RESPONSES TO: **S.B. 1033, S.B. 1034, AND S.B. 1035**

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Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarthy and members of the Education Committee, my name is Shannon Marimón, I'm the executive director of ReadyCT, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing academic excellence and career-connected learning for all public school students in Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in response to the following bills:

- **S.B. 1033: AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND FINANCIAL LITERACY AS PART OF THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS;**
- **S.B. 1034: AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT; and**
- **S.B. 1035: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW PRE-SERVICE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS.**

ReadyCT supports in part S.B. 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND FINANCIAL LITERACY AS PART OF THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS.

Connecticut's new graduation requirements require that students complete nine (9) humanities courses and nine (9) STEM courses. Computer science (CS) courses should explicitly count toward completion of those nine STEM courses.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has recently defined what constitutes a CS course that meets the rigorous standards as established by the Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA). Additionally, Connecticut now has access to a common CS coursework language, as set forth in the new *Computer Science Course Code Guide.* This guide is expected to be distributed statewide in the spring of 2021 and will serve as even greater guidance in categorizing CS coursework. As such, going forward, there should be no question that CS coursework should count towards the STEM graduation requirement.

On a related note, a review of federal law is applicable here. The Federal STEM Education Act of 2015 provides the term "STEM education" means education in the subjects of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, ***including computer science*** [emphasis added]." There appears to be no good reason to reject that federal definition here in Connecticut especially in light of the elevated focus on proper categorization and rigor.

As a state, we should strive for consistent language and standards when categorizing courses. With standards and CS language established, all districts should embrace CS for the true STEM coursework that it is.

A final thought with regard to S.B. 1033: while a course in financial literacy is important and a very sound offering, I urge this body to exercise caution in making it a graduation requirement. There is reason to be concerned that this could result in yet another unfunded mandate for our school systems. Additionally, the introduction of new course requirements flies in the face of the flexibilities that were desired in revising the high school graduation requirements in the first place. We should avoid walking back on this aim.

ReadyCT <u>supports</u> **S.B. 1034, AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT.**

The academic and social benefits of learning from a teacher who shares a student's cultural and familial context are well documented. Additionally, such teachers can serve as role models, which is why we believe the state should recruit and retain teachers and administrators of color. Educators of color relate to students of color in ways that lead to trusting relationships and increased student engagement, to say nothing of the fact that greater diversity in the teaching workforce benefits all students, by preparing them to work and interact with people of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds.

A commitment to minority teacher recruitment is not new in Connecticut. Among other efforts to recruit teachers of color, there is a legislatively established MTR Task Force, as well as an Oversight Council. There should be no tension among any of the existing MTR efforts. Indeed, creating coherence and avoiding redundancies with ongoing MTR policy initiatives will help to ensure the greatest long-term impact.

Along with encouraging alignment with other efforts to establish a minority teaching corps, we make special mention here of the implicit bias and anti-bias training for hiring personnel as required by S.B. 1034. This requirement -- helping to eliminate yet another obstacle to hiring qualified minority teachers -- enhances existing efforts to develop this much-needed workforce.

ReadyCT <u>opposes</u> **S.B. 1035, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW PRE-SERVICE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS.**

On grounds that include quality and financial concerns, ReadyCT opposes S.B. 1035.

This bill is shortsighted. edTPA is a multifaceted, *student-centered* assessment that examines pre-service teaching competence using a portfolio approach. It is a valid and reliable tool aligned to state and national teaching standards. There are 958 educator preparation programs in 41 states and the District of Columbia participating in edTPA.[1] When edTPA was adopted in

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[1] http://edtpa.aacte.org/state-policy

Connecticut, it was vetted and identified by Connecticut's Educator Preparation Advisory Council (EPAC), a robust stakeholder group that invested significant time over a number of years conducting research to support the training and development of teachers and school leaders to fulfill our responsibilities in educating Connecticut students. As presented to the Connecticut State Board of Education (SBE) in 2016, EPAC strongly recommended the adoption of edTPA -- a recommendation that came only after a pilot program and a rigorous implementation study conducted by the CSDE, in partnership with educator preparation programs. Since 2016, the CSDE has continued to facilitate engagement with edTPA in all existing educator preparation programs. Implementation has been thoughtful and carefully administered.

Additionally, on the all-important fiscal note, allowing each individual educator preparation program to develop and administer its own version of a pre-service performance assessment will result in the expenditure of additional resources. That is completely unnecessary and wasteful; in a state that faces chronic budget shortfalls, this should be avoided. As well, there will be greater variability across programs, which limits the ability to compare effectiveness of educator preparation programs in any sort of standardized manner.

If the Committee is committed to student success vis-a-vis high quality teacher training, and if the Committee values streamlining resources, and if the Committee is cognizant of Connecticut's staunch fiscal reality, the Committee will reject S.B. 1035.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on this proposed legislation. I am available for discussion on these points at your convenience.

About ReadyCT
ReadyCT advocates for education policies and practices that narrow achievement and opportunity gaps so all Connecticut students can access and succeed within a 21st-century education system and beyond. We do this by collaborating with educators, employers, and community members across the state. We are guided by the belief that schools must prepare all students to become thriving citizens and professionals, and we are committed to recruiting, preparing, and supporting educators to deliver on that promise. We consider how enacting one set of policies/actions makes realizing other policies/actions more possible and meaningful. Our priorities assume examples of positive growth and outcomes exist in some schools and districts, and that the state's role is to understand how certain schools and districts working with historically underserved students are closing gaps while others are not. We are attempting to study, learn from, optimize, and most importantly—scale—what's already been proven to have impact. Our recommendations focus on optimizing present resources rather than seeking new funding sources. ReadyCT undertakes strategic efforts that prepare every student to pursue whatever college, career, or credentialing opportunity they choose in order to reach their highest potential.