

**Testimony of**

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**S.B. No. 977 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING VIRTUAL LEARNING**

**Before the Education Commission**

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Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Cathy Lee and I am a CREC Educator.

The essence of teaching is related directly to the creating of relationships between teachers and students. Looking back over the past year, I was able to have students engage with me online last year because there was no other option and there was already a relationship formed. This year is not the same – there are many students whom I have never seen or heard because online they will not turn on their camera and will not have conversations, either verbally or through the chat feature of online learning platforms.

We cannot continue virtual teaching at both the primary level and secondary level we cannot as we do now. Yes, there are students who are excelling but having a one-size fits all approach as we are right now cannot continue. Within virtual teaching are the obvious: no eye contact between teachers and students, too many distractions, no true requirement to participate, and not enough critical thinking. But that is just the beginning.

Within virtual teaching there is little equity. Education has fought for decades now to create a more equitable public education system that would allow all students to learn. Unfortunately, even in 2021 there are still students who do not have adequate internet sources within their home and many who do not have a device to use that is comparable to a Chromebook. Many school districts, mine included, have supplied students with Chromebooks where they are expected to stare at screens for 6-7 hours per day as we have gone paperless. Students who are not as lucky to have a Chromebook may be able to use their smart phone, but that is not enough. This is true of my student Nyla. She has her iPhone and unlimited data, and she has not reached a point where she has little chance of graduating in June with her peers. It is not for her lack of trying to work. Since she did not need a Chromebook last year and did not fill out the form for a device at the beginning of the year, there wasn't one available for her she has been left behind. Virtual teaching is not equitable.

Because are online, there is a serious lack of connection and therefore no relationship is being formed between teachers and students. I have not been able to hear or see fourteen of my students. While they see me during classes on Zoom on a regular basis, there is nothing that I can relate to them to remember who they are outside of a black box with their name written in

white. Tatiana began the school year in person, but after being sent home to quarantine in the fall, her family decided to keep her home. I had made a connection as she sat in front of me, but the connection has since disappeared. I know nothing of Bryan aside from he logs in late and will respond in the chat when I call his name for attendance, I have not been able to form a connection with him and his algebra skills are suffering because of this.

As many teachers around my school, district, state, country and world will attest this is inhibiting the education of special education students the most. I cannot color code notes, write concrete steps next to problems for students to follow or, as I mentioned earlier, connect with them to create a relationship so that I can better understand how to help them. I am required by law to follow a students' individualized education plan (IEP); usually this will include notes, less problems, check-ins and more. I cannot check in with a student when there is little communication and no relationship formed.