

**TESTIMONY OF JOHN R. RATHGEBER
PRESIDENT & CEO
CONNECTICUT BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

Good Afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Education Committee. My name is John Rathgeber, President of the Connecticut Business and Industry Association. CBIA's 10,000 member companies represent the broad diversity of Connecticut's private sector enterprises. National leaders in productivity and innovation, these companies rely on a vibrant workforce in order to remain economically competitive.

CBIA is here today to support **SB-24 AAC Educational Competitiveness**. The recommendations in this bill are well thought out and offer the opportunity to realize meaningful education reform that will improve overall academic outcomes and close the achievement gap.

However, it is critically important to understand that these measures work together to form a framework for reform; they are interconnected and we urge this Committee and the Legislature as a whole to pass this bill substantially as drafted.

CBIA's membership faces numerous challenges as they compete in the global, 21st century economy. One of the most profound long-term issues Connecticut businesses face is the lack of skilled help to fill positions that require proficiency in math and the sciences as well as training in highly technical fields like precision manufacturing.

According to the 2011 CBIA/BlumShapiro Survey of Connecticut Businesses, 37% of respondents said they are having difficulty finding qualified workers. We need to do better. Every student in Connecticut deserves a change to reach their potential. With the largest achievement gap in the United States and with our highest performing students slipping relative to states like Texas and the Dakotas, it is time to act.

The Governor has proposed a package of reforms that, taken as a whole, would serve to close the achievement gap and raise educational outcomes for all students. CBIA is particularly encouraged to see legislation addressing:

Certification – Improving teacher certification processes are necessary to ensure that those entering the teaching profession both meet high standards and are afforded more flexibility when they receive appropriate training outside the state. The State Board of Education should be given more latitude to approve initial certification even if a

prospective teacher with a record of success comes from out of state, breaking down barriers to entry for qualified individuals who want to practice their craft in Connecticut.

Further, the Commissioner of Education should have the authority to grant an acting superintendent waiver to any individual deemed exceptionally qualified on a case-by-case basis by broadening the Commissioner's authority and eliminating the arbitrary qualifiers that currently limit issuing a waiver to an otherwise exceptionally qualified individual.

Lastly, the creation of three new levels of teacher certification (initial, professional, and master) based on effectiveness ratings under the new Performance Evaluation System and tied to a new pay schedule will allow streamlined promotion of highly effective educators, allow teachers who chose to stay in the classroom the option to do so without foregoing advancement, and help to identify those who need customized professional development.

Teacher Evaluations – As recommended by the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council, teacher evaluations should weigh student performance as a central factor in education evaluation. Evaluations will result in one of four effectiveness rankings (below standard, developing, proficient, and exemplary) to be used for advancement, to identify professional development needs, and to determine where dismissal may be appropriate.

It is appropriate that teacher pay scale step advancement rely on the four-tiered effectiveness designation to determine advancement, rather than using evaluations to arbitrarily “provide guidance” in this area. Student learning is the central duty of educators. This new evaluation system will facilitate assistance to those who need it and reward excellence by quicker promotion and the ability to negotiate for additional compensation when an individual attains a master teacher certification or receives multiple exemplary ratings.

Tenure – Relying on the new evaluation system, attainment of tenure will be expedited relative to the current system for those teachers that receive two “exemplary” ratings. Maintenance of tenure will require a combination of three “proficient” or “exemplary” ratings every five years with ample opportunity for targeted, customized professional development to ensure teachers have every opportunity to excel and advance.

The new system retains the due process protections that prevent wrongful dismissal while tying the maintenance of tenure to teacher skill. The new tenure law will emphasize retention of high-quality teachers and facilitate professional growth for the entire profession.

CTHSS Governance – Connecticut's independent technical high schools are a unique and underutilized asset in public education. The report of the Task Force on the Connecticut Technical High School System has recommended, and the Governor has included in this bill, a governance board for the Connecticut Technical High School

System. The proposed CTHSS Board of Education will serve an important role in directing a system of schools that are responsive in their curricula and graduation requirements to the needs of businesses in Connecticut.

Early Education – Children who arrive in Kindergarten having received some form of pre-K educational experience are substantially more prepared to learn than their peers who have not had such opportunities. Although even the best pre-K experience cannot inoculate a child from the effects of a low-quality K-12 education, taken along with the broad reforms contained in this legislation, CBIA is encouraged by the creation of 500 new seats for early child education in Connecticut and the inclusion of a system of accountability that will give parents the ability to select the best program for their child.

Uniform System of Accounting – Tracking school expenditures is imperative to ensuring that Connecticut's substantial investment in public education is actually going to the classroom. Currently, common charts of accounts do not exist at the school level making it impossible to accurately follow and account for the dollars as they flow into our schools. This proposal is long overdue.

Shared Services and Small District Consolidation – In addition to accounting for money spent on education, making efficient use of school funding lowers operating costs and allows savings to be applied to classroom, a benefit to student learning. CBIA supports language in this legislation that would direct the Commissioner of Education to recommend incentives to consolidate school districts of less than one thousand pupils by October 1, 2016 and annually thereafter.

Turnaround Schools and the Commissioners District – CBIA heartily endorses the proposed intervention in chronically underperforming schools and looks forward to swift action in this area. Connecticut cannot afford to allow an entire generation of students to fall behind due to a school's inability to right its course, nor should the state fail to extend needed assistance to schools or districts that find themselves in difficult circumstances.

This legislation provides an array of alternatives that can be custom tailored to a given school's unique circumstances and offers an intelligent "best fit" approach to solving the dire problem of failing schools.

Public Schools of Choice – Alternative public school models serve as laboratories for the best practices of tomorrow. As such, we support the inclusion of charter, magnet, and other public schools of choice in plans to reform our educational delivery system.

Conclusion – CBIA is encouraged that the Education Committee is taking on this monumental piece of legislation this session. Adoption of this package of reforms is a necessary and significant first step down the road to educational excellence. Connecticut's businesses are relying on our public schools to graduate the best and the brightest in the country, and our children are depending on all of us to ensure that they

have access to a world-class education in order to live rich, fulfilling lives as citizens of our great state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter. We would be pleased to respond to any inquiries on this subject.