

Connecticut Debate Association Extemporaneous Debate, October 11, 2008

Resolved: Connecticut should adopt high school education reforms substantially similar to the McQuillan Initiative.

Schooling Overhaul Endorsed: Course Exams Would Become Feature Of High School, Arielle Levin Becker, The Hartford Courant, 12-06-2007

Dec. 6--The State Board Of Education on Wednesday endorsed a proposal that would require high school students to pass end-of-course exams, complete an independent study, and take at least 24 credits in specific courses to earn a diploma.

The board's approval clears the way for a yearlong effort to solicit public comment. A final proposal, expected by December 2008, would be submitted to the legislature. Changes could be implemented in the 2011-12 school year.

"This is a work in progress," Education Commissioner Mark K. McQuillan said. "This is work that is designed to capture public input and to take people's best ideas and make it stronger."

The board's vote Wednesday also directed McQuillan to seek funding from the state legislature to study the costs of the changes.

A committee that included teachers, school officials, and business and higher education leaders came up with the recommendations. McQuillan outlined the concerns behind the push for high school reform. Test scores are stagnating and falling below those of other states. Connecticut's achievement gap is among the widest in the nation. An increasing number of high school graduates enter college unprepared. And the impending retirement of a large portion of the state's work force, unmatched by an influx of young skilled workers, has left the business community fearful for the future of the state's economy.

"We have to improve," McQuillan said. "We have to improve dramatically."

Under the proposal, many courses, such as algebra II, international studies and biology, would be required. At the moment, only a half-credit course in civics and American government are required.

An earlier proposal called for students to take one credit of U.S. history, 1860 to the present, with the intention of teaching pre-Civil War U.S. history in middle school, officials said. But word of the requirement generated concern that students would not learn about the Constitution, prompting board members to change the requirement name to "U.S. history."

The new requirements would also include two years of world languages -- none are presently required -- and three years of lab sciences, changes that would mean hiring more teachers and building more labs in many schools.

Connecticut would join a growing list of states to require end-of-course exams. The state would provide a model curriculum, which districts could use at their discretion. Some type of safety net would exist for students who are unable to pass the exams.

Officials have stressed that the proposal is still in draft form, and will probably change in the coming year as various groups weigh in. A "listening tour" begins this month, to put the proposal before the public. McQuillan said he is particularly interested in written responses.

"This is a huge change and a significant new direction for Connecticut," he said.

The board voted unanimously, but some members had concerns. Donald J. Coolican asked whether a safety net for students who cannot pass the end-of-course exams would undermine the exams.

James C. Blake, a student board member, asked why the changes should affect all schools, not just low-achieving ones.

McQuillan said the idea that only a small portion of students are struggling is not true. And Allan B. Taylor, the board chairman, noted that Connecticut's test scores, once the top in the nation, have stagnated.

"What's going on is we're staying steady, talking about how we're at the top, while people who haven't been at the top are moving and getting ahead of us," he said.

It's not clear what the proposals would cost. A study to determine that is expected to be commissioned this year, and cost considerations will be part of the final proposal, McQuillan said. A reform plan will require an investment by the state, he said.

Mark Benigni, assistant principal at Berlin High School, praised aspects of the plan, but questioned what he called conflicting objectives -- the focus on individualized plans for students while limiting students' choices by requiring specific courses.

Benigni, who is also the mayor of Meriden, added that officials should use the discussion about school reform to address the root causes of problems in schools -- wages, unemployment, a lack of affordable housing, and medical care.

Weaver High School Principal Paul Stringer said issues like inadequate access to health care and eye care, which contribute to the achievement gap, must be addressed if urban students are to meet higher standards.

Other people raised questions about what safety net would exist for students who could not pass the exams or prescribed courses. McQuillan said safety nets could include allowing students to take summer courses or tutorials to pass the test.

State get and earful on state's curriculum-reform plan

Brian McCready, New Haven Register, Conn.

May 1--MILFORD -- School officials criticized a state Department of Education proposal to revamp high school curriculums as an unaffordable idea that could make the state's achievement gap worse.

The Board of Education met Tuesday night to discuss state Department of Education Commissioner Mark McQuillan's proposed high school curriculum reforms. Board members said it would cost taxpayers more than \$2 million to implement.

McQuillan's proposed plan is designed to improve high schools, increase graduation rates and to better prepare graduates for careers. The proposal would require hiring numerous teachers and force the district to expand its facilities, costing taxpayers millions of dollars.

Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Michael Cummings said the proposal may lead to a widening achievement gap between suburban and rural/urban schools, because of the cost to less-affluent districts.

