

Testimony of  
**Donald E. Williams, Jr.**  
**Executive Director**  
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Before the  
**Education Committee**

Re:

**SB 1 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDHOOD MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH SERVICES  
IN SCHOOLS**

**HB 5465 AN ACT INCREASING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR SALARIES AND EXPANDING CHILD CARE  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILIES**

March 21, 2022

Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee. I'm Don Williams, Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), representing educators throughout our state.

Thank you for raising Senate Bill 1, and House Bill 5465.

The CEA strongly supports SB 1 concerning mental and physical health for students in our schools. In the years prior to the pandemic, educators and parents were already focused on the critical link between student health and academic progress for students. The pandemic underscored the need for more resources—additional social workers, counselors, access to healthcare resources, and lower student-to-teacher ratios. Identifying and addressing student health needs as early as possible leads to better outcomes in every way.

**Amendments to SB 1:**

- **Amendment 1: End “Divided or Dual Teaching”**  
CEA is proposing three amendments to SB 1. The first would eliminate the potential for divided teaching, where classroom teaching is divided in real time between in-class students and remote students. The two formats are dramatically different; and when teachers are asked to do both at the same time, student attention engagement and learning suffers.

A study of divided or dual teaching in nine states by Lora Bartlett at the University of California, Santa Barbara determined that it led to multiple technology breakdowns, absent and unengaged students, and chaos as to learning.

When it comes to in-person or remote learning, it makes sense to concentrate on one or the other, not both, and avoid the added stress and loss of learning.

- **Amendment 2: Encourage Common Core Flexibility and Play-Based Learning in Elementary School**  
CEA is also recommending an amendment that encourages play-based learning in elementary school. Curriculum changes have increasingly treated elementary school students as if they are best suited for complex subject matters and standardized test learning. In the process, we've seen increased stress and behavioral problems at this level.

Play-based learning is essential to self-regulation and executive function, which are in turn critical for academic and life success. We need greater flexibility in how the Common Core is taught in elementary school to take into account basic facts regarding child development and the need to learn through play.

CEA recommends that the committee incorporate ideas in similar legislation in Illinois and Oklahoma, as well as activities discussed by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University at the following link:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/activities-guide-enhancing-and-practicing-executive-function-skills-with-children-from-infancy-to-adolescence/>

#### **Amendment to HB 5465:**

- **Amendment 3: Raise the Kindergarten Start Age to 5 (like other states) and Increase the Number of Pre-School Spaces**

Regarding HB 5465, CEA recommends that the state commit to expanding the number of pre-school spaces in school readiness programs throughout the state in concert with bringing Connecticut into line with other states as to the kindergarten start age.

It does not make sense for Connecticut to be an outlier among states. Connecticut allows children to start kindergarten at the youngest age, four and a half. No other state permits placing so many four-year-old children into what has become a more academically pressurized experience. Age makes a huge difference in elementary school, and some studies have linked a younger start age for children in kindergarten with increasing the likelihood of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

At the same time, families must not be disadvantaged with limited access to free or affordable childcare. That's why linking these two developmentally appropriate goals makes sense. Our amendment would require that the state increase the number of spaces for pre-school programs to accommodate the number of four-and-a-half-year-old children who would in the future enter school at age five.

Thank you for your consideration of these additions to SB1 and HB 5465.

**Amendment 1: Prohibition and Advisement Against Dual-Instruction**

- Prohibits the delivery of instruction simultaneously to in-person and remote students.

Sec. 501 (NEW)

- a. Notwithstanding any provision in Title 10 of the general statutes, the delivery of instruction by a local or regional board of education simultaneously to remote or virtual and in-person students by a single teacher is prohibited.
- b. Any guidance or standards for virtual or remote instruction developed by the State Department of Education or approved by the State Board of Education shall advise that the delivery of instruction simultaneously to remote and in-person students by a single teacher is strongly discouraged based on the potential negative impact on students in either setting.

## **Amendment 2: Elementary School Play-Based Learning Amendment**

- Requires play based learning for at least 30 minutes per day in elementary schools.

Based on Illinois's 2021 "Right to Play" law and Oklahoma's "Play-Based" legislation.

### Illinois

<https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2021/9/16/22678471/cps-illinois-school-recess-mandate-right-to-play-pritzker-minutes>).

Bill Text: <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/102/PDF/102-0357.pdf>

### Oklahoma

[https://www.normantranscript.com/news/rosecrants-oklahoma-play-to-learn-act-signed-into-law-by-governor/article\\_24aac90c-ba8b-11eb-bd04-9fcc372d6349.html](https://www.normantranscript.com/news/rosecrants-oklahoma-play-to-learn-act-signed-into-law-by-governor/article_24aac90c-ba8b-11eb-bd04-9fcc372d6349.html)

Bill Text: [https://capitolcorner.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HB1569\\_HFLR.pdf](https://capitolcorner.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HB1569_HFLR.pdf)

### Sec. 501 (NEW)

(a) As used in this section:

1. "Child-directed" means interaction in which the child is helped to direct and lead the play in any way the child wishes, unless there is harmful or destructive activity;
2. "Play-based learning" means any learning activities that are performed by a child for self-amusement that have behavioral, social and psychomotor rewards. Play-based learning may be structured to promote activities that are child-directed, joyful and spontaneous whereby the rewards come from within the individual child;
3. "Electronic mobile device" has the same meaning as used in 10-222d
4. "Electronic communication" has the same meaning as used in 10-222d

(b) Each local and regional boards of education shall provide daily time for supervised, child-directed play-based learning for all students in kindergarten through grade 5. Play time must allow child-directed play, but shall not include the use of electronic mobile devices or electronic communication as defined in 10-222d of the general statutes. Schools shall implement a preference for the provision of play time outdoors, but may hold play time indoors. Time spent dressing or undressing for outdoor play time, or for recess, shall not count towards the daily time for play.

