

2026 CEA Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

NAME: Ayana Taylor

PARTY: Democrat

DISTRICT: Senate 2

PAST AND/OR CURRENT ELECTED OFFICES HELD: Elected to the board in 2019, served as member, Secretary and Vice President. Currently service as Windsor Board of education President.

A. TEACHER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

1. Teacher Salary Enhancement

Background: Connecticut is facing a teacher shortage crisis as fewer young adults enter the teacher preparation programs and worsening teaching conditions push current teachers to leave for other fields or retirement. Salaries continue to be one of the concerns most highlighted by both new and experienced teachers. There are school districts in our state paying first-year teachers less than \$43,000/year, and more than half of the beginning salaries fall below the income threshold to qualify for certain state assistance (HUSKY B). Similarly, we have experienced educators with master's degrees regularly working second and third jobs. Increasing teacher salaries is a vital key in addressing the problems around teacher recruitment and retention, one which is supported by the public. In fact, a CEA survey of Connecticut voters found that:

- 83% of voters say we must increase teacher salaries in order to address the teacher shortage.
- 90% of voters believe teachers should be paid more than or comparable to professions with similar education and training requirements.
- 65% of voters say teachers in Connecticut are not paid enough.

CEA Position: CEA supports the establishment of a minimum starting salary of \$60,000 and increasing veteran teachers' salaries paid for through grants to municipalities from a new teaching enhancement fund.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment

☒ I will co-sponsor legislation establishing a minimum starting salary for teachers.

2. Teacher Recruitment & Diversity

Background: The number of people entering the teaching profession is declining at a time when the numbers leaving are increasing. Connecticut needs to pursue innovative ways to attract and retain teachers. At the same time, schools need to continually ensure that their faculties resemble the diversity of our society. Additionally, students of color show stronger educational outcomes when their teachers share their ethnic or racial background. Policies and programs that address barriers

to entering paths toward certification (like biased testing and high tuition costs) have shown success in increasing the number and diversity of candidates. So too, have programs that provide aspiring teachers career counseling, mentoring support, and strong clinical experiences. Furthermore, targeted financial assistance that can help the offset costs of tuition would be instrumental in ensuring that the teaching profession is accessible for all. Finally, a statewide program to recruit teachers must also recognize that promoting the conditions in schools that can increase retention and address legacies of institutional bias is critical to a long-standing solution.

CEA Position: CEA supports establishment of teacher recruitment programs that promote diversity by addressing obstacles to entry into education preparation programs, include resources to offset the costs of training and provide mentorship and guidance to help each candidate earn their certification. Some proposals to recruit a greater number of diverse teachers seek to lower expectations and standards for certification – policies that ultimately result in less experienced and prepared people teaching in the least wealthy communities. CEA believes that innovative policies and incentives can improve recruitment, workplace culture, and retention while maintaining high professional standards.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment

☒ I will co-sponsor legislation calling for innovative ways to increase the numbers and diversity of teachers graduating from rigorous teacher preparation programs and pursuing a successful career in teaching.

3. Paid Student Teaching

Background: Student teaching is one of the most demanding and transformative components of an aspiring educator's preparation program. For an entire semester, student teachers work full time in classrooms, planning lessons, teaching, assessing students, collaborating with mentor teachers, building relationships with families, and fully participating in the daily life of a school. Despite working full time hours, most student teachers receive no compensation and, in most cases, are paying tuition while completing this clinical experience.

While 10 states have enacted legislation to ensure their student teachers receive compensation, Connecticut has not. This lack of compensation creates a significant financial barrier to entering the profession. Many aspiring educators are forced to take on additional jobs or loans, delay completion of their preparation programs, or reconsider entering teaching altogether because they cannot afford to work full time without pay. These barriers disproportionately impact candidates from low income backgrounds and undermine efforts to diversify and strengthen Connecticut's educator workforce. A 2025 survey of recent student teachers found that:

- 88% report being considerably or extremely concerned about their personal finances while student teaching.
- 80% feel exploited not getting paid for work during student teaching.