Law Principal Janet Garagliano said the proposal includes requiring all students take and pass a state-developed math exam. Also, in order to graduate, a student must pass two years of world language.

Cummings said there is also talk of reducing certifications for world language teachers, which could lead to "unqualified" people teaching.

State Department of Education spokesman Thomas Murphy said the proposal includes budgeting money to help local communities implement the effects of the plan. "This is not designed to be an unfunded mandate," Murphy said.

Cummings said if the state's proposal is adopted, local school systems would be forced to adopt a state-mandated curriculum. "The legislature cannot go into this blindly. There is a cost involved," Superintendent of Schools Harvey B. Polansky said.

Murphy said Connecticut must improve its education curriculum or it will fall behind the rest of the country. "We are hearing loud and clear from the business community that our students are simply not making the grade," he said.

Student Toddchelle Young said Monday she's interested in medicine, but that science reform must start as early as elementary school. Curriculum reform must also be backed by books and labs, she said.

With so much money gone into "beautifying" city schools, "There is so much more within the schools that needs focus, like technology. We need new labs, we need new books to be competitive," she said.

Fellow student Ariane DaSilva urged the state to "boost math, boost sciences, because that's what's required of us in college," rather than elective courses.

New Haven's kindergarten-12 math supervisor Ken Mathews said he had "serious reservations about requiring Algebra II."

"Although I do believe in a society where every individual knows Algebra II, I just don't think it's well planned enough right now," he said.

New Haven school board member Frances Padilla asked the state to "flesh out" plans for middle school reform. Board member Ann Levett questioned what was being done to assure qualified teachers will be available to teach the proposed courses.

New Haven already requires at least 24 credits. The district has required two years of a world language for decades.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell's proposed budget includes \$100,000 for a feasibility study analyzing the reform's financial burden on the state and local districts.

"This is a proposal that will have implications for spending," McQuillan acknowledged Monday.

Yet McQuillan made what he called "an urgent statement about how much work we have to do as a state to address the learning achievement gaps we have," claiming Connecticut has fallen from its place as the nation's educational leader.

"Too many graduates are leaving high school and going onto community college or college, enrolling and having to take large numbers of remediate courses to be competitive or just to do the work in college," he said.

"We are in a very important and critical turning point. We haven't fallen off a cliff so far, but we're falling at a rate I think will be disastrous in a few years," he said.

A Five-Year Comprehensive Plan for Education 2006-11 Adopted by the Connecticut State Board of Education, January 3, 2007

Priority III: High School Reform

Redefining Connecticut's high schools is critical to preparing all our young people to be successful in today's challenging world. Connecticut's economy depends on a highly skilled and highly educated work force. As the demographics of the job market and Connecticut's work force change, it will become even more important to ensure that there is a new vision for Connecticut's high schools.

Every year, schools in our state lose thousands of young men and women who choose to leave school without graduating. When Connecticut's data is disaggregated for subgroups of students, the percentage of students who drop out is three times greater for Hispanics and two times greater for blacks than their white counterparts. In addition, thousands of high school graduates are leaving our schools without the skills and knowledge to be contributing citizens in our state and local economies.

The primary focus of Connecticut's high schools must be to ensure that all students graduate and will be second to none in a global marketplace. The current minimum standard for earning a high school diploma in Connecticut is 20 credits, as defined by Carnegie units, but in too many cases this standard

allows for low performance. Closing the gap between the skills of high school graduates and the skills needed in college and the work force is essential.

The high school experience must prepare students for the challenges, intellectual demands, opportunities and possibilities that await them. Providing the level of challenge necessary for student success requires a curriculum that includes rigorous content and concepts connected to relevant and authentic experiences and educators who hold high expectations for all students. Connecticut students need to be better prepared with 21st century skills, and ready for life, work and the world after high school.

Schools Boost Focus On Math And Reading

Associated Press, WASHINGTON, July 25, 2007

(AP) U.S. students are spending more time on math and reading and less on other subjects, an apparent consequence of the No Child Left Behind law. Roughly two-thirds of elementary schools surveyed by the nonpartisan Center on Education Policy reported increasing math and reading time since the law was passed in 2001. The law requires annual testing in reading and math in grades three through eight and once in high school. Schools face sanctions if they miss testing benchmarks. "Clearly what this is showing is, what schools are held accountable for is what they put the emphasis on," said Jack Jennings, president of the Washington-based center.

