Testimony of:
Jeff Leake
President of the Connecticut Education Association
and
Thomas Nicholas
Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association

Before the:

Committee on Children

Re:

SB 2 AAC Social Equity and the Health, Safety, and Education of Children

March 9, 2021

Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan, and members of the Committee on Children. My name is Jeff Leake, President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). With me is Tom Nicholas, Vice President of CEA. CEA represents educators in over 1,000 schools across the state.

We would like to express our concerns regarding SB 2.

SB 2 permits school districts to provide virtual learning on an ongoing basis with the approval of the commissioner of the State Department of Education. CEA believes this proposal would result in great harm and inequities for school children across the state.

While virtual teaching has served as a tool to allow for teaching and interaction throughout the COVID pandemic, it has come at the expense of equity and effectiveness. Remote instruction does not work for the majority of our students and is not optimal for any child. There have been many documented problems educators, students, and their families have faced due to virtual teaching and learning over the last year, including the ineffective practice of providing dual instruction to in-person and remote students at the same time.

We are concerned about any expansion of remote or virtual learning into schools on an ongoing basis or at times when there is not a public health emergency. The state should not permit virtual/remote learning, period. And must at least study its impact on learning, equity, and social emotional well-being (as proposed in SB 977 AAC Virtual Learning).

In times when virtual instruction is necessary, state statute should clearly:

1. **Provide Adequate Planning Time:** Institute mandatory planning time—an additional hour of planning time per day or one day per week for planning only.

2. **Prohibit Dual Teaching Setting:** Teachers should either teach remotely or in-person, but not both at the same time. Until dual settings are phased out, provide 1.5 hours of planning time per day to help manage dual teaching settings.

CEA stands firmly against simultaneously teaching both in-person and remotely. Legislators would greatly benefit from hearing stories from educators about what's happening in their classrooms. New requirements that have been imposed on educators during the pandemic have had negative impacts on student learning, as well as on educators who are working harder than ever to teach to both groups of students at the same time. Documented below are examples that educators have shared regarding what is really happening in their classrooms.

Remote/virtual learning is problematic for many reasons and only works for a relative few, which ultimately broadens inequities separating high achievers from the rest:

- Remote learners do not follow deadlines and complete assignments when in-person students are expected to -- creating inequity.
- We require extra time to prepare separate lessons for remote learners and extra disproportionate attention to keep them engaged; they require a lot of follow-up time to address missed classes and assignments.
- Some teachers report much lower performance among remote learners (e.g. 20 points lower). Low assignment completion and participation rates.
- Remote instruction, especially unplanned, for SPED, 504, and IEP presents difficulties and inequities.
- Students in lower performing groups engage less when remote and find it more difficult to follow assignments and complete work, especially compared to their higher performing counterparts, creating inequities.
- Checking for learning with remote students is difficult -- you can't see their work or their expressions.
- Specials like music and art are difficult remote, and dual instructionally too. You can't do group rehearsals online, for example given lags and other issues. With Art, you can't use materials that are housed in the classroom.
- Science labs cannot be done remotely.

Dual/synchronous instruction of remote and in-person at the same time raises many problems and exacerbates inequities within and across schools:

- Two different groups means one group gets attention while the other doesn't. Also, teachers must always be near their computer, monitoring remote students and chats. In-person is more hands-on, which is a different mode completely.

- Remote learners show up late, taking up valuable class time to reintroduce material. A disproportionate amount of time is spent dealing with students' login and internet access problems at the expense of others.

- Remote students often walk away or otherwise tune out during class.

- Test conditions vary between in-person and remote students, which make for unfair results.

- In-person use of white boards, DVDs, and other visuals cannot be seen by remote students.

- Districts with more dual/synchronous classes will have more students negatively affected. These are likely to be schools with fewer resources and staff to support the intensive nature of operating remote and in-person schools.

In short, absent a true public health emergency, public schools should advance and promote the best and most equitable instructional model, which is in-person instruction. There is just no substitute for in-person instruction. I urge you to consult the experts on this matter – public school educators, who can talk about the issues with remote instruction and what is best for educating our students.

Virtual Parent Conferences

SB 2 also adds the potential for virtual parent-teacher conferences. *Providing for opportunities for parents to attend teacher conferences virtually makes sense. However, it is not necessary for the state to mandate additional conferences, which are determined locally with input from teachers. We urge committee members to remove this mandate and to defer to educators in the districts on how best to provide for a continual dialogue with parents.*

Adverse childhood Experiences

SB 2 (along with HB 5698, on which we testified previously) provides for the collection of data on students' Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). We believe that teachers and administrators would be well served by knowing more about the level of ACES experienced by children under their care. We are concerned about the breadth of the bill language, which could result in the collection of not only ACES scores (i.e. the raw score) but details of personal information on adverse experiences at the state level. The primary tool for determining an ACE score is an inventory of adverse events experienced by a child. As such, the information includes not only a final score, but also a list of the types of incidents experienced. These include indicators of abuse and neglect, such as emotional or physical neglect and sexual abuse. They would also include indicators of family dysfunction, including the presence of mentally ill, depressed, or suicidal persons in the home, drug or alcohol addiction, divorce, incarceration, and domestic violence.

We believe ACE scores that indicate the number of adverse experiences experienced by a child, can help teachers understand the needs and emotional levels of students. This in turn can improve interactions and help educators to identify appropriate resources for students' unique circumstances. We believe the details of the ACES inventory should not be readily available in databases, though we believe such information is important for use by certified school specialists such as social workers, counselors, and mental health professionals.

We believe that the collection of ACES data at the state level in anything but aggregated forms is unwise and recommend that more effective parameters be included. Moreover, with proposals to expand the sharing of state-collected student data to institutions of higher education and entities engaging in employment, the risk of misuse, abuse, or breach is too great.

Thank you for your consideration.