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Testimony of

Kate Field

Connecticut Education Association

Before the Education Committee

HB 6882 An Act Concerning Mandate Relief

March 15, 2023

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel, and distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Kate Field, and I am the Teacher Development Specialist at the Connecticut Education Association. CEA helps active and retired teachers across the state advocate for students, teachers, and public schools. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in partial support of HB 6882, “An Act Concerning Mandate Relief.”

HB 6882 would create an Education Mandates Review Task Force that would review education laws and make recommendations to reduce obsolete and duplicative mandates that are overly burdensome to school districts. CEA supports the creation of the task force and appreciates being named to it; the expertise and experiences of educators are critical to informing this process. Reducing the number of educational mandates would allow districts to focus their resources and attention on the things that matter most to their students and families.

While CEA supports much of HB 6882, the bill does not include the recommendations made by the Professional Development Requirements Working Group, created last year by PA 22-116. This collaborative workgroup, comprised of major education stakeholders, made several recommendations in its report to reduce the number of professional development requirements required by state statute. For your convenience, I’ve submitted a copy of the Working Group’s Report along with my testimony. Including these recommendations in HB6882 would reduce many of the professional development mandates on districts, save districts millions of dollars, and enable educators to focus their professional development on topics that will best enhance student learning and social-emotional well-being.

To summarize, CEA supports HB 6882 but urges the committee to incorporate the recommendations made by the Professional Development Requirements Working Group.

Thank you for your time, attention, and consideration of my testimony.

**Educator Professional Development Requirements Working Group
Report**

January 2023

PA 22-116 (Section 4) created this working group and established the charge to the group (See Appendix A).

The report has been submitted pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 11-4a to the Education Committee, clerks of the Senate and House of Representatives, the Office of Legislative Research, and to the State Librarian.

Educator Professional Development Requirements Working Group Members

Alicia Bowman, Connecticut Association of Schools

Fran DiFiore, Connecticut Federation of School Administrators

Andrew Feinstein, Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut

Kate Field, Connecticut Education Association

Kathleen Greider, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents

Patrice McCarthy, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

Steve McKeveer, American Federation of Teachers- Connecticut

Irene Parisi, State Department of Education

Educator Professional Development Requirements Working Group
Recommendations
January 2023
Executive Summary

Background

The General Assembly passed PA 22-116 (Section 4) establishing a working group to examine and make recommendations concerning the consolidation or elimination of unnecessary, obsolete or redundant professional development requirements, pursuant to section 10-148a of the general statutes, and in-service training requirements, pursuant to section 10-220a of the general statutes. While PA 17-32 implemented some of the recommendations of the Task Force on Professional Development and In-service Training Requirements for Educators, required trainings for educators remain un-wieldy and disconnected from the definition of high-quality professional learning as defined in C.G.S. 10-148a. A top priority for this working group is to focus on meaningful professional learning and to streamline the statutory “compliance” requirements to better meet the learning needs of educators, which will, in turn, result in better outcomes for Connecticut’s children.

Working Group Recommendations

The following recommendations are described in greater detail in the report.

Implementation

- Provide greater flexibility for districts to determine frequency/reoccurrence of trainings;
- Differentiate which staff are required to complete specific training and connect completion of training for compliance with certification renewal in an online platform; and
- For any new training requirements, allow for, at minimum, a 1-year preparation period before requirements go into effect, along with state resources for implementation.

Content

- Delete redundancies in C.G.S 10-220a and 10-148a that overlap with requirements outlined elsewhere in statute;
- Clarify the distinction between in-service training (C.G.S. 10-220a) and professional learning that advances teaching and learning (C.G.S. 10-148a); and
- Modify language in 10-220a and 10-148a based on working group recommendations.

