

# Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-1

AN ACT INCREASING RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS, SCHOOLS AND

**Title:** SPECIAL EDUCATION.

**Vote Date:** 3/24/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/19/2025

**File No.:** 637

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## SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

## REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill aims to increase resources for students, schools, and special education by establishing sustainable funding mechanisms, expanding access to early childhood education, and strengthening oversight of educational systems. Central to the bill is the creation of the Universal Preschool Trust, which will be funded by up to \$300 million from the FY 2025 surplus and future unappropriated surpluses. Spending from the trust will roll out in four phases, gradually covering unpaid preschool and childcare costs—starting with state and Board of Education programs and expanding to private providers and infant/toddler care based on the trust’s investment returns.

The bill also expands the Tri-Share Childcare Matching Program statewide, easing the financial burden on families by dividing childcare costs among employers, employees, and the trust. To simplify access, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) will develop a centralized online enrollment portal for families and providers.

Beyond early education, the bill includes a series of reforms to improve transparency, accountability, and support across K–12 education. It mandates new reporting requirements for superintendents and school boards on student support services, staffing, and spending. It also establishes regional Education Accountability Review Boards to guide and monitor spending in Priority School Districts, which replace the outdated Alliance Districts. Additional provisions include a student success coach pilot program in eight high-need districts, a requirement for school boards to consider student homelessness before expulsion decisions, and funding for HVAC system upgrades through a new grant program. These

changes are reinforced by updates to data reporting, school budgeting oversight, and SDE corrective action policies.

This legislation is significant because it invests in the foundational years of a child's education while addressing systemic inequities in school funding and oversight. By expanding access to affordable childcare, supporting at-risk youth, and improving district accountability, the bill lays the groundwork for a more equitable, transparent, and student-centered public education system across the state.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

### **Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education**

The CSDE supports the bills' semi-annual reporting requirements although the department already reports frequently on the status of the implementation of the 5 Year Plan to the State Board of Education. S.B. 1 replaces prior legislation regarding non-lapsing un-expanding funds; they say local boards should publish the use of these funds and if the data needs to be validated or complied this requires more funding that isn't included in the Governor's budget. S.B. 1 asks the CSDE to administer a student success coach pilot program to be implemented in school of at-risk districts in Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury, New Britain, Hartford, Windham, New London, and Norwich in next three fiscal years. A two-million-dollar grant supports the Success Coach pilot, and the district can utilize an early indicator tool to identify students in need of a success coach in addition to participation in a Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaborative (CCERC). In summary, there is no need for duplicating information that already exists on Ed Sight, but transparency is needed for use of all funds and more funds are needed for programs not included in the governors' budget.

### **Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood, 450 Columbus Blvd, Hartford, CT**

The Office of Early Childhood appreciates the intent of S.B. 1. Sections two and three aim to establish a sustainable funding mechanism that support the development of our youngest learners and support their families' economic stability. Section 4 outlines a roll out of funds as the Trust Fund gains value. S.B. 1 prioritizes Tri-Share, an innovative program launched January 2025 and its' new model being tested as a pilot program however there are limited funds currently allocated for this program and the expansion efforts will be a challenge for some public-school classrooms in FY 27 because it doesn't address supporting community-based providers for at least several years and it is limited to 10% of the fund which doesn't ensure program expansion. In S.B.1 it is unclear how investment returns are going to be measured and which expenses the returns are going to be compared to when a phase begins. Section four caps the parent co-pay for tuition at 7% of current household income. The bills' Universal Preschool provision offers more hours that both support early learning and allows working families the ability to work while their young children are being looked after. Section 12 establishes an on-line enrollment portal that the OEC plans to build, establish, and ensure easy access for families to enroll their children in childcare. S.B. 1 eliminates free tuition and will increase co-payment amounts for families making more than \$60,000 a year when compared to the Governor's plan. They say the ability of the fund to support costs in a sustainable way is imperative given the ongoing nature of the costs being borne by providers who aren't being reimbursed on-time. Section 6 outlines a Universal Preschool Trust Fund Board, but they say an important question is how this Trust Fund Board

relates to the Early Childhood Cabinet and the Early Childhood Care and Education Fund Advisory Commission passed in legislation under P.A. 24-91 in 2024?

