

Testimony of

Kate Dias
Connecticut Education Association

Before the
Education Committee

Re:

**HB 5038 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS
CONCERNING EDUCATION**
SB 274 AN ACT CONCERNING MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

March 21, 2022

Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and members of Education Committee, my name is Kate Dias, President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents educators in over 150 school districts across the state and over 43,000 educators. I bring before you today testimony on two pieces of legislation: HB 5038 An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education and SB 274 An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention.

HB 5038 An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education

ECS and Other Program Funding

CEA supports the governor's budget for education. We applaud the governor's commitment to phasing in the full ECS formula, including a hold-harmless provision for certain districts that would see untimely declines in funding. We understand that committee members are considering other adjustments to the formula and other grant programs for greater coherency. Ultimately, we support investments in public education that will fairly lift all boats, and not unfairly pit one school funding program against another.

However, what is most important is that we ensure that increases in funding are targeted toward addressing the greatest needs exhibited by students in our school system. Over the past decade, we have seen a growing proportion of children become disengaged, disruptive, or dysregulated, especially alarming in the earliest grades. This has been a concerning trend exacerbated during the pandemic.

Promise District Proposal

As indicated by the collective attention given to children's mental health, students need trained supportive adults. Yet we see high levels of teacher attrition, shortages in key disciplines such as special education, school social workers, and school counselors, and pressures of time that further limit student access to school supports.

To resolve this, we ask committee members to consider the attached amendment, which establishes Promise District funding within available ECS funding. Why should legislators create and fund something called a “Promise” District program? Because it is in the state’s most financially distressed school districts where students who exhibit the greatest need also show the greatest promise.

The Promise District program sets-aside 25% of ECS increases received by the most financially distressed municipalities and targets funding toward hiring more certified and non-certified support staff. The program would increase certified support staff, such as school counselors and social workers. It would increase para-educator and other non-certified staffing levels to enable teachers to collaborate and plan. And it would target funding for incentives to retain educators.

As educators, we know that just beyond a child who is disengaged or disaffected is the promise of a child’s creativity, engagement, innovation, and joy. Helping children realize their promise requires the presence of caring adults who have the time to meaningfully engage with students. The Promise District set aside proposed in the attached amendment would enable school districts to do just that.

FAFSA

We understand that FAFSA completion will support student persistence toward attending and completing post-secondary education, whether it be trade schools or college.

However, many families may be reluctant to disclose the personal and financial information required in the FAFSA, families of undocumented students especially. It may be necessary to carry out a wider awareness and information campaign regarding financial post-secondary schooling options available to traditionally underserved populations. We urge that there be adequate staffing to ensure awareness and to provide guidance and assistance to families as they consider completing the FAFSA process.

SB 274 AAC Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention

CEA supports the development and submission of the report required in SB 274. However, we believe the language could more directly ensure input by educators by requiring that the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force include input from the Minority Teacher Policy Oversight Council and input from current educators actively recruited for participation in focus groups and through an opportunity for public comment.

Thank you.

PLEASE SEE PROMISE DISTRICT AMENDMENT – NEXT PAGE

Recruit, Retain, and Revitalize – Promise District Proposal

- Sets aside 25% of new ECS dollars for teacher stipends, uncertified support staff to ensure prep time, and professional support staff.
- Requires districts include input from bargaining units of certified staff

Amendment Language:

Sec. 501 (NEW) (a) For the purpose of this section, “Promise District” means a municipality qualifying as a distressed municipality pursuant to 32-9p, public investment community pursuant to 7-545, or alliance district pursuant to 10-262u.

(b) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, and each fiscal year thereafter, the Department of Education shall administer the promise district support program. Such program shall require promise districts to set aside twenty-five percent of any amount of its equalization aid grant received pursuant to 10-262h in excess of the total amount of such aid received in the prior year for the following purposes, subject to the provisions of subsection (b) of this act:

- 1) supplemental stipends to retain certified educators,
- 2) expansion of support and paraprofessional staff to ensure planning time for educators is sufficient and uninterrupted,
- 3) Hiring of certified staff to address special education, school counselor, social worker, school psychologist and speech pathologists' caseloads,

(c) In determining how funds for the promise district support program will be used by a local or regional board of education, such board shall:

- 1) submit to the state department of education, in manner determined by the commissioner of education, a plan for how such funds would be used;
- 2) include an attestation from the authorized leader of bargaining units representing certified teachers and administrators that such unit has received a meaningful opportunity to include input in the district plan;
- 3) include a description of how meaningful input from the community, including parents, was facilitated.

(d) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, and each fiscal year thereafter, the Commissioner of Education shall withhold from a promise district, from the funds transferred by the Comptroller pursuant to subsection (c) of section 10-262u of the general statutes, twenty-five per cent of any increase in such funds that such promise district receives for the fiscal year over the amount of such funds that it received for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022. The department shall use such funds to make a payment to such promise district and such promise district shall expend such payment for any of the costs described in subsection (c) of this section.