- 98% of CT aspiring educators agree or strongly agree that being paid for student teaching would ease their financial worries, and 95% said that it would make student teachers feel more valued.
- Aspiring educators of color were generally older, more reliant on financial support from others, and 1.5x more likely than their white peers to report having considered dropping out of their EPP because of financial pressure.

At the same time, Connecticut continues to face educator shortages, particularly in high need subject areas. Connecticut's educator preparation programs (EPP) enrollment declined 15% between 2020 and 2024. Providing compensation for all student teachers is a critical step toward removing barriers, strengthening the educator pipeline, and ensuring that future teachers can focus on developing their practice rather than managing financial hardship.

CEA Position: CEA supports policies and funding that ensure stipends for student teaching for every aspiring educator enrolled in an educator preparation program.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment

☒ I will co-sponsor legislation that provides stipends for all student teachers and strengthens Connecticut's educator pipeline.

OPTIONAL Please use the space below to provide any comments or explanations from your responses to this section.

I worked in HR specifically recruitment for Hartford Public Schools and know firsthand the importance of the CEA's positions. Long overdue.

B. FAIRNESS & SAFETY FOR EDUCATORS

4. Classroom Safety & Challenging Student Behavior

Background: Connecticut, like many states across the country, is facing a crisis in education driven by a growing number of young students who have experienced traumatic adverse childhood experiences. Our members see this every day in their classrooms, most acutely in the earliest grades. It appears in students' difficulty regulating stress and emotions, and in aggressive, disruptive, and sometimes violent outbursts that cause real physical and emotional harm to others in the school community. These outbursts are cries for help.

Yet teachers often lack the support and resources needed to meet the needs of students who, through no fault of their own, are experiencing trauma. Resources to respond to incidents are limited, and investment in prevention remains minimal. As a result, teachers are frequently left without support when a child cries out. Classrooms are cleared, learning is disrupted for all students, and the child in crisis returns without meaningful intervention, their underlying needs still unmet.

The legislature has begun to take steps to address these challenges through grants for certified support staff and policies promoting safer school climates. Still, it is imperative that we continue to support both students and educators by enacting and funding practices that meaningfully address childhood trauma.

CEA Position: CEA supports continued efforts and the necessary funding to address behavior that negatively impacts school climate, risks interfering with teaching and learning, or threatens the safety of students and staff in the school community.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment

☒ I will publicly support legislation that seeks to address student trauma and continuing to improve school climate, including policies, practices, and funding.

5. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Protections

Background: In recent years, educators have experienced an increase in harassment, bullying, and threats of violence, including doxxing, false accusations, and intimidation originating within and outside of school communities. Surveys conducted by CEA and others indicate that many teachers fear for their personal safety or the safety of their families due to unwarranted harassment from members of the public. Among all occupations, teachers experience the highest rate of workplace violence in restricted access settings, exceeding rates experienced by mental health workers, law enforcement, and security personnel. While several public employees with lower rates of workplace violence are afforded protections under the Freedom of Information Act, teachers are not explicitly included. The public disclosure of personal contact information such as home addresses and personal phone numbers, combined with increased workplace and political violence and heightened politicization of school curricula, leave educators vulnerable to harassment, intimidation, and threats beyond the workplace. Protecting educators' personal information is essential to maintaining a safe learning environment and retaining qualified professionals in the classroom.

