

CAS Position

The Connecticut Plan for Secondary School Reform

TESTIMONY--Senate Bill 944

The Connecticut Association of Schools supports SB 944 and urges its adoption with the additional language of directing the CT Commissioner of Education to apply for federal stimulus grants for adopting rigorous state standards contained in the Connecticut Plan, and if such grants are granted sufficient to support the Connecticut Plan that it take effect at the earliest date that the financial resources are available.

By adopting the Plan and pursuing federal stimulus money the State of Connecticut actively demonstrates the urgency and the priority the state has in preparing Connecticut students to continue higher education, prepare for the work place, and compete with other students in the United States and around the world. Furthermore, the Plan aggressively addresses the achievement gap that has been a feature of Connecticut educational performance for too long.

The Connecticut Association of Schools embraces the goal that all secondary school students will achieve at high levels, preparing them to learn, to work, and to be contributing citizens in a global, democratic society.

We strongly support the State Board of Education's Connecticut Plan for Secondary School Reform and view this effort as an attempt to further our shared mission of ensuring continuous improvement in the academic performance of all students. Moreover, we view our fundamental responsibility as one of building capacity within our schools for substantially improving student learning

We recognize that too many of Connecticut's students are not learning at levels that should be reasonably expected of them affecting their potential to lead valuable, satisfying lives. The evidence is clear that many leave school poorly prepared to make their way in the world. Accordingly, our resolve to improve the education of all of our children is propelled by a sense of urgency.

We fully support and endorse the three major components of the Connecticut Plan: Engagement, 21st Century Skills, and Rigor. Specifically, we note the following key components:

- The recognition that secondary education in Connecticut is for students in grades 6-12;
- The personalization of education through adult mentoring and individual student success plans;
- The emphasis on 21st century skills including: critical thinking, problem solving, written communication, information technology, innovation, creativity, self-direction, collaboration, leadership, and work ethic;
- The consideration of the developmental needs of students who will struggle with additional requirements and require multiple pathways and opportunities to demonstrate mastery;
- The identification of viable assessment alternatives, multiple assessment opportunities, support resources, and remediation programs for students who struggle to meet the requirements, especially students requiring special education services, 504 plans, or English Language Learner support systems;
- Clearly identified state standards and expectations for all Connecticut students be they rural, suburban, or urban;
- The allocation of resources that ensures that school reform efforts address the achievement gap in Connecticut;
- The involvement of teachers, principals and superintendents in the process of gathering input on the proposals and working on specific planning;
- Early (6th grade level) identification and interventions of students at risk of not graduating from high school;
- Capstone experiences with projects, internships, portfolios, exhibitions, and other experiences that require students to demonstrate in authentic circumstances what they have learned;
- Comprehensive professional development for teachers and school leaders for instructional improvement and student engagement;
- Rigorous standards-based assessments that will enable school leaders to employ timely, meaningful, and accurate data when making decisions about curriculum and instruction;
- Multiple assessment opportunities for all students to demonstrate attainment of state standards;
- The requirement of four credits of mathematics with multiple, related state assessments for Algebra I and geometry; and,
- The requirement of one credit in the fine and performing arts.

The secondary reform plan needs to be adopted in its entirety with the funding and structural supports for professional development for teachers and administrators, collaborative assessment development, student support, and pre-K through 12 systemic reforms.