



STATE OF CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly Education Committee Public Hearing Testimony of Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker March 15, 2023

Good morning, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. I am Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Education (department). I am pleased to have an opportunity to provide you with testimony today regarding several bills which appear on your agenda.

HB 6879 An Act Concerning Teacher Certification

Section 1 - This pertains to reinstating the former K-6 Elementary Education Certificate. The department acknowledges this proposal will allow for much needed staffing flexibility, depending on changes in enrollment, especially for our smaller communities, while addressing other issues such as the inconsistency in the grade span for educators who hold elementary certificates, and hopefully producing more kindergarten teachers. However, we also acknowledge that the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) has raised concerns with this proposal potentially exacerbating the shortage of qualified early childhood educators, and therefore we are currently working together on an early childhood endorsement that can be added to an elementary certificate for teachers with elementary certification. We ask that the legislature hold on making changes to the statute while the endorsement is being developed. In the meantime, OEC and the department have agreed that it would be prudent to offer a waiver allowing teachers endorsed for 1st Grade through 6th Grade to each Kindergarten in the 2023-24 school year. This would help with the challenges districts are having with recruiting certified early childhood teachers. Finally, the department is embarking upon a longer-term initiative to modernize Connecticut's certification regulations; this will also provide the opportunity for a comprehensive review of this certification issue across both agencies and with key education stakeholders.

Section 2 – Current certification regulations were adopted in 1998. In order to address the continually evolving education field, updated regulations with increased flexibility need to be adopted to continuously impact the educator workforce, educator preparation programming, and student outcomes in a positive manner. The department has already begun this important work. Pursuant to PA 22-1, Section 23, the department was charged with conducting a review of the statutes and regulations relating to teacher certification. We partnered with The Region 2 Comprehensive Center (R2CC) to assist in creating a cross walk between our State Statutes and Regulations to identify the legislation that has passed in the last several years to streamline the certification process over time. This information is helping to identify obsolete provisions within our regulations. A report was delivered to this Committee in January. We are now identifying several regulations which we believe, after consultation with key educational partners, could be immediately repealed to remove current barriers. We stand ready and are continuing the work with key education partners and will report back to the Committee with our progress moving forward. We do not believe the legislature needs to compel the department to convene this group in statute, as this is work we are already doing.

Section 4 - The department supports this language which will allow a candidate who holds a higher degree from an accredited institution to be eligible to apply for the authorization to be appropriately certified for the teaching assignment.

HB 6880 An Act Concerning Assorted Revisions to the Education Statutes

Section 1 - The department supports the practice of engaging relevant stakeholders in the teaching and learning process. As stated in the department's [K-12 Universal Curricula Design Principles: A Handbook for Evaluation, Renewal, and Development of District Curricula](#), convening a local curriculum committee or council consisting primarily of teachers who represent the various schools and grade levels in a district, administrators, members of the public (e.g., parents, business and industry representatives), and perhaps students, becomes the driving force for curricula change and the long-term process of implementing the curricula. However, curricular documents are complex and an important resource for classroom teachers for planning and assessing learning outcomes. Creating opportunities for the community to understand the components of the locally developed curricula that are specific to their role and perspective can be helpful. This process may take time to not only educate the community but also to create a process that aligns with the local curriculum development cycles and local policy, which could include a public review and comment period.

Section 2 – The department believes that it is unnecessary to conduct a nutrient analysis of school meals for web posting because of the existing rigorous regulations that govern the nutritional criteria of school meals. Additionally, to implement this requirement statewide would require a significant fiscal investment in nutrient analysis software, staff training, and time, especially given the current issues with lack of staffing, staff turnover, and supply chain shortages.

It is important to note that over 95% of Connecticut schools participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National School Lunch Program. By federal law, these school meals must be based on the goals of the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). School meals are designed to provide one-third of children's daily calorie and nutrient needs for lunch and one-quarter of their daily calorie and nutrient needs for breakfast. The federal [school meal nutrition standards](#) require schools to offer students specific amounts of fruits, vegetables, low-fat or fat-free milk, whole grains, and protein foods. For example, the meal pattern regulations require minimum weekly amounts of the five vegetable subgroups (dark green, red/orange, legumes, starchy, and other) and minimum amounts of whole grain rich foods to ensure a wide range of nutrients. In addition to the meal pattern requirements, to ensure optimal nutrition, meals offered over each school week must meet calorie ranges and limits for saturated fat and sodium, and all foods and ingredients used in school meals must be trans-fat free. The Connecticut Nutrition Standards, developed by the department, apply similar requirements for foods offered for sale to students separately from school meals. The department monitors school nutrition programs for compliance with the meal requirements during on-site administrative reviews of each participating school.

