

Statement to the Connecticut Education Committee
March 16, 2021
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As Superintendent of the Woodbridge School District, I begin by stressing that the right to read is a fundamental right. Success in life depends, to a large degree, on an individual's development of early literacy skills, habits, and tendencies. Indeed, helping each and every one of Connecticut's children learn how to read is among our chief obligations.

Exactly because of the importance of helping all of our children learn how to read, I must write in opposition to proposed House Bill 6620, "An Act Concerning the Right to Read and Addressing Opportunity Gaps and Equity in Public Schools."

The intent of proposed Bill 6620 is laudable: our State's schools vary significantly in their preparation of students in fundamental skills such as reading. The equity issues in Connecticut are real, and by several measures are growing. As a State, we can and should do better.

But despite its best intent, proposed Bill 6620 promotes that all districts need the same degree of monitoring by, auditing from, and compliance with a new Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success, with such wide-ranging responsibilities as "implement[ing] [a] coordinated state-wide reading plan," "approv[ing] at least five reading curriculum models or programs to be implemented by local . . . boards of education," and "providing independent, random reviews of . . . a local . . . board of education." Keep in mind that many of Connecticut's school districts have attained, and continue to attain, outstanding student reading achievement without such oversight. Indeed, with strong local leadership and existing collaborative efforts, many of our districts have developed curricula that work well in the contexts of their communities. Curriculum development and professional development are not best achieved through State-developed, State-prescribed methods.

One might observe that proposed Bill 6620 allows for a range – "at least five" – of reading curricula to be implemented in Connecticut, and that it even allows local districts to request a waiver under certain guidelines. But these caveats miss the point that mandating compliance – even with some flexibility – by every district in Connecticut diverts resources from the districts who really need the assistance of State-level leaders.

Significant revisions to proposed Bill 6620 are in order, including much more targeted focus on districts whose student performance in reading demonstrates a need for State intervention, and

much greater involvement in leading the Center from local Superintendents, principals, and literacy leaders.

Thank you for your efforts to help all children learn to read. Please do not channel the best aspects of those efforts into additional bureaucratic compliance for all school districts, when a much narrower approach would be far more productive.