CEA Position: CEA supports proposals to strengthen FOIA protections by explicitly exempting public school teachers' and other public employees' personal contact information, including residential addresses and personal telephone numbers, from public disclosure. We believe these protections are necessary to ensure educator safety, promote fairness, and prevent harassment, while preserving appropriate transparency in government.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment:

☒ I will support and co-sponsor legislation to explicitly protect public school teachers' personal contact information, including home addresses and personal phone numbers, from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

6. Cell Phone Policy

Background: A growing body of peer reviewed research shows that constant access to cell phones and other personal electronic devices during the school day negatively affects student focus, learning, and mental health. National data show that since the early 2010s, rates of anxiety, depression, and self harm among adolescents have risen sharply, coinciding with the widespread adoption of smartphones and social media. Research summarized by pediatric health experts and scholars, including findings highlighted in *The Anxious Generation*, indicates that frequent phone checking fragments attention, increases classroom disruptions, and is associated with higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among students. Studies also show that students spend a significant portion of the school day on their phones when unrestricted, often engaging with highly addictive social media and entertainment platforms.

In response to this growing evidence, educators, academics, and pediatric health professionals increasingly support clear limits on student access to personal electronic devices during instructional time. As of this year, at least 35 states have enacted legislation limiting cell phone use in schools, with many adopting bell-to-bell prohibitions during the instructional day. While Connecticut has begun to take steps to address this issue, effective implementation requires a clear and consistent statewide framework that includes stakeholder input, transparent communication with families, safe and secure storage of student devices, appropriate exemptions, and regular evaluation to ensure equitable and effective enforcement across districts.

CEA Position: CEA supports legislation establishing clear limits on student use of cell phones and other personal electronic devices during instructional time, including a bell-to-bell prohibition. We believe that this process should require transparent district level policy development with meaningful input from educators, parents, students, health professionals, and other stakeholders.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment

☒ I will support and co sponsor legislation establishing a clear statewide framework regarding use of cell phones and personal electronic devices during instructional time that includes a bell-to-bell prohibition.

OPTIONAL Please use the space below to provide any comments or explanations from your responses to this section.

We are in the midst of a cell phone policy update in Windsor and as for the FOIA, boards of education members home addresses can be accessed as well and I am pushing to get that changed as well. All of this is very important to me personally. Safety is key. Our educators deserve to be protected.

C. EDUCATION FUNDING & EQUITY

7. Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Grants

Background: A Connecticut Supreme Court decision, *Horton v. Meskill*, requires the state to equalize funding for school districts based on each district's ability to pay. Adequate education funding for all districts is essential to a well-prepared and growing workforce in Connecticut. For Connecticut to honor its obligations to students and enhance its economic competitiveness, it must meet its financial commitment to fund schools equitably and appropriately. That starts with enhancing the foundation of the ECS grant, which has not been increased since 2013, and tying it to inflation. The state's nearly \$200 million investment in district funding in 2026 was a meaningful step in supporting municipal budgets, but sustainable, long-term solutions are needed to ensure that educators and municipalities are provided the resources they need to best prepare all students to be successful adults.

CEA Position: ECS funding must be given the highest priority, even in difficult budget years, and enhanced to ensure that districts have what they need. Cuts in educational funding harm students, negatively impact teaching and learning, and can increase local property taxes. We do not support any reductions in the state's commitment to ECS funding and will continue to advocate for increasing the funding of school districts wherever possible.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitments

☒ I will co-sponsor legislation that protects and enhances education funding.

☒ I will vote against any budget that hurts our students by cutting ECS funding.

8. Protecting Municipal Contributions for Education

Background: Property tax caps that penalize municipalities for supporting their schools beyond the "minimum" requirements result in depleting school resources, punishing students, and undermining local control. Schools have different needs across municipalities—most require more resources. Punishing cities and towns for investing more than the bare minimum into their schools is an ill-conceived policy that hurts students. It does not make sense to withhold state aid merely because a town chooses to responsibly fund its schools.

CEA Position: CEA opposes policies, including misguided property tax caps that discourage or penalize municipalities from investing in education. We oppose policies that penalize towns for investing more funding in their local schools.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment

☒ I will oppose legislation exploring or establishing property tax caps.