Section 4 - Over 95% of Connecticut schools participate in the USDA National School Lunch Program. The USDA does not allow the sale of whole milk in schools participating in the National School Lunch Program, and therefore, whole milk cannot be sold in schools operating under the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs either as part of the school meal or as an a-la-carte option during the school day. Furthermore, the regulations for school meals (including the requirement that milk must be low-fat or fat-free) follow the recommendations of the [2020-2025](#)

[Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). Developed by the USDA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Dietary Guidelines are updated every five years by an external Federal Advisory Committee and are based on current nutrition science, public health, and best practices in scientific review and guidance development to promote healthy eating and prevent nutrition-related diseases. The Dietary Guidelines recommend whole milk beginning at 12 months of age only until age two (2). Low-fat or fat-free milk is recommended for children ages two (2) and older to decrease intake of saturated fat.

Section 5 - The plan for the creation and implementation of a statewide remote learning school should not limit eligible students to only be those who cannot attend in-person due to a medical condition or vaccination status. Those are personal, confidential matters that should not be revealed through attendance in such a school. Many students for a wide variety of reasons, including medical reasons, may benefit from access to a statewide remote school.

Pursuant to Section 388 of PA 21-22 the task of developing a plan for the creation and implementation of a statewide remote learning school under the direction of the Connecticut State Department of Education remains under development in consultation with the legislated Remote Learning Commission.

The department appreciates and agrees with the adjusted timeline of January 1, 2024, to submit the plan and draft request for proposals and any recommendations for legislation related to the implementation of a statewide remote learning school for eligible students for participating in remote learning models.

Section 6 – The department could perform this analysis without the requirement of conducting a study. The impact by district would vary considerably depending on the amount of the state share of their local education budget, with the greatest potential impact being to our most disadvantaged communities.

Section 7 – The department is in support of this change although scheduling challenges will need to be worked out locally. It is important to note that in Connecticut the lunch period defined in [CGS Section 10-221o](#) is 20 minutes which must include the time it takes for students to walk to the cafeteria, wait in line, get their lunch and consume the healthy options provided. The continuation of meals at no cost for all students has resulted in increased participation in school meals, subsequently adding to the amount of time necessary to serve all students their meals, reducing the available “seat time.” According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at least 20 minutes of actual seat time is recommended to ensure that students have enough time to enjoy their meal and have a needed break with peers. Given the aforementioned requirements to ensure optimal nutrition in school meals, the additional 10 minutes will help to ensure that the students have enough time to eat their lunch. Students receive no benefit from a balanced, healthy lunch if the meals are not consumed.

Section 9 – Given that the department is currently appointed to 50 legislatively mandated committees, taskforces, etc, coupled with our focused commitment to listening and hearing from all education stakeholders, the department does not believe it is necessary to legislatively create two entirely new advisory committees to the department. In 2016, the department created the now nationally recognized: [Commissioner’s Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement in Education](#) whose purpose is to advise the Commissioner of Education regarding policy and programmatic priorities to

improve outcomes for all students and advance the State Board of Education's comprehensive plan for equity and excellence in Connecticut schools. Membership on the Commissioner's Roundtable reflects a balanced representation of major constituencies -- school/district staff, experts and advocates in education, parents/guardians, community members and students. The Roundtable meets quarterly and brings an authentic parent and community voice to the department products and initiatives. Recently, the statewide definition for Family Engagement, which was created in collaboration between the Roundtable, the department and the Office of Early Childhood was included in a 2022 publication: *Everyone Wins! The Evidence for Family-School Partnerships & Implications for Practice*. Appointments to the group are made upon recommendation by the Commissioner of Education and reflect Connecticut's geographic, economic, ethnic, and racial diversity. Teacher Voice is critically important, and the department recently convened, in partnership with the Connecticut Teacher of the Year Council, an Educator Roundtable to discuss recruiting, hiring and retaining educators. The department plans to continue this collaborative process to discuss education issues important to students, teachers, and families.

HB 6881 An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators

Section 1 – The department agrees and supports the provision of meaningful professional development (PD) opportunities for our paraeducators. The PD opportunities provided should be based on the needs of the students they serve, Individualized Education Program (IEP) information, individual instructional strategies, and modifications/accommodations as directed by the special education/classroom teacher. PD should also be aligned with district priorities as they apply to specific paraeducators and the roles in which they were hired.