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Martin Looney, Senate Present Pro Tempore. Supports S.B. 1.**

They say S.B. 1 is drafted to invest in early childhood education, improve data transparency and availability from and to schools, invest in youth to prevent them from becoming disconnected, and refine the district classifications to reduce red tape to districts and ensure that the neediest districts get the most targeted services. They say the first twelve sections of the bill establish a multi-phase approach to universal preschool, and ultimately, universal childcare. They say the bill proposes to use \$300 million of unappropriated surplus to establish a Universal Preschool Trust, which will serve as a funding mechanism for the proposal. They say the bill removes a program to free resources and to remove a massive administrative burden to both the state and district, but the schools will continue to receive services without this program. Finally, they say the bill removes the alliance district program because the program's core ideology includes withholding funds from the state's academically neediest districts until the districts develop a plan to spend the withheld funds and by removing this program and leaning on the priority school district program statutorily, districts will be freed from administrative burden and red tape between themselves and their educational cost sharing funds. They say this shift would allow districts to prioritize and spend to best meet their own specific needs, and it will free funds and resources at the SDOE to be used to address the highest need.

### **Vincent Candelora, House Minority Leader- CT House Republican Caucus. Supports S.B. No. 1.**

They urge the legislature to invest in organizations with a proven track record. They say according to the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities' "Young People First" report (2024), addressing this crisis would have a transformative effect on our state's economy by filling a significant portion of unfilled jobs with diverse, talented workers and increasing Connecticut's GDP by up to \$5.1 billion and that for each young person successfully reconnected, the state generates approximately \$150,000 to \$180,000 in additional tax revenue. They also point to the newly formed 119K To Zero collaborative which brings together Connecticut nonprofits that specialize in serving severely disconnected youth and has already created a track record with demonstrated results. They say Connecticut taxpayers continue bearing unnecessary social service costs; miss potential tax revenue from productive citizens; and fail to meet the workforce needs of local and state employers and that it is important to investment in organizations with proven methodologies and measurable outcomes.

### **Justin Elicker, Mayor of the City of New Haven. Supports S.B. No. 1**

They say S.B. 1 unlocks future opportunities, job prospects, continued enthusiasm for learning, and long-term wellbeing for our students but that the lack of adequate and equitable education funding has significant impacts on the 119,000 young people across the state currently at-risk or disconnected from education or the workforce with an additional 10,000

young people adding to that number every year. They say there is a need for adequate and equitable education funding that keeps up with inflation and ensures quality education, regardless of zip code and municipality. They highlight recommendations from the 119K Commission's Young People First report including adjusting the amount for inflation from \$11,525 to \$12,488 and indexing it to inflation moving forward, additional funding for high-needs students to support their unique learning needs, increased weight for economically disadvantaged students (from 30% to 40%), increased weight for concentrated poverty (from 15% to 20%), increased weight for multilingual learners (from 25% to 35%) and added weight for students with disabilities (50%) for a total \$545M increase.

**Andrew Feinstein, Legislative Chair, SEEK. Supports S.B.1**

They say a comprehensive education from age 3 would equip children with the literacy, numerosity, and social skills they need to enter kindergarten and grade one and would reduce the number of students qualifying for special education later and reduce the level of services that students with IEPs would need. They say the Universal Preschool Trust is a move towards universal pre-k education although it fails to move us to programs that foster the sort of educational and social growth that could make a major difference in elementary school. SEEK supports the designation of literacy districts based on reading scores and believes substantial resources should be devoted to the training of teachers in the science of reading. They say Sec. 39 of S.B. 1 eliminates the pilot program to study restraint and seclusion. They say a student in seclusion who is physically prevented from leaving their space and has no entitlement to receive calming or de-escalating interventions experiences trauma which elevates them into a fight or flight mode. Therefore, they say "seclusion" should be re-defined so that it is only permissible when a mental health professional is physically present with the student and assisting the student to calm or de-escalate.