9. Public Funds for Private Schools

Background: CEA believes that public dollars should support public schools. In the past year, increased federal emphasis on voucher programs have intensified efforts to expand programs that divert public education funding to private entities. Taxpayer funds should never be diverted to privately operated schools through tax credits for individuals or businesses, direct payments, or any other means. These and other “money follows the child” style approaches to divert taxpayer funds include school vouchers, “educational access” or “opportunity scholarship” tax credits, and education savings accounts (ESAs). Proposals that divert funding from neighborhood public schools ultimately benefit the wealthy and short-change students in historically underfunded public schools.

CEA Position: CEA opposes legislation that diverts funding and resources from traditional public schools and opposes the creation of tax credits and other voucher-style measures that benefit wealthy families and elite private schools at the expense of traditional public schools. We also oppose efforts to have Connecticut participate in the Federal Voucher Program established in 2025.

☒ Agree with CEA’s Position ☐ Oppose CEA’s Position

Legislative Commitment

☒ I will publicly oppose legislation and/or budgets that would establish tax credits or other school voucher-style programs that send public tax dollars away to private schools, especially when done at the expense of traditional public schools.

10. Opponents to Public Education

Background: In recent years, well-funded organizations seeking to undermine our public education system have proliferated across Connecticut and the Nation. Groups like Families for Excellent Schools (FES), Achievement First, Democrats for Education Reform (DFER), Education Reform Now (ERN), and others promote an overreliance on standardized testing and the expansion of privately operated schools (including CMO–run charter schools), at the expense of traditional public schools. Increased state funding for new charter schools necessarily results in a reduction of available resources for some of our most historically underfunded schools.

Groups like the Yankee Institute threaten to undermine the teaching profession by seeking to do away with fair retirement plans, collective bargaining, and public employee unions altogether. Others like the American Legislative Exchange Council (aka ALEC), the State Policy Network, Americans for Prosperity, and the Walton Family Foundation seek to do all the above. Several of these organizations along with others have also supported the development and promotion of curricular materials that politicized and whitewash complex aspects of U.S. history. The U.S. Department of Education has increasingly encouraged states to adopt these political curricular materials. Together, the direction advocated by these organizations dilutes resources available for public schools, weakens teacher advocacy for students’ needs, erodes the integrity of curriculum and instruction, and narrows the opportunities available to all students to learn.

CEA Position: CEA believes that organizations such as those noted above pose a threat to public education, undermine public employee unions, and conflict with our core mission of providing fair and equitable opportunities for all students.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment

☒ I will oppose efforts by such organizations to privatize education, undermine the teaching profession, politicize curriculum, or divert funding away from public school districts.

11. Support for English Learners

Background: The population of students whose dominant language is not English is approaching 1 in 10 students in Connecticut. Currently, Connecticut has among the worst education outcomes in the U.S. for English Learners. Other states with a larger population of English Learners (EL) have had success educating these students. Connecticut can make great progress if EL students are given adequate resources and personalized attention necessary to become fluent English speakers quickly. 2023 Legislation establishing a multilanguage learners' bill of rights took important steps in ensuring the educational success of these students; however, there are still significant barriers in place. For instance, Connecticut only provides bilingual education funds to schools that have 20 or more students speaking the same non-English language in the same school building. This threshold is far too narrow. Several schools throughout the state enroll students with multiple dominant languages but do not qualify for funding from the state's bilingual education grant. Teachers in these schools need more assistance and resources to help EL students succeed.

CEA Position: CEA supports proposals to continue to expand bilingual funding to more schools. We support proposals that both increase funding for the bilingual education grant and expand eligibility to more schools.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment

☒ I will co-sponsor legislation to increase funding and expand eligibility for the bilingual education grant and innovative programs like dual language programs.

12. Special Education

Background: Special education services in Connecticut are under significant strain. The number of students requiring special education services continues to rise, while shortages of certified special education teachers and paraeducators persist. As a result, educator to student ratios in special education settings are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. Excessive caseloads, growing administrative responsibilities, and extensive paperwork requirements make it challenging for educators to meet students' needs and remain in compliance with Individualized Education Program requirements.

