

Legislative History for Connecticut Act

**PA 14-232**

HB5564

House	5589-5684	96
Senate	3461, 3476, 3480-3481	4
Education	967-969, 971-972, 1038-1043, 1067-1069, 1185-1189, 1333-1334, 1336-1353, 1414-1415, 1418-1421	45

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**145**

**H - 11697**

**CONNECTICUT  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
HOUSE**

**PROCEEDINGS  
2014**

**VOL.57  
PART 17  
5567 - 5881**

And would the Clerk please announce the tally?

THE CLERK:

Mr. Speaker, Senate Bill 2 as amended by Senate  
"A" and in concurrence with the Senate:

Total number voting	145
Necessary for Passage	73
Those voting Yea	145
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	6

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Bill passes at concurrence.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar 265?

THE CLERK:

On page 38, Calendar 265, favorable report of the  
Joint Standing Committee on Finance Revenue and  
Bonding, substitute House Bill Number 5564, AN ACT  
CONCERNING SCHOOL SAFETY.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann of the 18th District,  
you have the floor, sir.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move acceptance of the Joint Committee's  
favorable report and passage of the bill.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Question before the Chamber is acceptance of the Joint Committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

Please proceed, sir.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The measure that is now before us really is an effort to build upon the good work that this General Assembly did in a bipartisan bicameral way after the Sandy Hook tragedy more than a year ago. As you recall, all of us focused in on what we could do to improve school safety as well as improve the supports given in terms of mental health services for children and gun safety. And this measure really seeks to move the ball further forward on school safety.

Right now, the measure before us has four main sections. The first would create a new safe travel to school grant program to help improve student safety as children travel to and from their schools. The second section requires the State Department of Education to either approve or reject school district Safe Climate Plans. Those plans are currently submitted, but they

are -- and they're reviewed, but we left some ambiguity about what happens post review and this would clear up that needless ambiguity.

The third portion would add specific requirements to Safe School Climate surveys making them comparable from one school to the next. Right now we have surveys, but you can't figure out how one high school compares to the next, compares to the next. It doesn't make sense and we would clear up that problem. And the fourth section requires a feasibility study for a student safety anonymous tip line. So, all of these sections are good. However, the first section had a, a major fiscal note and -- involving dollars that were not included in the budget.

So, in that spirit the Clerk is in possession of a bipartisan amendment, LCO 5141. I ask the Clerk please call and I be given permission to summarize.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Would the Clerk please call LCO 5141. It shall be designated House Amendment Schedule "A."

THE CLERK:

LCO Number 5141, designated House "A" and offered by Representative Fleischmann, Senator Stillman, Representative Ackert and Senator Boucher.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative asks permission of the Chamber to summarize. Is there objection to summarization? Objection?

Seeing none, please proceed, Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I mentioned, first and foremost, the amendment before us would strike Section 1 which would eliminate this new grant program which would be a great program but which is not in the budget and something we can work on in future years. It would clarify the language in Section 3 to make sure that it is -- there is a very straightforward process in place for the submission of climate reports and their acceptance or rejection and a timeline for dealing with that. And finally, it ensures the, the clarity and uniformity of the questions that are handled in the school climate surveys.

I move adoption.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Question before the Chamber is adoption of House "A."

Representative Ackert of the 8th District, you have the floor, sir.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks for the good Chair for his iteration of what took place.

I do have a question, and I didn't hear it and I'm not sure if my colleagues did, because one of the key areas that we did mention, we did hear testimony on was this sort of Safe Roads to School Plan and that was the Section 1 that is now no longer in this new, new iteration that was -- bipartisan support. I will state, and right off the bat, that this was the amendment, but that the first section, again, was removed, through you, Mr. Speaker, I believe from financial concerns. Is that true, through you, Mr. Speaker?

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, by striking Section 1 we remove a potential cost of up to \$4 million and bring it down to zero.

Through you.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the good Chair.

That's what I thought I heard, and that's the understanding. After I saw the note and I saw the fiscal note on Section 1 primarily, obviously the idea here is to start to move this process forward. I believe that there will be an effort again next year to continue to look at that one component. We think about being safe in our schools, but also an area that has some concern, a study to start a pilot program that would help make sure that our, our students that are getting on our buses and making their way to school are also safe and I know that's an effort that will continue on behalf of this Chamber.

And then on the amendment, a few questions on the amendment, through you, Mr. Speaker, that will become the underlying bill.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you.

Just on line 8, to the good Chair, I do notice the date change from January 1, 2012. And I believe that was the original date that this School Climate Plan -- plans by each district were supposed to be submitted and now that's got moved out to September 1, 2014.

Could the good Chair let me know why that -- this Chamber know why that date was moved out?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

School Safe Climate Plans are traditionally finalized and ready for presentation to members of a district community at the beginning of the school year. So, this date seemed most appropriate given the fact that we are meeting now in May of 2014. This seemed both practicable and reasonable for districts.

Through you.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the good Chair for the answer.

Essentially, it wasn't -- so, in -- in the current legislation now, each district was supposed to submit that School Climate Plan for review and now -- to the understanding of the Chair, was that taking place? They were -- all of them were actually submitting those plans in or this kind of codifies, "Hey, listen, we really need to get these submitted for our review"?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my understanding that districts took their responsibility seriously and submitted plans for review. The problem arose there were some districts whose plans were found to be insufficient and the State Department of Education said, "This plan is not approved." But we lacked statutes to clarify what happened next, so, those districts simply had plans that were disapproved and nothing going forward. What this language here does is ensures that those

districts that did not get plan approval will now resubmit and seek approval pursuant to guidelines issued by the State Department of Education.

