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Testimony of

Ray Rossomando

Connecticut Education Association

Before the

Education Committee

Re:

SB 1032 AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES

SB 1033 AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND FINANCIAL LITERACY AS PART OF THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

SB 1035 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW PRESERVICE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

HB 6617 AN ACT CONCERNING AUTHORIZATION OF STATE GRANT COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS AND REVISIONS TO THE SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS STATUTES

HB 6618 AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN FUNDING ISSUES AFFECTING BOARDS OF EDUCATION

HB 6619 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A KINDERGARTEN TO EIGHT GRADE MODEL CURRICULUM

HB 6620 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS AND EQUITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 17, 2021

Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, my name is Ray Rossomando and I serve as the Director of Policy, Research, and Government Relations for the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents educators in over 1,000 schools across the state.

We testify on various bills being heard today as follows:

SB 1032 AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES

CEA believes that state law needs to be updated to address the potential for future pandemics. We have experienced much during this past year dealing with COVID-19 and have learned much from our experiences. We ask members of this committee to incorporate into SB 1032 or HB 6621 the following public health emergency protocols and protections:

Transparency – Ensure that educators and all employees who work in public buildings receive notifications of outbreaks of infectious diseases that occur in places of work and have input into responses made to outbreaks.

Prevention – Establish infectious disease safety standards, including cleaning protocols, building closure requirements, and ensuring HVAC systems are inspected, updated, and maintained.

Student learning and development – Provide time for educators to plan and prepare for teaching remotely during a public health emergency and prohibit dual-instruction classrooms that require in-person students to be taught by a teacher who is also required to be simultaneously teaching remote students. Statewide mastery testing should also be prohibited during public health emergencies. We have experienced quite a new world during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and normality appears to be on the horizon, we should prepare now for future public health emergencies.

Working in a coalition of employees of boards of education, CEA offers the attached summary of public health emergency protocols that should be considered while the experience of such emergency is fresh in the minds of school and municipal employees, parents and taxpayers, and legislators.

SB 1033 AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND FINANCIAL LITERACY AS PART OF THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

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HB 6619 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A KINDERGARTEN TO EIGHT GRADE MODEL CURRICULUM

CEA supports the proposal in SB 1033 for the inclusion of financial literacy within existing curricular requirements. This would ensure the topic is covered in a meaningful way without creating a new unmanageable mandate for teachers or school districts. We believe that the inclusion of additional curricular subject areas could be considered by those who would develop a model statewide curriculum, as proposed in HB 6619.

CEA supports the proposal in HB 6619 for a statewide model curriculum, and further recommends that the proposal include input by active educators. Educators are best poised to determine the scope and sequence of curriculum but asking each of Connecticut's school districts to do it individually results in unnecessary duplication of effort. Developing a state-wide model curriculum would help school districts that wished to use it to avoid recreating the wheel while providing a framework for those who write curriculum locally to use it as a springboard to innovation.

SB 1035 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW PRESERVICE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

CEA supports this bill and the termination of edTPA as a one-size-fits-all assessment of college students' preparation for becoming a certified teacher.

The experiences of teachers who have participated in edTPA have been largely negative. They report a standardized experience detached from actual classrooms that creates unreasonable stress that is counterproductive to developing skills and strategies that will make them better teachers. They report that results are invalid and even deter students from remaining in education preparation programs.

Eliminating edTPA will enable our education preparation programs to focus more on the individual skill development needs of aspiring educators. It will enable programs to adapt to changes in school settings, such as the shift in focus to social emotional learning. And it will help turn around a downward trend in the number of students pursuing careers in teaching.

HB 6617 AN ACT CONCERNING AUTHORIZATION OF STATE GRANT COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS AND REVISIONS TO THE SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS STATUTES

CEA supports HB 6617 and the inclusion of water filling stations in state school building projects. The use of reusable water bottles is a positive trend in our society. It promotes health by making it more convenient for students and staff to drink more water – something we all know is better for each of us. It also helps reduce the spread of germs and infection from the sharing of water fountains. We support the inclusion of this provision.

Additionally, the issue of indoor air quality in schools remains a serious concern. Vastly fluctuating temperatures, along with poor ventilation and disrepair, have resulted in schools infected with mold, airborne pathogens, and infestations that cause poor health and conditions not conducive to teaching and learning. This concern has been even more evident with the potential spread of infectious disease during a public health emergency like that we are experiencing with COVID-19.

CEA urges committee members to add the school construction bill bond funding earmarked for HVAC inspection, maintenance, repair, and enhancements. Use of school bonding funds to update the HVAC systems in our schools is long-overdue and would be a responsible way to correct this ongoing problem.

HB 6618 AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN FUNDING ISSUES AFFECTING BOARDS OF EDUCATION

CEA supports giving Alliance Districts more flexibility in spending per this bill.

Regarding a non-lapsing account for federal COVID-19 funds, federal funds may come with a date by which they must be expended or allocated. Consequently, federal government funds will lapse, and the unexpended portion must be returned. The State of Connecticut has no control over this. For this reason, we ask this committee to consider under what conditions it is appropriate to create a non-lapsing account for federal funds.

HB 6620 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO READ AND ADDRESSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS AND EQUITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CEA supports the availability of comprehensive, research-based, student-centered literacy programs. We commend the Education Committee for its continued focus on reading as a critical building-block to learning. As CEA considers HB 6620, we seek more specificity regarding who would be leading the reading entity proposed in the bill, how they would be appointed, and what parameters, focuses, and pedagogies would be included in the five reading curricula required in the bill. What assurances would there be for the voice of public school educators to be heard in the development of literacy programs for schools?

We ask that the committee consider convening groups of educators to review state statutes and programs designed to promote literacy. Input from educators who teach reading in the early grades will result in identifying more effective and innovative uses of local resources to improve literacy.

Thank you.