**Steven Hernandez, Executive Director, CONNCAN. Supports S.B. 1**

They say statewide access to high quality early education preschool has a positive impact on the child, the parents and on the K-12 system and that often families face significant financial barriers and have too few options for childcare and by creating the Universal Preschool Trust, Connecticut has the potential to significantly expand access to early childhood education across the state. They say the transparency provisions in S.B. 1 are critical, as they empower families and communities to better understand the state's progress toward its strategic outcomes, district services available to families, key data on student experience, particularly for those who may feel disconnected or disengaged from their schools. While they are supportive of the concept of driving additional resources and technical assistance where they are most needed, it is important to ensure that students who live in other Connecticut communities, especially those that are identified as an Alliance District but not a Literacy District, receive the support they need to learn to read and read to learn. They say by investing in the capacity of districts and private providers to expand offerings, it encourages families to find what works best for their needs.

**Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, CAPASS. Supports S.B.1**

They say In January 2025, CAPSS updated its priorities on public education and endorsed an education scenario that would elevate, fund, and improve Connecticut's public education on

system and they say that this bill would adopt more education funding for both regular and special education so that no towns will lose either amount of funding this year and additionally, the legislation provides funding to add incentive funds for districts to implement the Blue-Ribbon Panel's Early Childhood Plan. CAPSS is in favor of a Trust Fund and supports this significant move towards universal preschool. They say Section 14 of the bill calls for each Superintendent to provide data to the Board, including the number of students in internship and workplace programs, classroom sizes, and student/teacher vacancies and CAPSS recommends sharing this burden with community agencies and having the SDE report class sizes. They say Section 18 states that the use of an early indication tool provided by the SDE in consultation with the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap to identify students; and CAPSS believes this is another mandate to use a single indicator tool. They say Section 20 states that for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, each local board of education shall compile a report about the unexpended and non-lapsing accounts from the budgeted appropriation for education and CAPSS believes this is already done as a matter of routine with up to 2% being held in a non-lapsing account. They say Section 24 calls for a new student success pilot program (\$2 million grant) in eight low achievement districts which CAPSS is in favor if it is a competitive grant but opposed to it if it's mandated. Regarding Sections 27 through 31, they say these sections are not clear as written, but if these sections eliminate Alliance districts and substitute them with Priority districts (Bridgeport, Harford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury, Windham, and Norwich), CAPSS is opposed. They say while the Alliance District program may need revision, it makes more sense to wait for the SDE report on Alliance Districts which is due in January 2026. They say Section 33 calls for the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success, established pursuant to sec on 10-14gg, shall, within available appropriations, establish a reading readiness program that provides supports in early literacy to each literacy district, as defined in sec on 10-14u, as amended by this act which CAPSS supports because they say support should be implemented in every district. They say Sections 40 through 43 calls for changes to the rules for ECS to exclude alliance districts which CAPSS believes it to be essential that the 81 districts scheduled to lose money in 2025/2026 in the Education Cost Sharing budget line be held harmless.

**Kate Dias, President & Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President, Connecticut Education Association. Support S.B. No.1**

They say S.B. 1 requires a clearer reporting on budget reserve funds, as well as measures of class size, student-teacher ratios, data on vacancies, and non-profit services utilized by school district and that it also sunsets the Alliance District Program and Commissioner's Network Schools. They agree that it is time to reimagine how school districts can be better supported and hope that funding for these programs is maintained and repurposed to invest in what we know works best for students: involving and supporting teachers in the decisions affecting their students, classrooms, and schools. They say the transparency provisions offered today, along with others CEA suggests, can help accomplish this goal.