Through you.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the good Chair's answers.

And then as we move forward, looking at some language, right now currently or would this amendment -- I think currently now, the State Department of Education will have on their website -- and I'm looking at 45, line 45, and I'll get back to Section 4 earlier. But line 45, right now the school safety plans, school climate plans, are going to be on the SDE website for review as to who has completed them and who has not.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, are all of those plans available for anybody to view or is it primarily a school district will see how they're doing or is it for, you know, a parent moving into a district saying, "Hey, did they actually have a School Climate Plan and is it ready for review?"

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Through the magic of the Internet, I believe that all parties who are interested in seeing what the plan is for their school district or what the plan might be for a school district they're considering moving into will look like. And I would observe, this is a School Climate Plan. So, it really relates primarily to measures that a district has in place to protect children from bullying and to ensure that every child feels that they have a safe, secure learning environment.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

And a key component to this, I think that, you know, when a Board of Ed. or administration puts that, puts that School Climate Plan together that have that administrator's teacher, somebody involved with the school district be able to review those plans and make

sure that they're -- that their plan is accepted, that it's codified by the State Department of Education. And, through you, Mr. Speaker, also that the local school district also has that information on their Internet.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, look at line 18, also states that -- it's also on the Internet for -- your local school district must have it on their website also. Is that correct?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Yes, Mr. Speaker.

As I read it, "The local board shall make such plan available on the board's each -- and each individual school and its school district's Internet website and ensure that the plans included in the district's publication of the rules, procedure and standard of conduct for the schools in all student handbooks."

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And one of the lines that I was interested in, actually, is -- not that I've been in school for such a long time -- it has been a long time, to be honest -- on line 21 it says, "in all student handbooks." So, that information, rules, procedures and standards for conduct, schools -- is it the good Chair's understanding -- do we still hand out -- do schools still hand out school student handbooks or is that an Internet -- is that -- are school handbooks actually handed out to students anymore or are they available?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

To my knowledge, it depends on the school. Most schools I know of are still giving out hard copies, but I believe that it may be that there are schools that are converting to electronic copies.

Through you.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the good Chair.

I'm going to ask a couple of questions dealing with Section 4 because this is really in this section on 4 -- starting with lines 22 -- was really what was a concern when brought to this Committee regarding what was taking place when a school district was submitting their School Climate Plan, submitting it to SDE, State Department of Education was accepting them, reviewing them, and then submitting them back to the districts and said if it was disapproved, that they would have to then redo it and then they would send it back in, and that was it. So, it was --

So, this section really codifies, I think, the goal that we were trying to accomplish. So, through you, Mr. Speaker, now if the good Chair would like to just briefly touch on it or I could just kind of -- he could agree.

Now they submit that plan. SDE has to respond within 30 days as to what they need to do if it's so not approved. And then they return that back to the

school district, the school district must then again resubmit. Is that true?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

And now from the readings that I have, they can do that actually up to two more times. Essentially, they can resubmit from the corrections that SDE has provided them and then that can actually get rejected again. And then that can actually be rejected again. And then SDE will give them information on what they need to do. And then that process could actually be done for a third time.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, is that how the good Chair reads that?

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that is a correct reading of this section.

Through you.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

And then as I read it, if that school district has not complied or not met, I should state, SDE standards then the school -- State Department of Education will say, here is your, essentially -- you haven't -- you kind of struck out on this. Now here is your plan. Is that through -- is that the way the good Chair reads it?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

I would ask my good colleague to, to point out the line number that he's referring to. That's my recollection of the amendment, but I'm having difficulty finding the specific reference.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

And I apologize. I normally do give the line numbers. I'm looking at 43 and 44. So, they've, they've -- Section 1, they have to submit it and the substitute, and then at the very bottom it says for a -- so, developer recommended by the Department pursuant to Section 3 of the subsection 10 of the General Statute and amended. So, I think that -- if I'm not -- maybe I'm reading it wrong, but I believe they then say, here's a plan. The State Department of Education said, "Here's your plan." Is that true?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes. I appreciate my good colleague's pointing to the specific lines. And if a district has failed on multiple occasions to put together a plan that is acceptable and comports with the guidelines of the State Department of Education then and only then they're required to conform to the model plan that the

State Department has published because they have failed to develop their local plan.

Through you.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I would hope that that doesn't have to come -- I hope three shots at it, you should get it right and meet the SDE's approval. So, I thank the good Chair for, for his, for his answers on that.

And then on Section 69 through 70 -- lines 69 through 74, the student survey, I think one of the things that we were trying to drive at is some commonality between district and district and school age and so forth, so that if there's a bunch of school surveys coming in, you know, from 160 plus districts to the SDE, State Department of Education, that there should be some commonality for them to work on and address. So, through you, Mr. Speaker, is that what the goal is of that section that we're reading on that school assessment instrument, essentially saying, "Hey, if there's 20 areas that have common, let's answer those 20. If you want to adapt them, you know,

a little differently for your district, you can a little bit, but we need to have these basic -- basics answers question." Is that how I would interpret that or the good Chair would interpret that?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, for purposes of legislative intent, the goal here is to ensure that there are certain questions that every district asks in its student surveys so that we can compare across schools, which we cannot do today. When we received a report from the State Department of Education at the beginning of this year, we were not able to get any comparables among schools due to the lack of uniformity. So, this simply says that a certain batch of questions must be asked uniformly. The other questions past those could, of course, be up to the, the choice of the given district.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you -- thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the good Chair for his answers.