Process

- Tie professional development requirements to certification renewal.
- Given the excessive number of hours required to complete all statutorily-required trainings the working group recommends establishing a formal Educator Professional Development Council to serve as a long-term solution for ongoing review and modification of past and future legislation. The Council’s role would be to:

- Review and provide feedback on legislation that proposes any new trainings for certified and non-certified educators with a focus on reducing the burden on school districts;
- Develop a rating rubric to identify the priority and feasibility of the training; and
- Make a final recommendation to the General Assembly in a timely manner.

REPORT

Introduction

Over the past twenty years, there has been a significant increase in statutorily mandated trainings for public school educators in Connecticut. Meeting these mandates is untenable for school districts in the face of significant cuts to fiscal and personnel resources and the loss of precious professional learning time; not to mention a loss of critical instructional time with students. The learning that positively impacts educator practice and, ultimately, student growth, is sacrificed in an attempt to be compliant with an unwieldy list of mandated trainings. The professional learning time for educators that might remain is insufficient and the negative impact on instructional time with students is unacceptable. While PA 17-37 contained some of the recommendations of the Task Force on Professional Development and In-Service Training Requirements for Educators, the creation of this Working Group by the Legislature indicates the need for additional action.

Statutory Conflicts

In 2012, the Connecticut General Assembly passed legislation, C.G.S. 10-148a(a), which states that all local and regional boards of education shall provide an annual professional development program to educators that is at least 18 hours in length. The program should be comprehensive, support teacher and administrator effectiveness, focus on refining practice, foster collective responsibility, and include learning that is aligned to state student academic achievement standards, conducted and facilitated by educators, occurs frequently, and is job-embedded.

The State has also embraced a new definition of professional learning aligned to C.G.S. 10-148a(a). In May 2015, the Connecticut State Board of Education formally adopted the Connecticut Definition of Professional Learning and the Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning ([Appendix A](#)), which places an emphasis on individualized, relevant professional learning as determined by the needs of the educator and his/her students.

The list of mandated trainings is in direct conflict with the concept of personalized professional learning described in C.G.S. 10-148a, which results in an additional barrier to closing the achievement gap. Educators spend hours completing annual trainings that reduces the time districts are able to provide for professional learning. Educators are engaging more in the mandated training than in the learning that is driven by educator and student needs. Oftentimes, teachers are completing trainings that are more appropriate for specialized staff or specific grade levels and content areas (e.g., K-3 teachers versus high school teachers, school social workers, psychologists, and nurses). Instead of training all certified staff on an annual basis in violence, teen dating violence, domestic violence, child abuse, youth suicide, substance abuse, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted disease, PK-12 educators should be spending their time working to improve instruction and close gaps in student achievement.

Implementation Recommendations

Compliance Implications

In an attempt to meet both the mandated training requirements, as well as the individual needs of its teaching force, district time and resources are stretched thin and quality suffers. It is nearly impossible to do it all. While not always mutually exclusive, districts are often torn between doing what is required in statute and what is in the best interests of their staff and students. Districts struggle to provide a quality professional learning program aligned to the Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning and C.G.S. 10-148a(a). What little time is available for individual and collaborative learning is consumed by statutorily required trainings.

In addition to the time and resource burden put upon districts to meet all of the mandated training requirements, districts face a logistical challenge. As the mandated trainings are numerous and differ in frequency and intended audience, keeping track of attendance becomes onerous, especially when factoring in staff turnover. In order to make this process more manageable, it becomes easier for districts to expect participation on an annual basis even when frequency expectations are not explicit in statute.

A Statewide Dashboard

Tools such as the Safe Schools Platform allow employees to track their professional development and catalogue the required trainings, provider and frequency. A statewide tool would provide portability to educators as they change jobs to another district.

Approaches In Other States

Learning Forward highlighted professional development systems in 4 states (see [Appendix B](#))

The Working Group Implementation Recommendations include:

- Provide greater flexibility for districts to determine frequency/reoccurrence of trainings;
- Differentiate which staff are required to complete specific training and connect completion of training for compliance with certification renewal in an online platform; and
- For any new training requirements, allow for, at minimum, a 1-year preparation period before requirements go into effect.