**Senate Democrats, Connecticut General Assembly, Rm 300. Supports S.B. 1**

They say accountability measures and preventing disconnected youth is the focus of the continued work that the Senate Democrats have focused on for multiple sessions and that sections 13-24 of the legislation addresses improving data, transparency and accountability for schools and the state, and ensures that our states' children are engaged in the

educational process as much as possible. They also say that regarding disconnected youths, this bill improves strategies to share the findings of the disconnected youth report, improves resources for students experiencing homelessness while they are being expelled, and launches a pilot program for student success coaches. They believe that this increased transparency, and these expanded resources will help our schools and our state better serve Connecticut's students.

**Madeline Eldredge, Graduate Social Work Student, The University of Connecticut, Supports S.B. No.1**

They say this bill is a critical step forward toward ensuring that every child regardless of background or zip code has access to the resources, support, and opportunities they need to succeed. They highlight Section 24 of the bill which proposes a Student Success Coach Pilot Program for the cities of Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury, New Britain, Windham, Hartford, New London, and Norwich, at-risk districts with historically low attendance rates. They say this program will use evidence-based strategies to help reduce truancy rates and support the success of all students in these districts as well as addressing chronic absenteeism which they say is crucial to maintaining student engagement and overall achievement.

**Leslie Blatteau, President, New Haven Federation of Teachers, PreK-12 Divisional VP, AFT-CT Supports S.B. No.1**

They say S.B. 1 is titled a special education bill but it has very few mentioned resources for students, parents, and educators who need special education support instead we see language to update charter schools. They believe that all children in our community should have access to fully staffed and fully funded neighborhood schools. They say that the bills efforts forward toward adjusting fiscal roadblocks will bring funding to the underserved communities who need it most and make the necessary commitment to invest in our local schools ensuring that every child has access to a world class education.

**Several Others Submitted Testimony on S.B. 1**

The following speakers testified in support of establishing and investing a Universal Pre-K program with the allocation of \$300 million this year and the use of future unappropriated surpluses. They spoke of the benefits of investing in an early childhood system, stating that it is a vital to the development of a child, aged 3 to 5, targeting funds to provide resources to reconnect 109k disconnected youths to school/work and family well-being, resulting in economic stability for Connecticut.

Carl Asikainen, Executive Director, TEEG- East Hartford  
Cade Buckheit, Social Work Student- Southern Connecticut State University- New Haven  
Gail Marsh, Facilitator, Juvenile Review Board- New London  
Kathryn Scheinberg Meyer, Esq., Director of the Medical- Legal Partnership Program at the Yale Child Study Center, Center for Children's Advocacy- Hartford  
Kathryn Meyer, Attorney, Director of MLP- Center of Children Advocacy- Hartford  
Alex Johnson, President & CEO-Capital Workforce Partners, Hartford  
TJ Nuccio, CWCSEO, Childrens Policy Analyst, CGA-Hartford

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

### **Tim Anop, Director of External Affairs, Yankee Institute. Opposes S.B. 1**

They say S.B. 1 isn't just about children, its about Connecticut's fiscal future and this bill represents a clear and concerning violation of our state's bipartisan fiscal guardrails, and it sets a troubling precedent for spending that could once again put us on the path to financial instability. They say S.B. 1 would divert up to \$300 million from the FY 2025 surplus, and beginning in FY 2026, it requires that 100% of all future general fund surpluses be deposited into a new universal preschool trust, with the only exception being if the rainy-day fund is below its 18% cap, then just enough is used to fill it, and the rest still goes to the trust. They say this maneuver redefines "surplus" in state law, allowing funds to be rerouted before they're subject to the fiscal guardrails that require deposits into reserves and pension debt reduction and even more troubling, the trust is structured to operate outside the state budget as it is exempt from the spending cap, bypasses legislative appropriation, and is run by an appointed board rather than elected official and that this creates an off-budget spending mechanism with no guardrails, no accountability, and no taxpayer oversight. They say Connecticut made meaningful progress in stabilizing its finances over the past several years, thanks in large part to the fiscal guardrails that have brought greater discipline and transparency to the budget process and S.B. 1 risks undermining that progress by redirecting surplus funds away from reserves and debt reduction and creating a new spending structure outside the normal budget process.