Section 2 – The department has concerns with the added language in lines 50-51 “...any bargaining representative for paraeducators...”. We believe it could be problematic as it does not specify that the bargaining representative would be from the district, or if it could be any of the bargaining representatives serving paraeducators in the state. There are multiple bargaining organizations that represent paraeducators in Connecticut, and paraeducators in some districts/LEAs may not be represented by bargaining representatives. The department suggests that the district/LEA develop/implement its own professional development and evaluation committee (PDEC) selection process for paraeducators. This would allow a paraeducator(s) to serve on the PDEC in a leadership role on behalf of paraeducators in the district, and to be recognized as such. Similar to teachers and administrators having opportunities to serve in a leadership role, this would provide an opportunity for paraeducators.

Sections 3&4 – This new requirement would represent a massive data collection burden on both the local school districts and the state. The department already collects and reports on full-time equivalents (FTEs) of non-certified educators (i.e., paraeducators) who support instruction at the school level. These are collected and reported on an annual basis. Instead of “title” which can vary greatly, the department collects and reports the area which paraeducators support (general education, special education, library media, etc.). These same data are also available at the district and school level and are also included in the Profile and Performance Report (PPR), which can be found on the department’s data portal EdSight. Matters such as hourly rate of pay, working days/hours, health care contributions, and annual salary are matters pertaining to the local bargaining unit and not for collection by the department. It should be noted that the department does not collect such information

about certified educators either. Assigning a unique code to each paraeducator to collect paraeducator data would result in a complete makeover of the data collection, integration, and reporting framework. This would take substantial resources for the department to complete and would also add a significant annual burden for districts to report paraeducator data at an individual level.

Two areas where the department can be responsive are the following:

- The department occasionally conducts vacancy surveys, especially during the pandemic. We conducted a vacancy survey in August. Another one is currently in progress. In both those surveys, paraprofessional FTE vacancies *are* collected in the same groupings as currently being reported.
- We could calculate paraeducator/teacher and student ratios using the available data and publish them on EdSight as proposed in section 4. This will take time and effort for us but will not add a burden to local school districts. It could shed light on the differences in paraeducator capacity across districts.

Lastly, determining the impact of vacancies or paraeducator capacity on students and student learning as proposed in section 4 is an extremely complex question that cannot be answered definitively with annual descriptive data that is collected and reported. It requires a more sophisticated research endeavor to truly tease out the effect of paraeducator vacancies/capacity from all other factors.

Sections 6(d) & 9 – As the state grapples with recruiting and retaining and diversifying our educator workforce, the department understands the recommendation to pay teachers and paraeducators a livable wage, however, we recognize the challenge that will arise by mandating a minimum starting salary regardless of a district’s financial ability to pay. We also note that the \$600 million dollars appropriated in Section 7 of this bill to support the grant program proposed in these sections are not included in the Governor’s Budget.

Section 10 – This proposal would require school districts to employ paraeducators for not fewer than twenty hours a week, but would invest in the Commissioner of Education the power to waive this requirement if “the commissioner finds that extraordinary circumstances, in the commissioner’s discretion, require employing a paraeducator for fewer than twenty hours a week for a period not to exceed one school year.” This would essentially require the Commissioner to arbitrate individual labor disputes on a case-by-case basis between school districts and its paraeducators and would interject the Commissioner into the collective bargaining process between school boards and their paraeducator bargaining units, requiring a massive investment of time by the Commissioner and placing her in a role for which a Commissioner of Education – as opposed to Labor – is not suited. Consequently, the department strongly opposes the imposition of this role of labor arbiter on the Commissioner – and by extension on the department – and instead suggests that any such disputes over working hours would be better addressed under the negotiation, mediation, and arbitration processes already set forth in the collective bargaining agreements between districts and paraeducator bargaining units.

HB 6882 An Act Concerning Mandate Relief

Sections 1 & 2 – The department has consistently voiced concerns and welcomes attention to mandate relief at both the state and district levels. However, addressing such relief via an added mandate to the

department appears counterproductive. The department cannot conduct a biennial review of the education statutes without significant additional resources and time. The education statutes have evolved over centuries, and are consequently complex and intertwined. As part of its current annual legislative process, the department already tries to identify obsolete or duplicative mandates for repeal or revision, at times with limited success. The areas identified are based on current priorities. Trying to do this for the entirety of the education statutes by the January 2024 deadline and on a bi-annual basis would be extremely burdensome. Moreover, every year, new laws are added, further complicating this work.

Therefore, the department recommends eliminating Section 1 of the proposal and instead utilize the Education Mandate Review Taskforce being established in Section 2 to accomplish the task. The Taskforce, upon understanding the needed protocol for such a bi-annual review, can recommend a cadence and process as part of its report.

Section 3 – Districts are required to develop, update and submit School Safety and Security Plans annually, and aligning already required in-service training requirements concerning school violence prevention training with those required under School Safety and Security Plans is appropriate and provides consistency with the plans and expectations for the school community.