I have no more regarding the underlying amendment that we're about ready to vote on here. I do urge my colleagues to -- for support. You know, one of the things that we did last year led by Representative Fleischmann in the school safety area is started to really look at that, what we're doing with school safety and how we can change the climate a little bit more so that we feel comfortable with our kids in our schools.

And through that bipartisan effort regarding that school safety and the School Climate Plan, we found some problems with what we were doing with this, you know, the School Climate Plan and how it was handled at SDE and what our districts were supposed to do and we found some areas that we could tighten up. This legislation does that.

And on the school survey, I think one of the things we're going to do, if we're going to have a survey, at least have it be adaptive so we can get the information that we want out to see where that we may be failing in areas that we can -- and help SDE work

through the information provided. So, I urge my colleagues' support on this and we'll have remaining questions on the underlying bill when it comes out -- when it's amended.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Thank you, Representative Ackert.

Representative LeGeyt of the 17th, you have the floor, sir.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon to you.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Good afternoon, sir.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

I rise in support of this amendment, but I have a few questions to the proponent that I hope will clarify some of the things that I'm not sure about.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Please proceed, sir.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

Thank you very much.

I'm looking at line 9 which is the first reference to the Safe School Climate Plan and I'm wondering, understanding that there are Safe School

Climate Plans that are already in existence, but that this kind of cleans up those districts that don't have one or they have one that hasn't been approved yet. But in all, can we assume and would it be -- would I be correct that the Safe School Climate Plan is, in effect, a form of a mandate?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Thank you. Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I would say yes, but it's a requirement that this General Assembly imposed last year in April, concluding that this was an appropriate response to tragic incidents that this state had witnessed, including Sandy Hook and what we are doing here is simply making it more workable.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative LeGeyt.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I completely concur with what the good Chairman of the Education Committee has said regarding'

that. And with the characterization of it as a mandate, then, there's always the question of whether or not school districts are left to their own initiative for any resources or expenses that they have to provide to make that happen.

So, my question, then, is is the SDE providing any resources for those districts that need to still comply with the mandate for School Safe Climate Plan?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe the answer is yes. The State Department of Education is -- has seen a number of plans and has basically put together or is in the process of putting together a model plan that will be available on its website so that if you're operating a small school district and trying to figure out how to do this, you could consult the model plan. You could build your plan off of the model plan and, in my experience, that represents a great deal of assistance, a great reduction of the work required locally.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative LeGeyt.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And I anticipated that answer and asked the question just for purposes of legislative intent.

On line 12 or line 9, it refers to a Safe School Climate Plan, and my question is are we talking about a plan that is exclusively focused on bullying or are there other parameters that should be included in this Safe School Climate Plan?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I don't have my statute book open to that section of statute right now. My recollection is that the primary focus is bullying, but there are other aspects of school climate that are addressed so as to make sure that every child feels safe and secure while they are attending school.

Through you.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative LeGeyt.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

Thank you very much. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

For those sections of the plan that do focus on bullying, does the good Chair happen to know if there are any sanctions or punishment that are part of the plan with regard to bullying that occurs and complaints that are made and evaluations that occur as to whether or not the complaint is valid? Are there sanctions and punishment set out in the plan?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

So, a district with a proper plan has in place a set of policies and procedures for a complaint so that there is immediate follow-up and investigation. And if the investigation finds that indeed there have been repeated acts that constitute bullying by a bully against a victim, that action is taken by the district; that the parents and/or guardians of the, of the perpetrator are contacted as well as that child

who, who took those actions; that the victim and his or her parents and/or guardians are contacted and get to meet with the school, and that the school district takes the actions it deems appropriate pursuant to the policies and procedures it sets up in its School Climate Plan.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative LeGeyt.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate that answer. With regard to bullying, it has been my experience in my teaching career that examples and episodes of bullying have two facets to them. One is the aggressive nature of the person who is doing the bullying and the other is the regressive or inferior position of the person being bullied. And I have always thought and it has been shown to me and to the district that I taught in that sometimes it's just as effective to train the students that have the potential to be bullied to resist the bullying and that, that solves many of the problems rather than trying to train the students not to bully.

So, my question is does the good Chair happen to know if in the School Climate Plan there are requirements or are there already aspects of training for students to resist the bullying that might occur to them?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my understanding that a model plan includes measures that train all children because the fact is that, given the complexity of a school environment, virtually every child may be in a situation where they are victimized and a target, where they may somehow act as a bully, or where they're a bystander. So, every child is affected and every child needs training.

So, there's not only training for children who are potential perpetrators and potential victims, but also potential bystanders so that they understand that, in fact, standing by is not okay, that it's important to speak up and become an ally of the child who is a target, and for the child who is a target to

understand that it's okay to simply walk away from a bully and/or seek support from an adult or authority figure. So, all those are aspects of a model School Climate Plan.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative LeGeyt.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I anticipated that response, but just asked the question for purposes of legislative intent.

With regard to any potential sanctions and punishment that might be in the School Climate Plan relative to bullying, does the good Chair of the Education Committee happen to know if there are any options for removing the bully? Would the punishment and sanctions include suspension or in-school isolation, dependent on the degrees of bullying that might occur?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my understanding that a proper plan has proportionate and appropriate levels of response so that if there is a mild incident, there may be a reprimand or a small in-school suspension. And if there were a very serious incident, it could be an out-of-school suspension or if it involved weaponry, there could even be an expulsion, but there is a, essentially a -- an escalating series of responses that are proportionate to the type of incident that has occurred -- or incidents that have occurred.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative LeGeyt.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

Thank you very much. And thank you for those answers.