### **Maegan Adams, Executive Director, Bristol Child Development Center, and Adjunct Faculty at Charter Oak State College, Opposes S.B. 1**

They say the allocation of \$300 million this year and the use of future unappropriated surpluses are vital for early child development, family well-being, and economic stability. They say a thriving early childhood system depends on two essential factors: ensuring that families can afford high-quality care that meet their needs and ensuring that early childhood educators receive fair wages and benefits for their essential work. They say despite holding bachelor's or master's degrees, many early educators earn poverty-level wages without benefits and as a result, programs struggle to recruit and retain staff, forcing many centers to reduce enrollment or close classrooms as teachers find higher paying jobs, in fields that require less educational requirements. They say while S.B. 1 seeks to make public pre-K schools free for families, it doesn't address the severe underfunding of community-based early childhood programs, such as Early Start (formerly School Readiness and CDC) or an even larger disparity between public pre-K, and the state funded programs who primarily serve the pre-K population. They say SB 1's implementation of a timeline will adversely affect families already on programs such as Care4Kids waitlist and they will continue waiting, while families in wealthier suburbs will see their tuition drop to just 7% of their income. They say families without an employer participating in TriShare will not receive immediate relief and that the youngest children (infants and toddlers) will not receive funding until the final phase, leaving families without viable options for years. They say if Connecticut wants to strengthen its workforce and economy, childcare must be affordable and accessible now, not just in future phases.

### **Sandra Godin, Co-Chair Bristol Early Childhood Alliance (BECA). Opposes S.B. 1**

They say parts of this bill would have unintended adverse effects on families, and members of the early childhood community. They say the public school system alone cannot meet the needs of working parents, especially those with full-time schedules. They say this bill as written would essentially expand access to pre-K in name only, as it would strip away access to full-day care for parents unable to manage a part-time school-based schedule due to their job requirements. They say it would also potentially force closures of our existing full-time childcare centers in town, which are already chronically underfunded and struggling to hire and pay staff a competitive working wage, while trying to keep their services affordable for families.

**Kristina Ford & Marissa Pratt, The Goddard School, Farmington CT. Opposes S.B. 1**

They say public preschools threaten viability of the childcare infrastructure in our area and that privately funded schools that focus more on care and education of younger children (under 2.8 years of age), lack the ability to participate in the universal pre-k program. They say practically, if this legislation moves forward, they will need to close the three locations their school currently operates, costing jobs. They say they are committed to ensuring all children receive high-quality early childhood education. They say giving families a choice as to where their children can utilize these funds would be ideal.

**Liz Brown, Waterbury Board of Education. Opposes S.B. 1**

CABE urges the committee to not move forward with establishing another layer of bureaucracy for already what they say are overburdened districts. The proposed regional education review boards in priority school districts would be part of the regional planning agencies who historically deal with functions unrelated to education and they say adding education oversight would diminish the important work they already do for their communities. They suggest an alternative approach would be to provide CSDOE with sufficient resources to provide technical assistance to challenged school districts. They say Investment in teachers is the only significant reform strategy that improves student outcomes. They say if these mandates become law, Waterbury and many other priorities school districts will have to hire new staff to collect, analyze, and report to the state. In summary, these mandates take away from the already shrinking resources for teachers and students in the classroom. CABE urges the committee to review this legislation with the lens of effectiveness, efficiency, and duplication of effort.

**The following individuals opposed S.B. 1**

The following speakers testified against of establishing and funding the Universal Pre-K program with the proposed \$300 million this year and against future unappropriated surpluses. They spoke of the adverse effects of an unfunded mandate as repetitive data collection already exists, and requires more time, resources and the use of funds meant to stabilize the states' debt. They say this would cause a negative impact on local and regional boards of education, superintendents, staff, many early childcare providers, and parents.

Alicia Lombard, Teacher, Derby Public School

