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TESTIMONY OF MARILYN MATHES
CONNECTICUT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE CHILDREN'S COMMITTEE

RE:

SB 2 AAC SOCIAL EQUITY AND THE HEALTH, SAFETY AND EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

MARCH 9, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan, and members of the Committee on Children. My name is Marilyn Mathes. I am testifying today as the mom of a public elementary school student, and I have also worked directly with teachers as a staff member of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) for the past 14 years.

I would like to express our concerns regarding SB 2.

SB 2 permits school districts to provide virtual learning on an ongoing basis with the approval of the commissioner of the State Department of Education. CEA believes this proposal would result in great harm and inequities for school children across the state.

While I recognize that during times of a public health emergency there may need to be adjustments for safety reasons, there is no true substitute for in-person education. And the implications of this bill appear to go far beyond a declared public health emergency.

Due to fear and concerns about COVID, my husband and I opted to have our daughter participate in full remote education this school year. We live in a well-resourced school district that sent devices home with students before schools closed last March. But despite herculean efforts by our daughter's phenomenal teacher and staff, we have seen first-hand that, even in a well-resourced school district with excellent educators and staff, remote instruction is not the same as in-person education. And despite our concerns about COVID, we intend to send our daughter back to school in person in the fall.

We have witnessed a number of problems and distractions that have impacted instruction for our daughter, her peers, and her teacher. Our daughter's teacher had to reach out to parents on multiple occasions due to students causing disruptions or distractions by logging in late in the morning or when returning from breaks, shutting off their cameras, not participating, or engaging in other disruptive behavior. There were also a number of technological issues that

interrupted instruction. My daughter was very upset one day when, in the middle of an assessment, she lost connection and couldn't get back into the assessment. I went to help her, and her teacher patiently tried to help us troubleshoot while simultaneously reassuring my daughter that it would be ok and fielding questions and addressing concerns from several other students. Ultimately, we could not fix the problem and had to submit an IT ticket. This is one of several technological issues that my daughter experienced, and many other students experienced similar problems, all of which took time away from instruction. I have also seen the toll this year has taken on my daughter's and other students' emotional and mental health, and the stress from remote learning challenges has added to this serious problem.

If we are experiencing these difficulties in a well-resourced school district, I can only imagine the additional challenges and inequities in districts that do not have access to the resources we have.

In fact, I have heard a number of concerns raised by teachers about remote instruction, in particular in classrooms where there are both in-person students and students simultaneously participating remotely.

- Having both in-person and remote students means one group gets attention while the other doesn't. Also, teachers must always be near their computer, monitoring remote students and chats. In-person is more hands-on, which is a different mode completely.
- Remote learners show up late, taking up class time to reintroduce material. A disproportionate amount of time is spent dealing with students' login and internet access problems at the expense of others.
- Remote students often walk away or otherwise tune out during class.
- Test conditions vary between in-person and remote students, which make for unfair results.
- In person use of white boards, DVDs, and other visuals cannot be seen by remote students.
- Districts with more dual/synchronous classes will have more students negatively affected. These are likely to be schools with fewer resources and staff to support the intensive nature of operating remote and in-person schools.
- Remote learners do not follow deadlines and complete assignments when in-person students are expected to -- creates inequity.

- Remote learners require extra time to prepare separate lessons, and extra disproportionate attention to keep them engaged; They require a lot of follow-up time to address missed classes and assignments.
- Some teachers report much lower performance among remote learners (e.g., 20 points lower). Low assignment completion and participation rates.
- Remote instruction, especially unplanned, for Special Education, 504, and IEP presents difficulties and inequities.
- Students in lower performing groups engage less when remote and find it more difficult to follow assignments and complete work, especially compared to their higher performing counterparts, creating inequities.
- Checking for learning with remote students is difficult -- you can't see their work or their expressions.
- Specials like music and art are difficult for remote, and dual instructionally too. You can't do group rehearsals online, for example given lags and other issues. With art, you can't use materials that are housed in the classroom.
- Science labs cannot be done remotely.

In short, absent a true public health emergency, public schools should advance and promote the best and most equitable instructional model, which is in-person instruction. There just is no substitute for in-person instruction. I urge you to consult the experts on this matter – public school educators, who can talk about the issues with remote instruction and what is best for educating our students.

SB 2 also adds the potential for virtual parent-teacher conferences. Providing for opportunities for parents to attend teacher conferences virtually makes sense. However, it is not necessary for the state to mandate additional conferences, which are determined locally with input from teachers.

Thank you for your consideration.