Moving on to Section 4, I'm looking at line 28 of the amendment. And it says that, "After receiving the plan, the Department shall approve or reject the plan." I'm wondering if the regulations which we are not privy to here have some criteria whereby that plan might be approved or rejected, or what is the process of the Department in, in approving or rejecting a given plan that's submitted to them?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

The State Department of Education will be not only publishing online a model plan, but it will be distributing to all school districts in the state guidelines so that they will have an understanding of the key components of a plan before submission.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative LeGeyt.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And the process whereby those guidelines are promulgated would be subject to some kind of hearing or information from game players, teachers, administrators, school board members, and so forth, rather than simply promulgated in -- through the Department itself?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my understanding there has been a lot of two-way communication about Safe School Climate Plans over the last year so that at this point there have been dozens and dozens of plans submitted to the State Department and a lot of dialogue between folks at the State Department and those who submitted. So, it's my expectation that both the model plan and guidelines that are to be issued will reflect the fruit of those many dialogues.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative LeGeyt.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Moving down to line 41, talking about if, "If the process goes through two revisions and rejections then the board, the local regional Board of Education shall adopt an appropriate model Safe School Climate Plan." I'm wondering about the word "appropriate." When I hear the word "appropriate" I think that it is a measure of one of something as against something that's not appropriate.

So, is the use of the word "appropriate" there mean that there are other model plans that aren't appropriate? Or are there other model plans that apply to different school environments and it would be up to the regional board to pick the appropriate one for their environment? What's the reference and use of the word "appropriate" there for legislative history?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

While it's not 100 percent clear, it's my sense that there may be more than one model plan made available and that one model may work best for a large district with, say, a very large high school and very large middle school, and that another model plan may work better for a smaller District with smaller schools so that districts are encouraged to adopt the model that works best for them.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative LeGeyt.

REP. LeGEYT (17th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the indulgence of the Chair of the Education Committee in answering my questions. And I appreciate the courtesy this evening, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Thank you, Representative LeGeyt.

From the 143rd District, Representative Lavielle.  
You have the floor, Madam.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon to you.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Good afternoon.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Good to see you today.

I rise in strong support of this amendment, and we had some good discussions about it on the Education Committee. I thank the good Chair of the Committee for his good work on the bill which I was very pleased to support. And I do, however, have some questions for clarification and legislative intent, if I may.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Please proceed, Madam.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that in, in Representative LeGeyt's questioning just now, the Chair of Education did clarify that the focus of this bill is on bullying. There are, there are those -- and that had been my impression. But there are, there are some thing in the bill -- in the amendment that suggest that there may be some spillover into other areas. And I know that in our discussions on mandates on school districts and some of the testimony during the year on a task force that we had from a number of school districts, there is a feeling that there may be some crossover or overlap between the duties of the Safe School Climate Committees who come up with the plans and other school safety committees.

And, so, I wanted to ask whether the, whether the work that is done by each district to develop the plans that are described in the amendment are done by a Committee that focuses only on bullying and perceived threats or whether there are also some threats of physical concern that are involved in that Committee's work.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, as I said, I don't have that section of statute in front of me. But if memory serves, both types of threat to student safety would be covered through a School Climate Plan.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And if we could -- let's see. I believe since Section 2 is not cut out of the bill, it's not, it's not covered in the amendment. So, I'll go straight to what's covered by the amendment, which would begin with Section 3 and this would be the lines 17 through 21 which refer to websites and the availability of each district's Safe School Climate Plan on the State Board of Education's website as well as the local district's website.

Do we know if every school district in the state actually has a website?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure whether every district does. I believe they do. But in the event that there were a district that did not have a website then the publication -- the promotion, the awareness of the plan would be promulgated through the student handbook.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's good to know. And as we move into Section 4 where we're talking about the actual mechanics of how the plan gets approved and put together, there was some discussion of model plans a little while ago, the idea being that if a school district has two chances to submit a Safe School Climate Plan and if both times the plan is rejected by the State Board of Ed then the -- there would be a requirement to adopt a model plan.

For what reasons might these plans be rejected?  
Or let me phrase that another way. Are there specific requirements that the plans must meet so that if they don't meet them they're rejected?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes. And while I don't believe that the State Department of Education has yet issued its formal guidelines to all districts because it's awaiting our action on this legislation, even today what one could do is turn to the relevant section of our statutes and see all of the processes that are supposed to happen to ensure Safe School Climate. And if the Safe School Climate Plan failed to account for each of those steps that we have sketched out in our statutory framework then clearly such a plan would be deemed insufficient.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you.

So, in other words, if -- if -- and the date here is September 14th -- September 1st, 2014. So, if a school district respects to the letter what is in statute already in term of requirements for the plan then that would fulfill the requirements, there would be no anticipation of rejection, or would there -- could there be other reasons?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my best guess that if a district were to go ahead and put together a plan today that fully matched up with all the statutory steps that we have in place, that such a plan would probably be deemed appropriate and approved.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And further to that there was some discussion a few minutes ago about the possibility of more than one

model plan, more than one type of model plan that might be suggested as appropriate by the State Board of Ed. Is there a model plan that is currently available for school districts that might choose to look at it?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Since the measure before us has not yet been enacted, I don't believe that there is a model plan or a set of model plans that are on the State Department's website. However, I think that the State Department does have some excellent plans that were submitted by districts that were out front on this issue and has been able to use those sort of top-flight plans from other districts to offer guidance to date.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you.