Section 4 - Districts have invested many resources to provide students with an opportunity to engage in a senior capstone or demonstration of learning experience that is a culmination of learning across many grades. By eliminating the one credit mastery-based diploma assessment we eliminate the alternate opportunity for students to demonstrate their application of learning utilizing many skills categorized as soft, executive functioning or power skills. Additionally, the action of eliminating this one credit mastery-based diploma assessment option, diminishes the student-centered approach to education where students should have choice and voice in how they can demonstrate their collective learning toward graduation.

HB 6883 An Act Concerning Students with Developmental Disabilities

Sections 1-2 – the Departments of Developmental Services, Aging and Disability Services, Mental Health and Addiction Services and Children and Families are all separate state agencies that are governed by unique state and federal laws with different organizational and operational structures; therefore, it would not be appropriate for the Department of Education to oversee the coordination of their transition services.

Additionally, the department acknowledges the importance of the provision of transition services, however, respectfully requests the ability to maintain the right to determine the agency's organizational structure, rather than mandating an office of two people to be hired within the limits of general funds currently appropriated for hiring staff. These decisions are part of the budgeting process.

Additionally, the responsibilities outlined for this new office, which is two people, appears potentially inappropriate as this would oversee the implementation of transition services for three other state agencies, each of which have organizational structures that are responsible for ensuring their work which are governed by different laws other than the IDEA.

Section 3 – the department would require additional resources to develop this training, and also to be considered is the requirement for the delivery of this training by the Regional Educational Service Centers at no cost.

Section 5 - The department understands the recommendation to extend the maximum age of eligibility to the end of the school year, rather than the student's 22nd birthday. However, it is important to note the impact this will have fiscally and programmatically on districts as an unfunded mandate going above and beyond the recent A.R. ruling which requires ongoing eligibility for entitlements created by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for special education students who have not yet been conferred a diploma, and have not yet reached the age of 22 years old. According to this decision, special education and related services under the IDEA must remain available until the student's 22nd birthday. Additionally, adult agencies such as the Department of Developmental Services that revised their funding timelines based upon the recent A.R. decision would have to readjust their current fiscal processes and structures.

Sections 6-9 - The department is supportive of these sections, however, the maximum age of eligibility in these sections are not aligned with the age adjustments referenced in Section 5.

Section 11 - requires the department to develop and provide a competitive grant for public transition programs. The department would require additional resources and staff to administer this new grant program. This grant is also not reflected in the Governor's budget.

Section 13 - The department is supportive of measures to ensure that parents are meaningful participants in the Planning and Placement Team process. We suggest a language change to line 351 "translator" to "interpreter." Note that training programs are required to ensure that the available interpreters have a basic understanding of special education and Section 504 laws processes. In response to Lines 383-389, the Connecticut Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS) currently translates IEP and 504 process based documents in the top ten languages in the state. In response to Lines 407-412, the department is concerned with this additional responsibility without significant training and dissemination of information to current Planning and Placement Teams since this legal information falls outside the scope of federal and state special education laws. In response to lines 413-420, the department has concerns with the emphasis to communicate only one of the dispute resolution options, and reading this notice aloud during a PPT meeting seems unnecessary. The department has concerns regarding the PPT's knowledge and ability to share legal information about conservatorship with the parent.

Section 14 - The department has some concerns related to language in line 491-505 which is in conflict with established Department of Development Services and Bureau of Rehabilitation Services application processes as well as student privacy rights. The department is opposed to the language in lines 506-531 due to issues related to student confidentiality. It would also be inappropriate for Planning and Placement Teams to predict who would and would not be eligible for adult services.

Section 15 - The department cannot support the language/requirements set forth in this Section. It is outside the scope of the Planning and Placement Team to determine DDS eligibility for summer employment.

Section 16 - The department cannot support the language/requirements set forth in this Section. Although, sufficient staffing for students who are eligible for services from the DDS and/or BRS is appropriate and necessary, the Planning and Placement Team does not determine eligibility for these services.

Section 18 - The department acknowledges the importance of this work, however, respectfully requests the ability to maintain the right to determine the agency's organizational structure, rather than mandating an office of one person to be hired within the limits of general funds currently appropriated for hiring staff. These decisions are part of the budget process.

Section 19 - The department has concerns related to Line 647 in the use of the term "non-binding." When parents and school districts reach a settlement agreement it is a binding contract. In response to Lines 752-756, changing the current burden of production in special education hearings that are consistent with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, is not warranted. Furthermore, requiring a school district to shoulder the burden of production in a hearing brought by a parent or guardian would essentially require the district to speculate as to the scope of the issues the parent or guardian seeks to raise, complicating and extending hearings. In response to Lines 860-865, plain language resources on complaints, hearings, and other dispute resolution processes already exists and are posted.