The report, being released Wednesday, says that of the districts reporting an increase, elementary schools are spending on average 37 minutes more per day on reading, math or both since the law was passed. Nearly half of the districts said they have cut time in elementary schools for non-tested subjects such as social studies, science, art, music and gym. The cuts across these various subjects totaled about 30 minutes a day, according to the report. About a quarter of middle schools reported increasing time spent on reading or English. One in five said they increased time spent on math. They didn't report cuts in other subjects.

The report found at the high school level, students have been taking more math and science coursework, which may be driven by state graduation requirements. The report doesn't address whether that added time is coming at the expense of other subjects. However, A separate federal study found declines in time spent on vocational education among high schoolers.

Slate Hot Document

From: Bonnie Goldstein, former special investigator to the U.S. Senate and investigative producer for ABC News. Posted Friday, Feb. 29, 2008, at 4:09 PM ET

When did Columbus set sail for the New World? Who wrote *The Canterbury Tales*? In the Bible, what is Job known for? Who was Adolf Hitler?

These aren't exactly brainteasers, but when the new education-advocacy group [Common Core](#) posed these and 30 similar questions about history and literature to 1,200 17-year-old high-school students (below on the following four pages), it discovered that American teenagers are "[stunningly ignorant](#)."

Common Core puts some of the blame on [six years](#) of George W. Bush's "[No Child Left Behind](#)" law, which forced schools to concentrate lessons on [standardized-test](#) measures for math and reading at the expense of education in the humanities. The organization debuted on Feb. 26 with a [press conference](#) that unveiled the findings in a glossy pamphlet titled [Still at Risk](#), an allusion to the landmark 1983 education survey, [A Nation At Risk](#). That earlier survey famously stated, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." Apparently, we lost.

The test posed a series of questions whose answers even the slowest-witted high-schoolers might reasonably be expected to know. But only one question (Who gave the "[I Have A Dream](#)" speech in 1963?), yielded the correct response on a near-unanimous basis (97 percent). Only 61 percent knew what the Renaissance was, and only half knew why the Federalist papers were written. *Fewer than half* knew when the Civil War was fought. And this test was *multiple-choice*!

The Hill

3/12/07 Op Ed

By Robert L. Lynch *Lynch is president and CEO of Americans for the Arts, a nonprofit group with offices in Washington and New York.*

No Child Left Behind Act wrongly left the arts behind

As Congress considers reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, set to expire in just six months, it should correct the legislation's unintended consequences, which include reducing the amount of arts education in our nation's schools.

That effect may seem ironic, since the legislation lists the arts as one of 10 "core academic subjects" of public education. But it also requires schools to report student achievement test results for only two subjects: reading and math. With the emphasis on just those two, the arts have suffered.

A recent national study of the Act's impact by the Council on Education Policy reveals that a majority of school leaders saw gains in achievement, but 71 percent reported having reduced instructional time in at least one other subject to make more time for reading and math. Since the passage of NCLB, 22 percent of elementary school leaders surveyed reported a decline in their art and music instruction.

One might ask: Isn't it worth sacrificing some arts instruction if that's what it takes to achieve reading and math proficiency? But that question just begs others: Should our schools be pushed to focus on two subjects at the expense of others? Why aren't the arts being used to teach reading and math? And will our nation maintain its global competitiveness by simply producing better readers?

The arts — which can be justified simply by their expressive qualities — are at the center of our nation's economic competitiveness in this Information Age. The U.S. economy has reinvented itself as a global force once again, this time around the Internet. And what is the Internet, if not an expression of the arts?

The content of virtually every website involves graphic design, photography, writing, and, in some cases, music and increasingly video. What is YouTube.com, if not an engine for artistic expression? And how will we remain competitive as a nation if our children are not learning innovation and creativity by studying the arts in school?

In our own country alone, just the nonprofit arts industry — the museums and performing arts centers, among others — generates \$134 billion in economic activity every year, according to a study conducted by economists at Georgia Tech for Americans for the Arts. The \$134 billion nationally supports 4.85 million fulltime-equivalent jobs and \$89.4 billion in household income. Where will those jobs go, if our students aren't exposed to the arts?