While the legislature identified special education as a priority in 2025 and enacted several important policy changes, these efforts did not address many of the day-to-day realities facing special education educators in classrooms. Funding increases, including those related to high cost placements, help districts manage budgets but do not directly reduce strained educator workloads, improve staffing ratios, or enhance the quality of in district special education services. At the same time, the uncertainty of full federal government funding has placed additional pressure on local school districts.

Without meaningful investment in staffing and classroom level supports, students may not receive the individualized services they are entitled to and educators risk burnout and an unsustainable work environment. Addressing workload, staffing ratios, and funding is essential to ensuring high quality special education services and supporting both students and educators.

CEA Position: CEA supports policies and funding that reduce excessive workloads for special education educators, ensure appropriate educator to student ratios, and direct increased resources into special education classrooms so educators can meet student needs, comply with legal requirements, and deliver high quality services.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment

☒ I will support and co-sponsor legislation and funding that improve staffing levels, address special education educator workloads, and ensure appropriate educator to student ratios in special education settings.

OPTIONAL Please use the space below to provide any comments or explanations from your responses to this section.

I am the daughter of a retired special education teacher and my son is on the spectrum. We are past conversations and way overdue for ECS funding to go up. The incremental increase is not going to cut it. Funding for all students is not only necessary but imperative.

D. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

13. Collective Bargaining

Background: The right to be a union member is a fundamental employment protection under state and federal laws. America's labor unions have led the fight for working families, winning protections such as the 8-hour workday and the 40-hour workweek, overtime rights, and access to health care and retirement security. Today, the fight continues to retain these vital rights and to ensure safe and healthy workplaces. Following the 2018 Supreme Court decision in the case of Janus v. AFSCME, Connecticut must be a leader in protecting union rights. For teachers, collective bargaining allows their voices, ideas, and advocacy for students to be heard without fear of reprisal.

CEA Position: CEA opposes any legislative proposals to weaken or eliminate collective bargaining rights for teachers and other public employees, including proposals to limit bargaining on salary, benefits, or conditions of employment currently permitted under law.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment:

☒ I will oppose any legislation weakening collective bargaining or the unions representing employees.

OPTIONAL Please use the space below to provide any comments or explanations from your responses to this section.

A former union worker and steward, this is important to me as well.

D. TEACHER'S RETIREMENT & HEALTH CARE

14. Defined Benefit Pension Plan

Background: Some states have considered replacing traditional pension plans with defined contribution (401k-type) plans. Research indicates this is a flawed approach. Defined benefit pensions (DBs) have proven to be more cost-efficient than defined contribution accounts (DCs) due to higher investment returns and longevity risk pooling. When states look at shifting from a DB pension to DC accounts, such a shift does not close funding shortfalls and, in fact, can increase a state's retirement costs by requiring the state to operate multiple plans at that same time. Moreover, it is cost-efficient for teachers to remain outside of social security since boards of education would be required to pay the employer contribution if teachers were included in social security.

In recent years, the state legislature has also considered whether the state should continue to solely fund DB pensions for Connecticut's educators. Proposals in recent years included shifting the cost of these plans from the state to municipalities in a move that would impact school budgets, reduce resources available for teaching and learning, and result in higher property taxes for our residents. These proposals would do nothing more than put a target on educators' backs across the state and create further unfunded mandates for our towns and their residents.

CEA Position: Defined benefit pension plans should continue to be offered to all public employees. CEA opposes any weakening of the current defined benefit plan, including instituting any new tiers or including teachers in social security. In addition, CEA opposes any proposals to shift the cost of educators' pension plans from the state to municipalities.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitments

☒ I will oppose legislation that would weaken the benefit structure for public school teachers.

☒ I will oppose legislation that would shift the state's responsibility for teacher retirement to the municipalities.