Section 21 - The department currently supports and monitors the implementation of the IDEA. This work is done through the CSDE General Monitoring and Supervisions System. This system includes eight interconnected components including Fiscal Management, State Performance Plan, Integrated Monitoring, Dispute Resolution, Policies/Procedures, Technical Assistance/PD, Data on Results, and Improvement/Incentives/Sanctions. The CSDE reviews each student IEPs annually for compliance, and one third of all school districts each year in a priority area of focus based upon current data.

Section 22 - Additional in-service training is added burden for district staff, which the legislature has recognized in the past with its passage of PA 22-116, which established a working group to examine and make recommendations concerning the consolidation or elimination of unnecessary, obsolete or redundant professional development requirements.

HB 6884 An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession

Section 1 – As the state grapples with recruiting and retaining and diversifying our educator workforce, the department understands the recommendation to pay teachers a livable wage, however, we recognize the challenge that will arise by mandating a minimum starting salary regardless of a district's financial ability to pay. We believe that policy makers will need to continue to work together to determine the appropriate funding mechanism to achieve this important goal equitably across the state.

Section 2 – This proposal would provide a tax break to teachers who hold an initial educator certificate or a provisional educator certificate, but it would exclude those who hold a professional educator certificate. The department would be supportive in concept of expanding the credit to include those more experienced teachers. However, this is not included in the Governor's budget.

Sections 4-6 – The department cannot support these sections of the proposal. The timeline is unrealistic, and the department does not currently have the capacity to create a valid and reliable performance assessment. States that have their own performance assessment have taken multiple years for design, piloting, and implementation.

Creating new performance-based assessments that measure what we want them to measure and can be used for their intended purposes (i.e., validity), and yield reliable and comparable scores across diverse people and repeated administrations (i.e., reliability) is an extremely complex, time intensive, and expensive proposition. It will take millions of dollars and several years (3-5 at the very least) to develop such an assessment. Moreover, in addition to the assessment, having a system to reliably and securely deploy such assessments, while conducting ongoing maintenance and development of both the assessments and the delivery platform are additional substantial ongoing commitments. The department does not have the massive amounts of resources – staff, time, money – to allocate toward such an endeavor; in fact, the State should seriously consider whether we will be better off than where we are today after such an exercise.

We would also note that in the creation of the new assessment, the wording of the bill also excludes private institutions of higher education as well as alternate routes to certification that operate outside of institution of higher education. Line 58 and line 76 also contradict each other. Line 58 says the new assessment would only be for public institutions and line 76 states that all teacher preparation programs would be required to implement the new assessment.

Finally, this legislation eliminates edTPA and creates a similar replacement. Note, the department is benchmarking with other states which have replaced edTPA to examine their rationale and replacement efforts.

Sections 7&8 – addresses the tenured-teacher employment termination hearing process set forth in C.G.S. §10-151(d) by eliminating the option of holding the hearing before a Board panel. All such termination proceedings would be held before a single hearing officer, which is already an option under Section 10-151(d). The other notable change is changing one of the statutorily enumerated bases upon which a teacher termination can be predicated from “due and sufficient cause” to “just cause,” thereby more explicitly including within the hearing determination a consideration of whether the district administration’s recommendation to terminate is consistent with the district’s handling of similar cases. Section 8 would eliminate the onerous criteria governing the department’s solicitation and recommendation of arbitrators to serve in disputes between school boards and bargaining units, which criteria have significantly limited the qualified applicant pool, particularly in terms of diversity, to the point of sometimes making it almost impossible to find arbitrators whose qualifications comport with the current statutory requirements.

Section 10 - For the reasons below, the department strongly recommends that any such legislation to raise the minimum entry age for Kindergarten not take effect until Connecticut has moved to universal pre-K, which requires thoughtful collaboration with our federal partners. Connecticut has one of the youngest K-entry ages in the country (see [Table 5.3. Types of state and district requirements for kindergarten entrance and attendance, waivers and exemptions for kindergarten entrance, by state: 2018 \(ed.gov\)](#)). However, this is a significant change for families, K-12 schools, pre-K programs, and other community-based organizations that support children prior to the start of Kindergarten. Therefore, implementation of this change should be delayed so that all the aforementioned

stakeholders can become aware of this change and make the necessary plans to update their policies and practices. Moreover, the state will need to expand its investments in pre-kindergarten programs so that families with greater socioeconomic needs are better able to support their children with high quality learning options for a longer period of time prior to the start of Kindergarten.