Connecticut Education Facts 2006-07

Connecticut State Board of Education

High School	1997-98	2005-06	2006-07
Hours Instruction per year	989	1002	1002
Students per computer	5.5	3.1	2.9
Average Class Size	20.1	20.3	20.0
Dropout Rate	15.0%	7.4%	6.6%
Expenditure per pupil	\$8,785	\$13,515	\$14,096
Enrolment	137,767	165,258	166,803

Matrix of Proposed Secondary School Reform Requirements

Draft 12/5/07	Required Credits	State Model	Embedded 21st	State EOC	State EOC	Local EOC	Locally
<i>Core Curriculum</i>	Distribution	Curricula	Century Skills	Examination	Performance Task	Performance Task	Scored
Mathematics	3						
Algebra I	1	x	x	x			
Geometry	1	x	x				
Algebra II	1	x	x	x			
Science	3						
Biology	1	x	x	x			
Chemistry or Other Full-year Physical Science Course (See N	1	x	x		x (Chemistry)	x (Other)	x
Full-year Lab Course in Physical or Life Science	1					x	x
English, LA & Reading	4						
English I	1	x	x				
English II	1	x	x	x			
Literature & Composition I	1						
Literature & Composition II or Full-year Elective	1						
History/Social Science	3						
International Studies	1					x	x
US History	1	x	x	x			
Civics	0.5	x	x				
Half-year Elective	0.5						
World Language	2						
Career & Technical Education and The Arts	2						
<i>Combination of Full or Half-Year Elective Courses</i>							
Careers and Technical Education	.5 or 1 or 2						
The Arts	.5 or 1 or 2						
Health and Wellness	2						
Health, Nutrition & Wellness	0.5	x	x				
Physical Education	1.5	x	x				
Electives: Full and Half-Year Courses	4						
Senior Demonstration	1					x	x
Total	24	11	11	5	1	4	4

Note 1: Model Curriculum for Chemistry Only

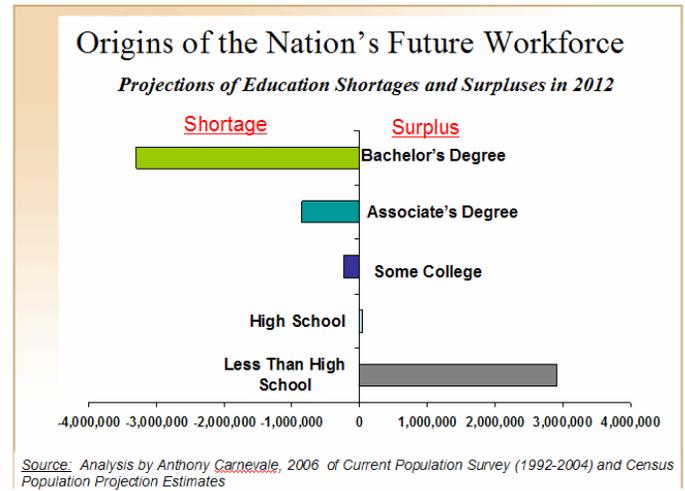
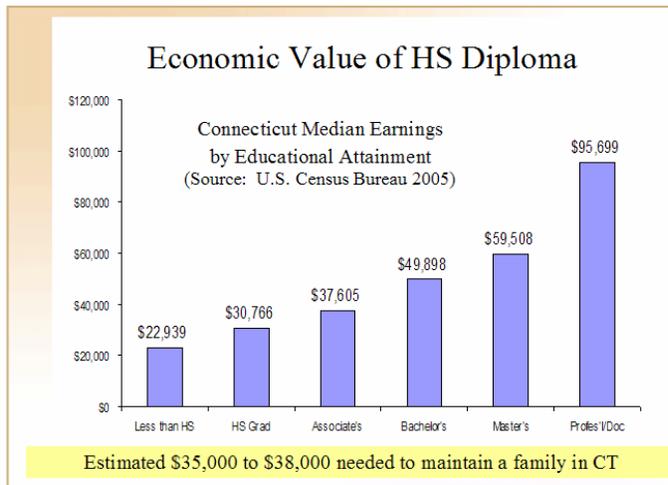
Tables from State Department of Education website:

<http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/edfacts/index.htm>

Connecticut Facts	
2000 State Population	3,405,565
1990-2000 Population Growth	3.6
Percent of Persons 5 and Older With Language Other Than English Spoken at Home	18.3
Percent of Population Below Poverty (1999)	7.9
Percent of Population, Nonwhite	18.4

Connecticut Education Facts	
Total 2004 Public School Enrollment	577,398
Percent of Students Enrolled in Public Schools	88.3
Public School Population as a Percentage of State Population	17.0
Percent of Persons 25 and Older, High School Graduates	84.0
Percent of Persons 25 and Older With a Bachelor's Degree or Higher	31.4
Number of Connecticut high schools	170

Tables from Education Commissioner McQuillan's PowerPoints:



Reform is necessary because...