Time Requirements and Direct and Indirect Costs

Districts support educator growth in many ways. One way is through standards-based, high-quality professional learning that provides time and opportunities throughout the school day for educators to collaborate and engage in learning to enhance their practice. However, districts must also find additional time for educators to complete the mandated trainings that are required in statute, which is misaligned with the Connecticut Definition of Professional Learning and the Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning. Districts understand the importance of topics identified for required trainings, but it is a growing challenge for them to find the additional time and resources needed after fulfilling all prescribed requirements to pursue a professional growth plan aligned to

C.G.S. 148a(a).

The working group has identified several challenges districts face when attempting to implement a high-quality professional learning system while completing the full list of statutory trainings:

- Tracking the completion of trainings is challenging due to various frequencies of required training and certified and non-certified turnover; while there are some online solutions available to track training participation/completion, this places an additional burden on fiscal resources.
- The mandated trainings cause greater disparities across districts due to differences in size and funding; oftentimes, smaller districts struggle due to limited staffing capacity.
- The feasibility of maintaining high-quality professional learning to support and advance teaching and learning aligned to educator, school and district goals is strained by the requirements to comply with an unending list of required training in C.G.S. 10-220a and other sections of state statute.
- C.G.S. 10-148a(a) identifies professional learning that supports the growth of teachers and administrators individually and collaboratively totaling at least 18 hours. C.G.S. 10-220a identifies required trainings educators must complete on various topics. The two statutes are in direct opposition of one another. C.G.S. 10-148a(a) identifies professional learning that supports the growth of teachers and administrators individually and collaboratively while the trainings outlined in C.G.S. 10-220a are predominantly non-instructional and compliance oriented.

Content Recommendation for C.G.S. 10-220a and 10-148a

Detailed content recommendations relative to C.G.S. 10-220a are included below. Much of the training identified in C.G.S. 10-220a is not high-quality professional learning nor does it align to the Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning. The working group recommends that C.G.S. 10-220a continue to include topics related to in-service training with removal of trainings that are redundant in other statutes and/or are optional trainings that boards of education may provide for their certified and not-certified staff. All topics pertaining to teaching and learning have been moved to C.G.S. 10-148a. This was done in order to minimize the mandated trainings and allow districts the flexibility to identify any additional trainings necessary to meet their school, district, and community needs and context.

The following recommendations are based on an analysis of C.G.S. 10-220a and mandated training required in other statutes. Below, the working group has outlined, by topic, recommendations specific to C.G.S. 10-220a:

- 1) *10-220a(1) The nature and relationship of drugs and alcohol to health and personality development, and procedures for discouraging their abuse*

Recommendation:

Delete C.G.S. 10-220a(1) because C.G.S. 10-19 addresses training of specialized personnel who teach about alcohol, nicotine or tobacco, drugs, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome. It also states in C.G.S. 10-19 that the State Board of Education and the Board of Regents for Higher Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction

Services and the Commissioner of Public Health, shall develop programs for the training of teachers.

- 2) *Health and mental health risk reduction education that includes, but not be limited to, the prevention of risk-taking behavior by children and the relationship of such behavior to substance abuse, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV-infection and AIDS, violence, teen dating violence, domestic violence, child abuse and youth suicide*

Recommendations:

- Specify that training in these topics not be expected on an annual basis and, instead, be required at a minimum, once in the career of a Connecticut educator providing there is sufficient documentation of successful completion. It was also recommended that districts consider making completion of this training a condition of employment within the district.

- 3) *School violence prevention, conflict resolution, the prevention of and response to youth suicide and the identification and prevention of and response to bullying, as defined in subsection (a) of section 10-222d, except that those boards of education that implement any evidence-based model approach that is approved by the Department of Education and is consistent with subsection (d) of section 1-145a, sections 10-222d, 10-222g and 10-222h, subsection (g) of section 10-233c and sections 1 and 3 of public act 08-160*, shall not be required to provide in-service training on the identification and prevention of and response to bullying*

Recommendation:

Increase flexibility in how districts react and prevent violence. Consider better alignment with C.G.S. 10-222n, which addresses creation and implementation of a school safety and security plan.