And just more in that paragraph describes the, the 30 days that the State Board of Ed. has to accept or reject a plan. How long does the Department of Ed., then, have to actually inform the school districts of its evaluation?

Through you.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

The language reads, "Not later than 30 Calendar days after receiving such plan the Department shall approve or reject such plan." So, it's my reading that by the 30th day the Department shall be notifying a district of its approval or its rejection.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I thank the Chair for his indulgence. I just have a few more questions.

In, in Section 5 which talks more about data collection from the various school districts so that

the Department of Education can observe trends and issues, and so on, we -- in the Education Committee, I believe last year, there was some good work done on a bill that included cyberbullying in the definition of bullying and included it in the various things that were being done to treat bullying in schools. And this section refers -- it's from 55 to 74, those lines. It refers to surveys that will be done of students to see how they feel about the safety climate in their schools. And I wondered if these surveys -- are there any that are available at the moment? And do they include questions on cyberbullying?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes. I have seen model surveys available through national nonprofits focused on these issues that have a series of questions pertaining to student safety and that include questions regarding students' use of social media.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you.

And will the analysis that is referred to in line -- well, actually in subsection B of that section. Will the, will the State Department of Education make its analysis available not only to our Education Committee but also to school districts throughout the state so that they can observe the trends as well?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

If I heard the question correctly, I believe the answer is yes.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you.

And in lines 90 to 91 of the amendment -- and I'll just read it. It says, "The Department makes up

private donations for the purposes of this section."  
There -- I don't -- and I'm not sure, actually.  
Perhaps I can ask the good Chairman of the Committee  
whether there is a fiscal note attached to that  
section. I, I neglected to look. I can do that,  
but -- let's see. It says, "The fiscal impact of the  
bill is eliminated through the amendment."

So, would there -- my question is what would the  
expenses be in Section 5 that private donations would  
be used for?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

With or without that language, I believe that  
there would be no cost. But I believe that what this  
allows, for example, is for various organizations that  
have knowledge about school safety and school climate  
to donate materials, such as the types of surveys I  
described earlier, to the Department for its usage.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you.

And would the Department of -- the State Department of Education actually conduct active solicitation of private donors for this purpose? And if so, how?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

The State Department of Education has a grants administrator and grants department. And, so, if they deemed it appropriate, they could apply for grants and/or in-kind donations to support their efforts in this area and that would be an administrative decision by the Department.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you.

And I have one final question and then I'll, I'll relieve the good Chair.

There are, there are a number of actions here that the State Department of Education will be required to be involved in and I just want to make sure, having heard much of the, the testimony and other, other conversations that we've had throughout the year with the State Department of Education, does the Chair feel confident that they have the necessary resources and time -- I'm not asking about money because we know the fiscal note has been eliminated. But are they equipped in terms of staff and expertise and time to execute what is required in this amendment effectively?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

In my estimation, yes.

SPEAKER SHARKEY:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And, again, I thank the good Chair of the Education Committee for his answers. This is a

subject that we've all been very concerned about in recent years for any number of reasons, both in terms of students' and teachers' physical safety, but also in terms of the increase in what we term bullying and threatening behavior, both within the physical school and also online.

This is a subject of great concern, I know, to my constituents and also to our educators and people who -- other people who work in our school systems. And this is true whether we're talking about one of our top districts or perhaps a district that has quite some way to go that may be in an inner city or another difficult environment. So, to see attention paid to this is a very encouraging development.

I'm also pleased to see the section that is concerned with surveying students because you can work along as you want in a school. You can have the most important position or the position that's closest possible to the students, but only a student knows how a student feels. And sometimes having perceived that you are in a situation that is either terribly uncomfortable or threatening or, or makes you even frightened to go to school is something only a student

can answer for and perhaps is something that a student does not want to speak about while being identified.

And one of the good things that happened in the Education Committee was that we amended the language concerning the surveys in a way that specifies that any submissions by students in those surveys may be done at the student's choice totally anonymously. And that's extremely important because otherwise a student might be afraid of repercussions or afraid that a complaint or an expression of fear might be communicated to the person who he or she thinks is bullying. And that could be a very difficult situation.

So, there are, there are some very good things in here. I, as always, hope that these exercises don't become overly administrative. But as I understand it, this amendment simply fixes and clears up the mechanics of a regulation or a set of, set of statutes that we already have in place. The Safe School Climate assessments and plans are currently underway. This just adds some additional precisions and some additional ways to monitor situations at school districts as they develop. So, I do believe that this

is a good amendment. I do support it and I urge adoption.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Thank you, Ma'am.

Representative Molgano of the 144th, sir, you have the floor. Please proceed.

REP. MOLGANO (144th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, sir.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Good afternoon.

REP. MOLGANO (144th):

I want to begin with the omission of the Safe School Travel that's no longer in the amendment. I want to build on what the good Ranking Member of Education brought up and he mentioned about Safe School Travel on buses. I want to make sure that when this does come back to us, which I hope it will, that we will be able to address not just the school buses but that we'll be able to address other concerns with school safety concerning lighting, sidewalks --

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Sir, would you excuse me for a second, please?

Could I ask the members of the Chamber to please take their conversations outside? We have a member who is trying to express his views on this bill and it's a little difficult to hear him. So, if you could take your conversations outside, we'd certainly appreciate it.

Maybe you'll hear me this time. If you could take your conversations outside, we have a member who is trying to express his views on this bill.

Thank you.

Please proceed, sir.