- CT has large achievement gaps, some of the largest in the United States;
- Achievement as measured by critical indicators (CAPT, CMT, NAEP) is declining or stagnant;
- Too many CT college students require remedial coursework;
- CT's high school diploma has low economic value;
- Graduates are often unprepared for the CT workplace;
- Large percentages of 16-18 year-olds are entering CT's Adult Education system;
- By 2010-11 approximately 100 districts will face NCLB sanctions;
- CT has the second highest juvenile incarceration rates for Hispanic males and the third highest rate for African American males in the country;
- Economists project that the bulk of CT's future work force will come from its major urban centers, where state achievement is lowest; and
- CT is 45th of 50 states in long-term job growth and has experienced the largest increase in income inequality in the nation since 1988;

CT Business Community: Recommended Changes to Reform High Schools

Recommended Changes	Percent Agree
Higher expectations for all students	68%
More rigorous math and science	67%
Exposure to career pathways	70%
Extended school day	37%
Reinforce analytic and problem-solving skills	69%
Preparation for employment in a global economy	60%
Assessment of skills prior to graduation	58%

2007 CBIA Member Survey +/- 3.8%; primarily small and mid-sized employers

The Condition of Education 2008, Connecticut Department of Education, August 2008

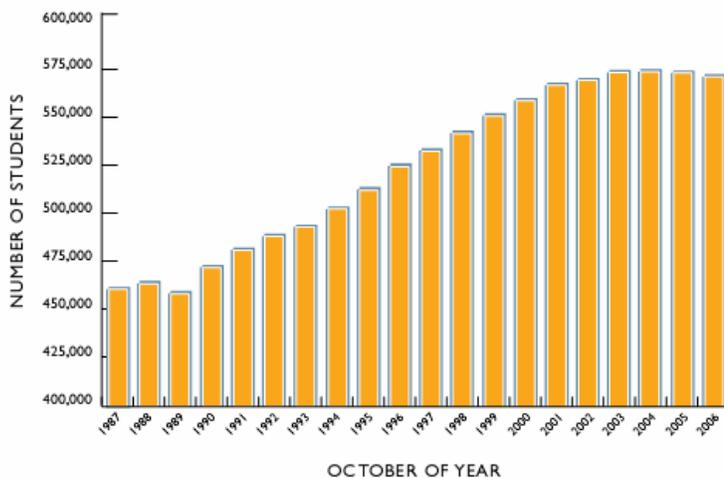
CREDITS REQUIRED FOR GRADUATION BY SUBJECT		
Subject	State Requirement*	Number of High Schools that Require Credits Beyond the State Minimum
English	4	3
Mathematics	3	5
Social studies	3	26
Science	2	120
Art or vocational ed.	1	70
Physical education	1	75
Health	0	122
World languages	0	20
Other specific req.	0	68
Community service	0	9

Total Per Pupil Expenditures*

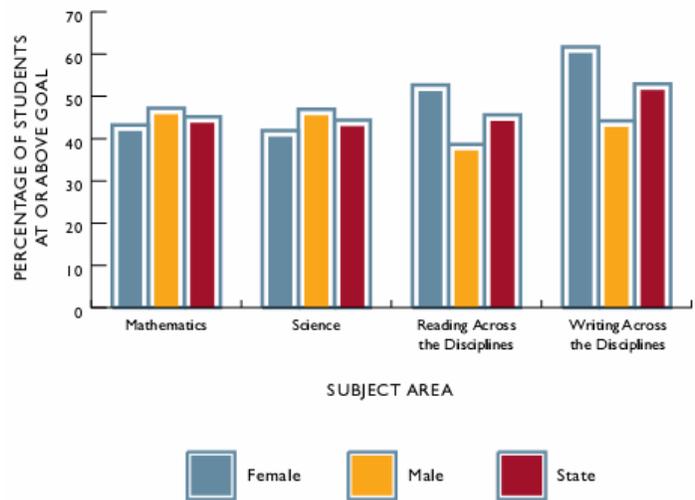
Year	Per Pupil Expenditure (\$)
1997-98	8,785
1998-99	9,365
1999-00	9,736
2000-01	10,212
2001-02	10,837
2002-03	11,380
2003-04	11,765
2004-05	12,517
2005-06	13,513
2006-07	14,096

* Includes debt service

PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT 1987 TO 2006



2007 CONNECTICUT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE TEST PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE GOAL



Percentage of Revenues by Source			
Source	1996-97	2005-06	2006-07
Local	57.2	53.9	54.7
State	38.6	40.3	39.8
Federal	4.0	5.4	5.1
Tuition and other sources	0.2	0.4	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE MEALS*