Sections 11-12 - Research demonstrates that play is integral to the academic environment. It ensures that the school setting attends to the social and emotional development of children as well as their cognitive development. It has been shown to help children adjust to the school setting and even to enhance children’s learning readiness, learning behaviors, and problem-solving skills. Play-based learning however, must be implemented in alignment with curricula and teaching and learning. Effective integration of play-based learning requires resources and time for implementation, including professional learning, coaching, technical assistance, and alignment to current practices. In order to be successful in its intent, educators and adults working with children will need support in learning how to effectively create play-based learning classroom environments and facilitate children’s engagement in structured and unstructured play. Many children - including children with disabilities, multilingual learners, and children without previous school experience - may require specific teacher support and scaffolding to engage in purposeful play and to benefit from play-based learning. We respectfully request that the implementation in play-based learning be delayed until the 2024-25 school year to allow the department to develop resources and potential frameworks to support schools for optimal outcomes and benefits for children. Additionally, we recommend the following:

Line 567/568: Replace “academic standards” with “learning standards.”

Line 584/585: Recommend using the broader concept of “limiting technology and screen time” in place of “be predominantly free of the use [sic] mobile electronic device.”

Line 593-596: This is unclear and the wording “shall comply with” is confusing. If the intent of this is related to access to the play-based learning and the content of IEP/504 plans, we suggest using the terms “alignment with” students’ IEPs and 504 plans.

Section 13 - While the department recognizes and supports the need of teachers to have sufficient planning time, such time is often included within collective bargaining agreements and, as such, should be scheduled collectively between districts and teachers’ bargaining units at the local level.

Sections 14-16 - While educators are certified by the state, they are employed by the school district. As such, personnel matters including exit surveys, pay scales, benefits, etc., are the domain of local human resource systems and school districts. They should not be collected by the department in annual data collection systems. The reasons why someone ceases employment in a school district is a very personal matter that should remain in the confidential personnel file of the individual and inform local decision-making purposes. Moreover, trying to collect this new data and report it to the department will add a tremendous burden for local school districts and the department. As an alternative to this proposed annual collection requirement, the department offers the following two suggestions:

1. The ground-breaking research collaborative established by the department is conducting a study to understand the effects of the pandemic on teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions of their role as well as patterns of educator turnover and mobility. This study is being led by a

collaboration of faculty from the University of Connecticut, Sacred Heart University, and Western Connecticut State University. It will shed light on some of the reasons why educators may be leaving the profession. A comprehensive report from this study is expected around September 2024. See https://portal.ct.gov/ccerc/Knowledge-Base/Articles/Teachers-and-Leaders-Perceptions-Turnover-and-Supply?language=en_US. The department will share the full report with the legislature once it is published.

2. The department already collects comprehensive data on educators which tells us what certification(s) they hold, where they teach, and what they are assigned to teach. Using these data, the department can determine educator turnover in a district. The turnover metric that can be reported with reasonable accuracy is the percentage of educators who are newly teaching in a district in a given school year. This metric will highlight the amount of “educator turnover” that is occurring in a district on an annual basis. While creating this data source and report on EdSight will require resources and time for the department, it will not add any burden to local districts. The department can create this new report to be publicly available on EdSight without any additional appropriation by April 30, 2025.

Section 17 - The department opposes this section, which modifies the makeup of the State Board of Education. Per State Statute § 4-5, the State Board of Education is considered an agency head. The Governor, as the head of the Executive Branch, has the sole authority to appoint all agency heads.

Section 18 – Teacher Voice is critically important, and the department recently convened, in partnership with the Connecticut Teacher of the Year Council, an Educator Roundtable to discuss recruiting, hiring and retaining educators. The department plans to continue this collaborative process to discuss education issues important to students, teachers and families.

SB 1197 An Act Concerning Workforce Development

Section 1 – The agency is in support of efforts which encourage districts to pursue aviation and aerospace apprenticeships for students in areas in which there are opportunities and industry demand provided they are in conformance with statutory standards and approvals of the Department of Labor.

Section 2 – Most districts in the state already have a range of dual credit programs in place. It is unclear what activities this section applies to, especially because it is optional. Subsection (a) requires districts to prioritize healthcare for any new programs they may envision, which will limit the ability of the district to be responsive in their programming to their regional needs and student interests. Subsection (b) adds an annual reporting burden for districts. As mentioned in previous testimony, dual credit courses which are also geared toward providing students with pathways to industry-recognized credentials are part of an ARPA funded department grant program which will be made available to districts so that they may work with local industry to determine what coursework is needed in order to meet area job demands.

Section 3 – The department supports working with the Paraeducator Advisory Council to create potential career pathways for students that includes the paraeducator profession. by exploring what following resources Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the National Resource Center for Paraeducators (NRCP) may have that CT could consider using (for example, CEC has developed [Core Competencies for Special Education Paraeducators](#), and NRCP has several resources for [Career](#)

Ladders for Paraeducators). Based on exploring existing options and models, the department could determine what next steps would be to train high school students to be paraeducators.

