

Testimony of
Mary Enright
Raised Bill No. 5378
March 9, 2020

Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Mary Enright, and I am a teacher in the Stamford Public Schools for the past five years. I have been teaching for 23 years and have taught all grade levels from Kindergarten to grade 12.

Thank you for reading my testimony today on Raised Bill 5378, An Act Concerning Integration of Social-Emotional Learning in Programs of Professional Development for Educators in Connecticut. While this proposal is important, it is not enough to address the severity of the current issues facing our children in today's classrooms. The topic I choose to address specifically is the overtesting of our children in the early childhood grades of K - 2.

As a teacher of English Language Learners, I have spent the entire month of February administering the English Language Proficiency exam known as the LAS Links to students in my elementary school. The test requires that students as young as 5 take four parts of this exam on a computer. The four parts are the listening, reading, writing and speaking subtests. The computer generated voice prompts the students in a long series of directions to listen to the prompt, click on the record button, speak into the microphone, and then stop recording.

I cannot adequately do this justice here, but I will attempt to describe how this exam on a computer is inappropriate and pedagogically unsound. Five year olds do not have the manual dexterity to go through 25 items listening, recording and proceeding to the next section -- nor the ability to comprehend multiple steps in the directions in a foreign language that they are learning. If you have had the opportunity to learn a foreign language, can you imagine having to navigate all of these intricate steps in that foreign language when you are five years old? The listening subtest is quite long for all grades, but the second grade test is particularly long at approximately 25 minutes. Anyone who has attempted to read a young child a story knows that children lose interest if the story is not engaging or interesting to them. This exam has some of the most monotone conversations and often complicated stories or scripts intended to trick students. The writing subtest requires that kindergarten students "write" a certain letter. When this test was administered in paper and pencil format, writing particular letters was a fair assessment, but students are no longer writing. This subtest has now become a keyboarding test. The test still prompts students to "write" particular letters by typing them. I have had students who can write the letter in question, but they cannot find it on a keyboard to type. Additionally, points are deducted (or students are penalized) for not knowing how to create a capital letter or for not

being unable to locate the correct punctuation marks. While these assessments are truly problematic, they are also very time consuming for what little valid information they yield about growth in the grade K to 2 levels.

While this bill is necessary in order to support a comprehensive approach to address student trauma and promote social emotional learning, please do not lose sight of all of the other areas created by the current climate of overtesting. A comprehensive approach should include eliminating computer-based assessments for all students in grades PreK to 2. As I have stated previously, I have been teaching for 23 years, and this area of assessment has exploded with online assessment being administered in all grades including kindergarten. This has negatively impacted our children's social and emotional growth as they must spend time learning keyboarding skills and not how to negotiate play and classroom interactions.

When our district was forced to administer online assessments, our scores dropped significantly. Now that we are forced to administer these exams on the computer for Kindergarten, first grade and second grade as well, the exit rate or the passing scores have decreased dramatically. It is extremely difficult for students to exit ESL services. When I administered the paper and pencil versions, it took approximately two weeks for all of our ESL teachers to test the students. It now takes between 4 or 5 weeks to test the same number of students. This madness must stop.

In conclusion, I urge you to end the practice of computer based standardized testing in grades K to 2.

1. Prohibit standardized tests from pre-kindergarten through second grade (as done in New Jersey).
2. Limit the amount of classroom time required for statewide assessments to less than 1% of the required annual instructional hours for each grade (as done in New York).
3. End computer based testing for English Language Learners in elementary schools. There is currently no computer based English language proficiency testing for any students in New York State.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for all your efforts on behalf of students in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Mary Enright

Mary Enright, NBCT

National Board Certified Teacher in English as a New Language