

Testimony of

Ann Grosjean

Before the

Education Committee

ReHB 5378 AA Concerning the Integration of Social-Emotional Learning in Programs of Professional Development for Educators in Connecticut

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Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ann Grosjean and I a retired Connecticut teacher. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of HB 5378 AAC the Integration of Social-Emotional Learning in Programs of Professional Development for Educators in Connecticut.

Part of the reason that some children are misbehaving, not engaged, and experiencing social and emotional issues in the classroom is that they are not developmentally ready to learn. This begins in kindergarten when we ask children who are still four years old to participate in a curriculum with which they are too young to succeed. I retired from teaching in June of 2010, having taught in the Mansfield Public Schools, grades kindergarten, first grade, and gifted and talented, for thirty-five years. Since I left kindergarten in 1997 and moved to grade one, huge changes have occurred.

With the Common Core Standards, kindergarten is the new first grade. In order for the children to “do well on the test,” what used to be taught in grade one is now taught in kindergarten, and most of the younger children, with birthdays after September 1, are not developmentally mature enough to successfully do this work. This leads to social and emotional misbehavior in the classroom, and students who later are not proficient on our SBAC tests, leading to our large achievement gap. I still volunteer weekly in three school districts for grades kindergarten, 1st, 3rd and 4th and see students struggling.

As a state, we need to work with our children from birth to solve this problem. We must continue to provide a strong Birth to Three Program that identifies and addresses problems early on. Universal public preschool for three- and four-year-olds whose parents cannot afford a private setting must be available for all. There are many programs in place like Care for Kids, public school special education programs, and Head Start to support children in need to attend preschool but there are not nearly enough programs for all children.

As our children enter the K-12 system they must be developmentally ready to learn. There is a snowball effect. Children whose birthdays fall between September 1st and January 1st are often unable to succeed in kindergarten and this follows them throughout their education. It is important that these children, especially low-income and at-risk children, have preschool opportunities in lieu of attending

kindergarten for that extra year. If we send them to kindergarten too early, some of these children might be retained. We must commit to making universal preschool a priority in the coming years. In the meantime, we must change our kindergarten entrance age date from January 1st to September 1st.

Connecticut is the only state that has a cut-off date for kindergarten entrance of January 1st. Thirty-two states require their children be five to start kindergarten on or before September 1st. Eight states have a cut-off date on or before October 1st. Maine is the latest at October 15th. California, Maryland, and Rhode Island have changed to September 1st from their December cut-off dates and Hawaii from January 1st to July 31st. Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Vermont leave the date to the discretion of local boards of education. By changing our three and four-year-old preschool and kindergarten cut-off date to September, our youngest students now will be the leaders in a developmentally appropriate classroom and they will be mature enough and socially and emotionally healthy and able to fully participate and succeed throughout their years of education and become lifelong lovers of learning. I believe that as children, who are ready to begin kindergarten, move through the grades the State of Connecticut will see our test scores improve and our achievement gap decrease.

Thank you for your consideration.