REP. MOLGANO (144th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was just saying that I was building on the good Ranking Member of Education's comments about the Safe School Travel that is omitted in the amendment, that hopefully when we do see this in the next session that we will remember the importance of not just the school buses but also about the students who are walking to school. And I know in my own district there are many areas where there are not safe sidewalks and many of the students walk in the streets. So, I want to make sure that that is something that my colleagues

consider when we come back for the repropsoed bill on this for the Safe School Travel.

Regarding the amendment before us, I have a couple questions of good Chairman of Education, if I may, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Please proceed, sir.

REP. MOLGANO (144th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

In the amendment before us, when there is a Safe School Climate Plan as submitted by a district, once that plan is submitted and approved, does the school district have to submit this annually or is this a one-time occurrence?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

As I read the bill, the district has to submit a plan, but I don't see the word "annually" included, so, I believe it needs to submit a plan, if it hasn't already, by September of this year. And if such plan is approved, it is in place. And a district that's

paying attention will update it on a somewhat regular basis, but there is no mandate that it be done annually.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Molgano.

REP. MOLGANO (144th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the good Chairman for his answer.

If the district, then -- and I think the Chairman may have made a statement and I don't know if I heard it correctly. If the district does have an approved plan and then wishes to make an amendment to it in the future, does it need to go through the same process as a new plan would?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I think what it says, my good colleague has foreseen a circumstance that's not spelled out explicitly in this amendment. But based on my reading, any new plan would have to go through the

same submittal and approval or rejection as the original plan since we've made it clear that the State Department of Education is arbiter of whether a plan is acceptable or not.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Molgano.

REP. MOLGANO (144th):

I thank the good gentleman from Education for that answer. And I just want to urge my colleagues that the importance of these plans cannot be stressed enough. And I would hope that everyone here will adopt this amendment and, therefore, the bill once it's amended.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Thank you, sir.

Representative Sawyer, the retiring Representative from the 55th. You have the floor next, Ma'am.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Did you just call me old?

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Well, it's all how you determine "retiring,"  
Ma'am.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

It's been a pleasure serving with you, too, sir.

A question through you to the good Chairman of  
the Education Committee.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Thank God. Representative Fleischmann, please --

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman -- Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chairman, specifically, I would like to  
address Section 5. And when you look at the new  
language that talks about the uniform grade level with  
appropriate questions that collect information about  
students' perspectives and opinions, the survey, who  
is expected to be writing this particular survey  
that's age appropriate? Will they be hiring a  
consultant or will they be using models from other  
states? Is there -- do they have an expert on staff?

I know that we have in the last few years cutback  
so much on their money that they do not have  
necessarily the same level expertise that they've had  
in the past.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to my youthful colleague from the 55th District.

I would say that the State Department of Education has on its staff consultants who have expertise in this area and has access to resources that would support the construction of these type of survey questions because there are national organizations that have taken an interest. So, between the folks who are already on staff at the State Department of Education and the resources available, I don't expect it will be difficult for the Department to put together this set of questions.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you.

Who will evaluate the quality of these particular surveys once they are developed? Will this be considered a pilot for the first year? As they use them, will they do an evaluation at the end of the

first year to see if this is -- I know the question of age appropriate is certainly in there. The word "uniform" is in there, but is that something that will be done on the Department level?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I do believe that the experts at the State Department of Education will follow an iterative process. They will do the best job they can in the first year. And if they find that certain questions aren't as effective as they would like, they may update the uniform questions -- the uniform age appropriate questions in the subsequent years.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When I looked at this and I looked back at the other section, it said that the -- I apologize. I was looking for the date. I saw February 1st -- I'm

sorry, where it says B on line 75, "February 1, 2014 and thereafter, the Department shall." Is it expected that they will have the surveys back by February 1, 2015 so that would be something that not only has to be developed but would be, then, presented to the -- back to the Department, the Department has to analyze it, and then it would come back to this body by just this next February, which is seven months away?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you.

Yes, I believe that's a fair expectation.

February of this year we were presented with a, sort of a summation of the State Department's findings from the surveys that were presented to it and it's one of the things that led to this language. It was a summation that was very broad and vague because there was a lack of uniformity in the questions that were asked of students in different schools and different districts. So, by adopting this language here, we will enable the Department not only to get us results

next February, but to give us some comparisons among schools in districts.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you.

Would there be an expectation that all schools would be doing this survey through all the grades and to include, say, special ed?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I would say no. We're talking about things that are grade level appropriate. So, I don't expect that it would be doable for kindergarteners to respond to a written survey. And my guess is that the State Department will develop, you know, questions that are age appropriate and that, you know, kindergarteners probably won't be covered.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

I would like to thank the gentleman for that answer, because when I had looked up above in lines 61 and 62, it did talk about the plans and the plans were for grades kindergarten through 12. So, I had made the assumption that these surveys were -- the expectation is these surveys would be done from kindergarten through 12 and that there would be a, perhaps a very simplified question and answer done maybe on a personal level versus a written level.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

That is a possibility for a district that were prepared to undertake oral surveys for young children.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, that's a -- was certainly a thought I had. But then I saw that these surveys are supposed to be anonymous. So, if they're going to take it, an oral survey, there is -- I think that's something we need to look at in the future for this particular language if we are going to ask for oral answers. Obviously that's not going to be anonymous. The teacher is going to know who said what to whom and the anonymity goes away.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, if I might, a question on the back page of this amendment.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Please proceed, Ma'am.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you.

These surveys, now that they're going to be uniform, do you have an expectation, Mr. Chairman, as to how long it will take for these surveys to be filled out? And who will be paying to have them printed?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Survey.