Section 4 – The department is supportive of all efforts which seek to make students and families more aware of academic and career pathway opportunities.

Section 6 – The department is supportive of this pre-apprenticeship grant program conceptually, but acknowledge that it was not included as part of the Governor’s biennial budget.

Section 7 – The department is utilizing \$3.5 million of ARPA funds to expand student participation in dual credit courses that are offered in partnership with Connecticut public and private institutions of higher education (IHE). This work needs a dedicated appropriation at the state level, and it should be noted that the Governor’s Recommended budget does provide an additional \$3.5 million to support this effort. Absent a permanent funding commitment, however, this section should change the following:

- Delete “model agreements to promote information sharing between boards of education and institutions of higher education,” – this is not a barrier to expanding dual credit programs and does not need to be required.
- Delete “(3) tuition assistance for students who enroll in dual credit and dual enrollment programs.” While laudable and critical, the current project with ARPA funds is designed to provide start-up funds to expand offerings. Providing tuition assistance requires an ongoing appropriation. Students need a long-term commitment from the state that their dual credit participation will be supported, and their family income will not be a barrier to their ambitions.
- Change report date from Jan 1, 2024, to Jan 1, 2026. This will allow the department to update the legislature not only on the activities implemented but also on the impact of those efforts to increase student participation in dual credit offerings.

SB 1199 An Act Concerning Equity in Education

Section 1 – The department supports and appreciates the intent of creating an educator apprenticeship program to provide opportunities for students in educator prep programs to gain hands-on experience in classroom teaching. We recommend adding “not as a teacher of record but under a teacher mentor” following “classroom teaching experience’ on line 6 of the bill. We would note that no funding has been provided for this program In the Governor’s budget.

Section 1 (b) – Under an apprenticeship program, the apprentice is an employee of the school district and must be paid for their work. The purpose of the apprenticeship is to remove financial barriers to becoming a teacher.

Section 3 – This adds accountability into the requirement that school districts must have an Increasing Educator Diversity Plan by providing a deadline to create the plan and making it publicly available on the district website and on EdSight. It also gives the State Board of Education the authority to withhold grant funds for noncompliance. We will need to continue to have conversations regarding our ongoing capacity concerns in light of this new accountability measure.

Section 4 – Students are currently not eligible to major in education until their junior year. It is suggested that, rather than having the eligibility be determined by “enrollment in a teacher preparation program during the following fall semester at a four-year institution of higher education,” that eligibility be contingent “upon admission into a state approved teacher preparation program or upon enrollment in an institution of higher education and pursuing a subject specific major required for educator certification.” Further, recipients receiving such scholarships should be required to teach in Connecticut for three years or the grant will convert to a loan. Finally, we would note there is no appropriation for this in the Governor’s Budget.

Section 5 – Replacing the term "minority" with the term “diverse” in the state statutes is an important and appropriate change.

Section 8 – This section removes the categorical designations of “District Reference Group” (DRG) which is no longer in use by the department. Additionally, the removal of the requirement that student experience be in certain DRGs will allow all districts to hire student teachers working in their district upon graduation.

Section 9 – The creation of an adjunct professor permit which authorizes recipients to hold part-time positions to teach in grades 9-12 will help address the teacher shortage. The requirement that the department be consulted in the development of such programs should be removed as this is unnecessary.

Sections 10 - While the K-8 model curricula work is in progress to meet the legislated deadline of January 1, 2024, the inclusion of two additional core components of cursive writing and world language will require research and development.

The agency will explore the mechanism, grade by grade learning opportunities, and timeline to incorporate cursive writing and World Language into the K-8 model curriculum.

It should be noted that the state board of education approved Connecticut Core Standards for English Language Arts identify when print concepts or handwriting should be developed in students in grades k-5. Print concepts include understanding of the organization and basic features of print, understand that words are separated by spaces in print and recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet, all of which will be included and integrated in K-5 model curricula for English language arts and made available on or before January 1, 2024.

Section 11 - Subsection 7 is appreciated, however not necessary as existing language in part (6) of subsection 11 allows the provision of providing credit recovery programs toward meeting the high school graduation requirement utilizing on-line coursework.

Sections 12-19 – The department understands the potential impact the Aspiring Educators Diversity Scholarship Program could have on diversifying the teaching workforce and appreciates the inclusion of four full time positions within the Talent Office, as well as the proposed appropriation of funds to administer the program, however, we must acknowledge that the positions and the funding are not included as part of the Governor’s biennial budget.