(c) Play-based learning shall not count as a course of physical education that fulfills the requirements of Section 10-16b of the general statutes, nor shall time spent in a course of physical education count towards the daily time for play.

(d) Play-based learning shall be considered hours of actual school work for the purposes of Section 10-16 of the general statutes. For any school day 5 hours or longer in length, the total time allotted for play for students in kindergarten through grade 5 must be at least 30 minutes. For any school day less than 5 hours in length, the total time allotted for play-based learning each school day must be at least one-tenth of a day of attendance for the student. Play-based learning may be divided into periods of at least 15 consecutive minutes in length.

(e) For students with disabilities, play-based learning shall comply with a student's applicable individualized education program (IEP) or federal Section 504 plan.

(f) Local and regional boards of education shall prohibit the withholding of play-based learning as a disciplinary or punitive action, except when a student's participation in play-based learning poses an imminent safety risk to the child or other children.

(g) Participation in professional development designed to help teachers promote play-based learning shall count toward professional development required pursuant to section 10-148a of the general statutes.

### **Amendment 3: Kindergarten Start-Age**

- ⇒ Amends Sec. 12 of SB1 by including in the Office of Early Childhood's proposal for a needs assessment estimates for moving the kindergarten start-age to 5 years old by September 1 in 2026.
- ⇒ Phases in raising the Kindergarten start age by requiring children to be 5 years old by November 1, 2025 and then September 1, 2026.

Strike section 12 of SB 1 in its entirety and substitute the following thereof:

Sec. 12. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2022*) (a) As used in this section:

- (1) "School readiness program" has the same meaning as provided in section 10-16p of the general statutes, as amended by this act; and
- (2) "Competitive municipality" means, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, a municipality that is among the lowest fifty municipalities when ranked by wealth, as determined by the Commissioner of Early Childhood, and for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, a municipality that is among the lowest one hundred municipalities when ranked by wealth, as determined by the commissioner.

(b) For the fiscal year ending July 1, 2023, and each fiscal year thereafter, the Commissioner of Early Childhood shall coordinate with local and regional school readiness councils to conduct needs assessments for infant, toddler and preschool spaces in school readiness programs throughout the state, and for amending the kindergarten start date for children who reach age five from on or before the first day of January to on or before the first day of November by 2025 and the first day of September by 2026. The commissioner shall use the results of such needs assessments to increase or adjust the number of infant, toddler and preschool spaces in school readiness programs to meet the need or demand of each community and to provide grants under section 10-16p of the general statutes, as amended by this act, in accordance with subsections (c) to (e), inclusive, of this section.

(c) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, the commissioner shall increase or adjust the number of infant, toddler and preschool spaces, in accordance with the needs assessments conducted pursuant to subsection (b) of this section, in priority school districts, as described in section 10-266p of the general statutes. The commissioner shall provide grants under section 10-16p of the general statutes, as amended by this act, to accomplish such increase or adjustment in such spaces.

(d) For the fiscal years ending June 30, 2025, and June 30, 2026, the commissioner shall increase or adjust the number of infant, toddler and preschool spaces, in accordance with the needs assessments conducted pursuant to subsection (b) of this section, in competitive municipalities. The commissioner shall provide grants under section 10-16p of the general statutes, as amended by this act, to accomplish such increase or adjustment in such spaces.

(e) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2027, and each fiscal year thereafter, the commissioner shall increase or adjust the number of infant, toddler and preschool spaces, in accordance with the needs assessments conducted pursuant to subsection (b) of this section, for each community throughout the state. The commissioner shall provide grants under section 10-16p of the general statutes, as amended by this act, to accomplish such increase or adjustment in such spaces.

**Sec. 501**

Section 10-15c of the General Statutes is repealed the following substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2022*):

- (a) For fiscal years beginning July 1, 2022 to July 1, 2024, the [The] public schools shall be open to all children five years of age and over who reach age five on or before the first day of January of any school year, and each such child shall have, and shall be so advised by the appropriate school authorities, an equal opportunity to participate in the activities, programs and courses of study offered in such public schools, at such time as the child becomes eligible to participate in such activities, programs and courses of study, without discrimination on account of race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, religion, national origin or sexual orientation; provided boards of education may, by vote at a meeting duly called, admit to any school children under five years of age.
- (b) For fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, the public schools shall be open to all children five years of age and over who reach age five on or before the first day of November of any school year, and each such child shall have, and shall be so advised by the appropriate school authorities, an equal opportunity to participate in the activities, programs and courses of study offered in such public schools, at such time as the child becomes eligible to participate in such activities, programs and courses of study, without discrimination on account of race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, religion, national origin or sexual orientation; provided boards of education may, by vote at a meeting duly called, admit to any school children under five years of age.
- (c) For fiscal years beginning July 1, 2026 and thereafter, the public schools shall be open to all children five years of age and over who reach age five on or before the first day of September of any school year, and each such child shall have, and shall be so advised by the appropriate school authorities, an equal opportunity to participate in the activities, programs and courses of study offered in such public schools, at such time as the child becomes eligible to participate in such activities, programs and courses of study, without discrimination on account of race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, religion, national origin or sexual orientation.