In this day and age, it's my understanding that most surveys of this type are done electronically. There are a wide array of survey instruments that are offered for free to any user. So, I would expect most districts to avail themselves of that type of software. For those that don't they could do printed surveys. The surveys I've seen fit on one side of one piece of paper. So, the expense, we would expect, would be quite low.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you.

Is it expected that the school districts will then create instruction once they have seen what their surveys have told them, that they will upgrade or improve their instruction or assemblies or other types of involvement with the children if they feel there is a much -- a higher than normal level of concern over the student responses?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Each school is supposed to have a Safe School Climate Plan, and a properly developed Safe School Climate Plan does include responses to a survey that would indicate children have a sense of lack of safety within a school. So, for instance, a school where a high percentage of children indicated that they felt physical fear or intimidation in their classrooms or hallways, one would expect a full school assembly followed by workshops.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And if I might, a question through you.

In the discussion that it was expected to be done anonymously, does that just mean the child's name is removed from it and the grade level still exists for -- is the child marked in some way so that it could be -- when we know they're age appropriate, but will they all be lumped together as a report? Or is

it going to be done by grade level or even per class so that the administration will be able to target specifically what group is feeling particularly threatened? Or is a particular area of concern for a specific grade, say, 7 or 8 or 11, that there is a particular problem? How does the word "anonymously" -- do you expect the word "anonymously" on line 74 to be applied?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

As I understand it, anonymity involves protecting the individual identity of the student. It does not require in a school, say, that has a hundred 10th graders that the grade level of the student be removed. Nor does it necessarily require that, say, the gender of the student be removed, but it does require that the name not be there so that -- and the birth date not be there, anything that would allow someone to personally identify the respondent would not be permissible on the survey.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

I thank the gentleman for that answer because I think that is clarifying in the expectations for what the schools are supposed to be doing.

If I might, through you, Mr. Speaker, just two last questions.

In the past in the report -- I did not see the report that came in in February. How many school districts participated in the report that or the first report that came in February 1st?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

To my knowledge, all districts participated.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you.

So, there is an understanding that this is already to be done. And the very last question is, it

says in line 90 that "The Department may accept private donations for the purpose of this section." If the good gentleman would describe, he just said that the expectation is no cost, pretty much, or almost no cost to the districts, that there will be very little instructional time taken away from the students. You know, we had S back already and we have the computers going into almost all the schools now so that it could be done, but through the computer, through the different grade levels. What would the private donations be used for, then?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

While I'm not sure, I would guess that some private donations that might be pertinent here would be an organization that wanted to donate survey questions that it had already developed for other states or other entities. There are organizations that may have developed training videos that they could donate. So, there are organizations that have developed booklets and materials. So, thanks to lines

90 and 91, all such materials could be donated to the State Department of Education.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Sawyer.

REP. SAWYER (55th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the gentleman for his answers.

You know, as we look forward in the future to our children's safety but also to their instruction, I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, and to the members of this Chamber, that we be keenly aware of making sure that each and every thing that we require of our students has a connectivity to their instruction that's going on, that we are very specific and careful that we look at now, just about every 10-minute block on a student's day.

We now have put in so many testing requirements and we have so many other requirements that have been laid into the laps of the Boards of Education, to the Superintendent's level, and down to the -- each teacher's level as well the aides that work with them that it's become very difficult, Mr. Speaker, for some

of the other things to be brought into the classroom, the creativity and so on, so forth.

So, at this time, because this is sort of the second part of an outreach in this particular project and because the State Department has moved forward and believes that it can do something with some immediacy, that we will be having some review on it, that it will not be costing the districts more money, which I think is a very good thing to hear, and that there will be an evaluation of it when it's all done, that they will be able to look at the amount of time that it takes the students as well as how it will relate to the other instruction for a particular grade level, a particular class or even a whole school.

So, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for your time on this particular amendment.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Thank you, Ma'am.

Representative Srinivasan of the 31st District, sir, you have the floor.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Good afternoon, sir.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

I, too, rise to join my colleagues in being very disappointed that an important section, the first section has been deleted in the amendment. And I hope that for those of us who are fortunate to come back in 2015, that new class of Legislators will revisit this important section that has been deleted today so that the entire school climate, including the travels, are also safe for our children.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, just a few questions to the good Chair of the Education Committee.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Please proceed, sir.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Are we aware of how many other states in the nation have such a similar program?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

'I am not aware of how many other states have a similar system in place.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Is it probable or likely that we would be trendsetters and will be the first State in the nation to have such a program?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I would ask for a clarification when my good colleague refers to such a program, which program he's referring to.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan, could you clarify, please?

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

I definitely will do that, Mr. Speaker.

I'm talking about the subject matter that we are discussing today on the amendment with regards to the school safety.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure. My sense is that there are not many states that have put as much thought into this area as Connecticut because few states other than Colorado have, have sort of undergone that kind of trauma that, that we have in the past year and a half.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Mr. Speaker, disappointed as I am that Section 1 has been deleted, it is reassuring to know that as far as school climate safety is concerned, we are among the first one, if not the first, to look at this problem as far as our state and our nation is concerned.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the good Chairperson of the Education Committee.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, am I to understand that if there are two rejections for a plan that has been submitted then that school will have to automatically take into consideration and follow the model program?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that's correct. If a district cannot manage to follow the State guidelines in a couple of attempts to submit a plan then it needs to adopt a model plan. And this amendment make it clear there isn't just going to be one model. There will be model plans offered, and the notion being that we don't have a one-size-fits-all kind of state. So, I would expect there should be a number of plans and a district would be able to adopt the one that best fit its needs.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Does the good Chairperson know as to how many such model programs the State will be coming up with?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