15 Retired Teachers' Health Insurance Fund

Background: In 1989, the General Assembly established a Retired Teachers' Health Insurance Fund to partially subsidize health insurance for retired teachers and their spouses. Current law requires that active teachers contribute 1.25% of their salaries to this fund and the state and those retirees on Medicare contribute 33% of the cost of the TRB's health program to the health fund. For retirees and spouses under age 65, the retiree is paying virtually the full cost of the insurance. In the past the state has reduced its share, resulting in millions of dollars of lost revenue to the health fund. This occurred as recently as 2025 when the state reduced its contribution to from 33% to 25% for one year. These reductions create greater risk and can threaten the long-term solvency of the Retired Teachers' Health Insurance fund if they continue.

CEA Position: CEA believes that the State should continue to meet its statutory responsibility and annually contribute its 33% share of funding to the Retired Teachers' Health Insurance Fund to ensure its long-term solvency.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment

☒ I will oppose proposals that do not fully fund the state's share of the Retired Teachers' Health Insurance Fund.

16. Teachers' Retirement Board (TRB) Elections

Background: Since its establishment in 1917, the Connecticut Teachers' Retirement Board (TRB) has been an independent state agency. Today, over 100 years later, the TRB services over 51,000 active members and over 38,000 retired members and is responsible for not only paying out monthly retirement benefits but also administering a very complex retired teachers' health insurance fund. In 2023, legislation was passed adding two elected retired teachers to the TRB, bringing the total number of teachers serving on the Board to 8 (4 active, 4 retired). CEA supported the addition of these two seats; however, the process in which they were elected diverged from the previously outlined processes. First, all 6 of the previously existing teacher TRB members were elected by all teachers (active and retired). The 2 newly created seats were only elected by retired teachers creating 2 tiers of voting and disenfranchising active teachers in the process. and should be rectified prior to the next vote in 2027.

CEA Position: CEA supports legislation that would ensure that active and retired teachers have equal opportunity to participate in fair, transparent, and user-friendly TRB elections by ensuring that all participants get a vote, regardless of active or retiree status.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

Legislative Commitment

[X] I will co-sponsor legislation to amend the TRB election process to ensure that all participants get an equal vote for all candidates for the TRB, regardless of active or retiree status.

OPTIONAL Please use the space below to provide any comments or explanations from your responses to this section.

Again, my mother is a retired Hartford public schools special education teacher and know all too well of the struggles personally. Again the same sentiments.

17. Drawing from your demonstrated record, please share with us what distinguishes you as a champion for teachers, students, and public education.

Drawing from your demonstrated record, please share with us what distinguishes you as a champion for teachers, students, and public education. Public education is not simply an issue I support. It is a responsibility I have lived every day as a parent, community leader, and elected member of the Windsor Board of Education since 2018. As the current Board President, I have worked to ensure that students, educators, and families have the resources and support they need to succeed. What distinguishes me is that I understand public education from multiple perspectives. I am the daughter of a retired special education teacher who dedicated 40 years to Hartford Public Schools, a parent of Windsor Public Schools students and graduates, and a policymaker who has helped navigate difficult educational and fiscal decisions. These experiences have strengthened my belief that strong schools are the foundation of strong communities. Throughout my service, I have championed investments in classroom learning, student mental health, pushing for social emotional learning, academic opportunity, and educator support. During COVID I pushed for SEL to be at the forefront and then currently during difficult budget discussions, I have consistently advocated for protecting classroom teachers and minimizing impacts on students. I understand that every budget decision affects real people and real classrooms. I have also prioritized elevating student voice and expanding opportunities for all learners. As State Senator, I will continue to fight for strong public schools, increased education funding, educator recruitment and retention, and the resources students need to thrive. My commitment to public education is rooted in both experience and personal conviction, and I will continue to be a collaborative and effective advocate for Connecticut's students, educators, and public schools.