

Good afternoon.

I am here to speak in support of Senate Bill 944, ***AN ACT CONCERNING A PLAN FOR ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL SUCCESS FOR EVERY MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT.***

When Commissioner McQuillan originally proposed the draft of this plan last year, I immediately saw it as having great potential for furthering in substantive ways what I believe is education's mission, the essence of which is to ensure that all students achieve at high levels, preparing them to learn, to work, and to be contributing citizens in a global, democratic society.

My colleagues and I were impressed by the commissioner's subsequent willingness to gather the opinions of various constituent groups for the purpose of improving the plan. As a result of the commissioner's collaborative approach, the document approved by the state board of education in October was seen as highly credible. Now, unfortunately, at precisely the time when what the plan provides for is most needed in our schools, it appears that because of lack of funding, the implementation of the plan will be postponed. I believe that postponement will be harmful to Connecticut's children.

My reason for being concerned about the postponement is that two conditions have emerged in recent decades that have substantively changed how educators must go about doing their work:

The first is the emergence of the world economy as described so presciently by Thomas Friedman in *The World is Flat* some four years ago.

The second, not entirely distinct from the first, is the astonishingly fast emergence of technology that not only increases the rapidity and dexterity with which we can generate and process information, but also changes the way that people, particularly those below the age of 25, think and view the world.

There has been enough attention to Friedman's world view for me to pass over it in these comments. Suffice it to say, that in order for our children to flourish in the 21st century, they will need to have, among others, highly developed skills in critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication. They will also need to collaborate, lead thoughtfully, and work very hard. These children will enter a fundamentally different world from the one high school graduates entered twenty, ten, or even five years ago.

To prepare students to enter this fundamentally different world, schools will have to provide them with learning experiences that are fundamentally different from the ones we are providing them with now. In order to do that, those of us who are leading schools will have to change fundamentally the way that we do business. In his recent book, *The Global Achievement Gap*, Tony Wagoner addresses ways schools will need to change:

1. Instead of treating students as receivers of knowledge, schools will need to treat them as participants in the acquisition of knowledge.
2. Schools will need to motivate students by tapping into *their* interests, not by simply presenting them with facts to learn.
3. Schools will need to act on the understanding that students are prepared to work just as hard and just as long as their parents, but not necessarily eight hours a day at a desk. They want to feel ownership, not only in what they do, but in how they do it.
4. Schools will need to train teachers to act as coaches and mentors to students.
5. Schools will need to arrange structures where teachers know students well and treat them as partners in learning, where teachers will help them discover what most interests them.

The plan for academic and personal success contains measures that, if enacted, will change schools so that they more effectively prepare students to meet the demands of the 21st century in that:

1. It establishes rigorous expectations for all of Connecticut's students, and it allocates resources in ways that address the achievement gap among those students.
2. It addresses the need for students to acquire deep understanding of critical knowledge and concepts so that they can objectively analyze and make intelligent use of the avalanche of facts that will come at them throughout their lives.
3. It personalizes education through adult mentoring and individual success plans that will culminate in a capstone project requiring student to demonstrate in authentic circumstances key elements of their secondary learning.

Under the best of circumstances, with the proper funding, this plan would take several years to show results. I believe that the need for the reform provided for in this plan is so important for the welfare of our state and our children, that, at the very least, funding should be provided to properly support the 25 school districts who have volunteered to begin planning. I encourage you to provide that funding.