



May 15, 2022

Dear Honorable Members of the Connecticut General Assembly,

While the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) applauds you for most of what Senate Bill 1 will do for the children of Connecticut, we have serious reservations about two amendments to the bill, which were added very late in the process and without broad input.

The first law has to do with “the prohibition of dual instruction as part of remote learning.” You permit remote learning - instruction by means of one or more Internet-based software platforms as part of a remote learning model – but you deny any opportunity for dual instruction to occur. With whom did you talk in making your decision? Did you speak to a broad sampling of students, parents, education leaders, teachers, and Boards of Education? I suspect not. But clearly, students or their learning were not the focus of this amendment.

Consider the following scenarios. In the fall of 22, a 3rd-grade student receives remote learning due to her cancer and her need for chemotherapy. An 11-year-old has school phobia and is receiving his education remotely. A high school student developed severe mental illness during COVID and has been hospitalized several times. It is determined by both the medical and mental health personnel that she learn from home. Every district has students like these. Sadly, what these students have in common is that they will be completely isolated in their learning. They will *never* see or engage with their classmates or with their teachers each day. They will be denied learning with their peers. Yes, they may have tutors coming to their homes, but it is not the same as seeing and engaging with their teacher(s) and their classmates. And why? Because dual instruction has been outlawed in Connecticut. We have taken a huge step backward and done so without justification.

What’s ironic is that COVID became the catalyst for significant advances in the use of technology as part of learning. Remote learning was *the* means of learning in countless CT schools in the 2020-21 school year. For those schools that could move to a hybrid model,

teachers simultaneously taught students both remotely and in person. Was it optimal? No, but it enabled students to interact with teachers and their classmates, whether in the classroom or home. That opportunity, which was a huge advancement, is now being denied to those students who, not by choice, are unable to be in school for their learning. How do you justify this occurring?

Additionally, through the denial of dual instruction, you have also shut down opportunities for high school students in one district to take courses remotely and use dual instruction with students in another high school, e.g., Stratford students joining students in another district in the study of Arabic. This form of dual instruction, previously known as distance learning, began in Connecticut more than 30 years ago when the US State Department of Education encouraged the teaching of Russian in schools and, subsequently, the teaching of Arabic. Countless districts across the state and the country had schools pairing in the study of a language through distance learning. Thirty years later, Connecticut law will no longer permit it. A wonderful opportunity lost! Again, we ask, whom did you listen to? Certainly, this was not a “student first” piece of legislation.

The second piece of new legislation which is disturbing is the mandate of a minimal 30-minute, uninterrupted lunch for all professional staff working with students, *effective* July 1, 2022, (Sec. 14. Section 10-156a.). The amendment, with this troubling new language for the first time, was filed and received final Senate passage within a couple of hours of being made public. Superintendents were blindsided as this piece of legislation was hidden from view. There was no transparency.

In passing this new law, was any thought given to the impact this law will have on at least 40 percent of the districts in the state that do not have a 30-minute uninterrupted lunch period? Did you give any thought as to how these districts will make this happen by July 1, 2022, when schedules and budgets have already been adopted for the next school year? For those districts that have a 25-minute lunch or a 20-minute lunch, where do you suggest they find that time? In adding minutes to ensure a 30-minute lunch for professional staff, the additional time will either have to be taken out of instructional time or added to the length of the day, which will most likely mean negotiating additional pay for teachers. The loss of time, if taken out of the day, is significant. For example, a daily 10-minute reduction results in a loss of 30 hours of instruction per year; if 5 minutes is taken out of the schedule, the loss is 15 hours of instruction.

The argument is not whether teachers should have a 30-minute lunch. The argument is that there was no thought given to the implications of implementing this bill in less than three months, i.e., by July 1, 2022, resulting in numerous districts having to create new

schedules in their schools, resulting in a loss of instruction or engage in bargaining around wages by adding onto the school day; and if the latter, where are these districts to find the money to pay their teachers? If more discussion had been held, you would have been made aware of these ramifications.

CAPSS does not see any benefit to adding amendments at the last minute without broad input. We ask that in the future, you take our recommendations into consideration. We ask that you in engage in discussion on the pros and cons of every mandate so that fully informed decisions can be made, especially when they affect Connecticut's children, which we believe is a prime concern of us all.

If you would like to discuss this further, I am always available.

Sincerely,



Frances M. Rabinowitz

Executive Director

Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents

CC: Office of the Governor
State Department of Education
Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
Connecticut Association of Schools
Connecticut Education Association
American Federation of Teachers Connecticut