SB 1200 An Act Concerning Special Education

Section 1 – the department is supportive of this language which would remove the various federal COVID-19 recovery funds from the calculation of net current expenditures/pupil for the purpose of calculating districts' special education excess cost grant threshold. These are one-time funds related to the pandemic that based on current statute are being included when determining how much a district must spend per pupil to reach the 4.5x threshold required for reimbursement under the Excess Cost grant. Their inclusion has inflated the amount of funds a district must spend before being eligible for reimbursement. Please note there would be a fiscal impact associated with passage of this language for which funding is currently not provided for in the budget.

Section 2 – the department is supportive of the use of dual instruction as part of remote learning when it is required for the implementation of an IEP for a student who requires special education services as that would be consistent with the mandates of the IDEA, but it does not support this language as written as we believe it limits guidance issued by the department last year, which would allow for the use of dual instruction to provide for Inter-and intra-district courses, a model that is designed to provide equitable access to students in underserved communities who would otherwise not have the ability to take the same high-level courses to which students in more affluent communities have access and a model which is also an intervention that is part of the Sheff settlement agreement and subsequent permanent injunction.

Section 3 – The department would request that the State Advisory Council for Special Education be added to this task force.

Section 4 – The department supports the right of parents/guardians in being meaningful members of the Planning and Placement Team process. We would support parents whose primary language is different than English to have access to interpreters during Planning and Placement Team meetings.

Section 5: The department is supportive of this language. If special education status were used as part of the enrollment/application process, it would be considered discriminatory.

Section 6 - The department remains committed to supporting student and educator safety as an essential foundation for learning and we continue to do so within the confines of our statutory authority. Our state has taken multiple steps, including providing training and support, and recently passed legislation to ensure that restraint and seclusion is utilized as a last resort and only in response to an emergency situation in which the student or others are in immediate or imminent risk of injury. In Connecticut, as of July 1, 2018, seclusion and restraint are not permissible as part of a student's behavior intervention plan (BIP) or to be included as an intervention in a student's individualized education program (IEP). It is important to share Connecticut's current definition of Seclusion: "Seclusion is the involuntary confinement of a child in a room, from which the student is physically prevented from leaving." Seclusion does not include: exclusionary time out; or in-school suspensions. In public schools, seclusion does not mean any confinement of a child where the child is physically able to leave the area of confinement such as in-school suspension and time-out." Seclusion is not a "place." Although an area or room can be assigned for the purpose of seclusion, a seclusion can be conducted in a classroom, hallway, office, etc., recognizing the defining criteria as the fact that the student is not allowed to leave the room, space, or area. Additionally, as of January 1, 2019, school districts and programs were responsible for developing policy related to the use of exclusionary time

out. An Exclusionary Time-Out is a temporary, continuously monitored separation of a student from an ongoing activity in a non-locked setting, for the purpose of calming such student or deescalating such student's behavior. An exclusionary time out becomes a reportable "seclusion" if or when the student is physically or otherwise prohibited from leaving the space.

The department remains focused on supporting our educators and families to reduce the need for the emergency use of seclusion however, the department is concerned about the complete removal of seclusion as an emergency procedure for trained educators to maintain the safety of students and educators. If trained educators are not able to utilize the emergency use of seclusion without the proper training and supports in place it may have an adverse effect on the safety of students leading to an increase in restraints or student removals from the school building thereby increasing our disciplinary removal of students across the state. The removal of seclusion may also negatively impact a student's access to being educated in the least restrictive environment, resulting in more restrictive placements outside of the general education classroom or even resulting in a student being placed in a separate school. If seclusion is banned, exclusionary time-out would require analysis with some parameters around reporting to parents. The department currently publicly reports seclusion data which is an important mechanism for analysis of current needs, training, and support for the field.

Section 8- The department currently posts and makes available to the public decisions of due process hearings as required under 34 CFR 300.500 and 300.537. The IDEA does not require posting of the results of individual special education complaints. Requiring the department to post such complaints would result in the following concerns: (1) Individual complaint reports are useful to the recipient, but we have concerns regarding their widespread application, overextension or inappropriate application of complaint findings (complaints are an investigative process not an adjudicative process) public/advocates/press; (2) concerns regarding maintaining the confidentiality of student(s) families, even with the heavy redaction of complaints, especially where complaints are filed in smaller/rural districts; (3) public posting may deter parents from filing a complaint; (4) redaction process is not a straightforward process and could lead to increased conflict of what information is or is not redacted; (4) the requirement of this process would provide an additional burden to an already understaffed dispute resolution unit. As an alternative to the current proposal, the department would suggest sharing summative data related to the complaint process, such as the number of complaints received, processed, a summary of the findings and important themes.