- 4) Overall Recommendation

Limit the audience for trainings to certain qualified personnel who would most often come across risk-taking behavior in their role and responsibilities. Such training topics include: substance abuse, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and teen dating violence.

Process Recommendations

The working group also discussed ways to move forward in the event that new or expanded training requirements are proposed in future legislative sessions. Their recommendation is to establish an Educator Professional Development Council to review any new proposed legislation that requires training for PK-12 educators. The Council would review and provide feedback on legislation that proposes new educator training/professional learning and would develop a rating rubric to rate the relevance/importance of the proposed training. The membership of the Council would include, at a minimum, one representative from each of the following associations:

American Federation of Teachers — Connecticut (AFT-CT), Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), Connecticut Association of School Superintendents (CAPSS), Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), Connecticut Education Association (CEA), Connecticut Federation of School

Administrators (CFSA), Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), and RESC Alliance. The Council would also include an active administrator, teacher, special educator, paraeducator, active board of education member, and a legislator.

The Educator Professional Development Council would adopt a review process for any proposed legislation specific to educator training and professional learning. Figure 1 outlines a proposed protocol that would guide the work of the Council. The Council would meet as needed, either in-person or virtually, to review, discuss, and provide feedback based on the feasibility and cost of implementing the proposed training in a district. They would also verify any redundancies in trainings, identify the priority/relevance of the training, propose who would complete the training, frequency, as well as a timeline for implementation. The Council would use the five-step protocol in Figure 1 to identify the possible implications and potential burden to districts for any proposed future statute.

Figure 1
Five Step Protocol

<p>I. Feasibility and Cost - Identify the real cost (e.g., personnel, time, resources, monetary, materials) to each district and the feasibility to achieve/meet the mandate within the timeframe specified.</p>
<p>II. Redundancy - Search of statutes to identify any redundancies</p>
<p>III. Priority Need - Use a rating rubric, to be developed by the Council, to rate the priority/relevance of the training and its alignment to the accountability system and the Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning</p>
<p>IV. Who, When, and How Often - Make explicit <i>WHO</i> needs to complete the training; as well as <i>WHEN/HOW OFTEN</i> they need to complete the training</p>
<p>V. Implementation Year - All newly-introduced statutes will include a preparation year built into the language before implementation is required</p>

The Council would also work with the regional educational service centers (RESCs) and/or other providers to create a catalogue of trainings required in C.G.S. 10-220a that would be of little to no cost to the districts or the State. This would include exploring opportunities to coordinate regional offerings of mandated trainings.

Conclusion

In recent years, Connecticut has shifted the learning and development of certified and non-certified educators from participation in irrelevant and passive learning (e.g. “sit and get,” auditorium-style events) to active learning that is focused on relevant topics that truly support and enhance teaching and learning.

Districts strive to design high-quality, job-embedded, relevant professional learning opportunities that support enhanced teaching and learning for all their certified and non-certified staff. Not only have districts redesigned their professional learning to prioritize educator and student growth, districts have fought to find time to allow their certified and non-certified staff to collaborate and learn together in order to better support their students. However, this time is too often sacrificed in order to comply with completing what amounts to 13 days of mandated trainings, annually.

The working group recommended changes to C.G.S. 10-220a ensure that the most essential in-service trainings are concentrated in one place for ease of reference and manageability and allows for districts to identify high-quality, individualized professional learning for educators based on their local context and the needs of their students. As well, their recommendation to establish a dedicated Educator Professional Development Council will provide a process to review future proposed training

requirements. The end result will provide educators with more meaningful professional learning, reduce the costs to districts, and most importantly, will allow teachers to focus more time on direct instruction with students.

