair, Connecticut Association for Marriage and Family Therapy:

This bill would directly create supports for our students through the strengths that school MFTs provide. As we recovery from the COVID-19, we anticipate our students emotional and mental health needs will increase as well. They recommend the language in the bill be modified from "family therapists" to "marriage and family therapists" to accurately reflect qualifications and professional titles.

Lauren Ruth, Research & Policy Director, Connecticut Voices for Children:

They applaud language in this bill mandating that districts budget funding to support more school counselors, family therapists, psychologists, and paraeducators in schools to partner with families in supporting students' mental health and social-emotional health needs. They also suggest removing police from school staffing altogether. The intent of this bill is to reduce the impact of trauma on children's education and keeping SROs in schools works against that goal.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Ronald Goodmaster; Anne Manusky, President, Connecticut Republican Assembly

This bill pushes non-academic teaching of emotional regulation under the guise of 'Social Emotional Learning, now called Social and Emotional Learning, "improvements, therein, as well as increased data collection via surveys. SEL, is not education but is the psychological manipulation of children. We need to repeal our Common Core Standards.

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.;
Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, CT Association of Public School Superintendents

As budgets are being developed, we know that many districts are seeking more positions to support student and staff. Mandating ratios does not provide the flexibility needed by districts. Additional mandates on the amount of time a counselor spends on different responsibilities in their day will confine the delivery of services. (These concerns seem to have been addressed by the substitute language)

Jennifer Jacobsen: This is a very well-intended, poorly thought out, poorly crafted piece of legislation that has no hope of implementation by July 2021 in any district because there is no time nor money to implement it. It does not fund its own purpose, is not rooted in any analysis of a needs assessment, does not contain an evaluation of effectiveness provision for ongoing support or lack thereof, amends our State Plan under ESSA of which there is no authority to do, and will cause massive FY22 budget deficits in your districts and communities.

Reported by: Dallas Emerle

Date: 4/5/2021