The amendment is not specific about the number of plans that shall be offered, just that it shall be more than one. I would guess that, that three would probably be a logical number for a state that has some large cities, some medium-size towns and some smaller rural communities.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

When will this model program or programs be available so that schools can then start working on getting their program that suits their specific needs?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Given that if this measure passes, districts will be expected to submit their plans that may have been rejected previously by September. I would expect the State Department of Education to start posting model plans very quickly upon passage of this measure.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

This plan that a school has to submit, either their own or a model program, is it mandatory to every district or can a district choose to opt out?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Pursuant to a statute that this General Assembly passed and the Governor signed on April 5th of last

year, all districts have been required to have school climate plans.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Listening to the debate earlier on, I got the impression that, that coming up with a plan will not be -- will not cost that particular district any financial burden. I just want to make sure I heard that correctly.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Once a program has been instated, who then makes sure that the plan is implemented?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that the State Department of Education monitors such things. So, for example, if a family were to call in to the State Department of Education and indicate that they hadn't received a proper response to an accusation of bullying, the State Department would investigate to ensure that the plan that had been submitted was indeed being followed.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the State Department respond and look at these implementations only when complaint or complaints have been levied against a particular school district, or do that as a routine matter of fact as well?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

The State Department of Education will certainly respond to any complaint that comes in. In addition, under its general authority, the State Department could conduct random audits of such plans if it so chose.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

The School Climate Plan, will it be based on the complaints that have come across? Will this plan have to be tweaked and revisited, and how often would that be necessary?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

No. If a plan has been approved, a plan has been approved. A complaint could lead to a district

hearing from the State Department of Education regarding its, its failure to properly implement a plan that has already been improved.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

When we talk about the surveys, the student surveys, I know it is (inaudible) to a program and in listening to the debate earlier on, I got the impression that the -- that the -- that these surveys, kindergarten, maybe the first grade and the second grade may be oral.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, will the survey still be anonymous, and how could that be done when it is done orally?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the good colleague for his question. You know, the fact is that a survey is generally written

and my initial response to my good youthful colleague from the 55th District was that I expected that there would be no written survey at all for kindergarteners. She then pursued the question as to whether there might be an oral survey and I said I suppose it was possible.

Given the discussion that's gone on in this Chamber, I actually think it would be pretty much impossible for there to be anonymity with an oral survey. So, my expectation is that there will be written surveys of children old enough to respond to such surveys.

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, listening to the debate earlier on, it was my impression that these surveys, age-appropriate surveys, will be written by the consultants or the experts we have in the Department of Education.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, since we have deleted Section 1, would some of the travel component be also included in these questionnaire or will it not be a

part of what the questions will be pertaining to?

Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed. Safe school climate involves not only what happens within the school walls, but also travel to and from school. So a question about how children feel on their school buses would be appropriate, in my view. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Srinivasan.

REP. SRINIVASAN (31st):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the good Chairman for his answers. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Thank you, Representative. Representative Buck-Taylor of the 67th District. Ma'am, you have the floor.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise in support of this amendment and I hope that we will be able to move forward with this.

I do have a couple of questions to the Chair of the Committee, through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Please proceed, ma'am.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

Is it the intent of this bill that all of the schools, local and regional boards of educations, will have a safe school climate plan in place by February 1, 2014? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I guess the answer is no. It was the intention of this General Assembly that all districts have a plan in place for the start of the current school year. Some districts had their plans rejected and so it would be our intention that by September 1 of this year, those districts whose plans had been rejected would now resubmit and get plans that were more appropriate and would be approved. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Buck-Taylor.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

To make sure that I'm not reading this incorrectly, Mr. Speaker, through you to Representative Fleischmann. It says not later than September 1, 2014, each local and regional board of education shall submit a safe school climate plan. It then goes on to give them 30 days to submit it, which I would put to October.

Thirty days for the Department of Education to decide whether or not it was appropriate and if it wasn't, then the school would have till December to resubmit.

And then, the Department of Education would then have till January to decide whether or not the second submission was okay. And if it wasn't, then the school has 30 days to adopt an appropriate model safe school plan.

So through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Chairman, am I reading this incorrectly?

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, no. I would say my good colleague is reading that section entirely

correctly. And I -- I think we simply had a miscommunication.

The -- the -- what my good colleague has described is a worst-case scenario, where a district submits a plan that is deemed insufficient and is rejected. It submits a second plan that's rejected, and then finally has to adopt a model plan.

It's our hope that that will be a rare -- a rare thing and that, in fact, most districts will submit plans by September 1 of this year that will be accepted because there will be guidelines and model plans available. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Buck-Taylor.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

I thank to Chair of the Education Committee for his clarification of the hope that everyone is going to have this done by September 1. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I have a second question to the Chair.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Please proceed.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

The bill says that the board of education shall adopt an appropriate model safe school climate plan.

It then says further on that the Department of Education will develop or recommend model safe school climate plans.

But the current law only requires a model safe school climate plan. Through you to the Chair, may I inquire as to whether or not the Department of Education already has additional model school climate plans or is that something that they will need compile? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I believe there may be some small incremental additional work required by the Department, but I've been told that since they are in possession of a -- a wide array of excellent plans, they do not foresee difficulty in making sure that more than one is made available to districts. Through you, Mr. Speaker

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Buck-Taylor.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Chair of the Board of Education -- the Committee on Education, is

it therefore our understanding that no school will be prevented from adopting a model safe school climate plan by virtue of there not being more than one available at this time? Through you, Mr. Speaker

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, if I -- if I understood the question correctly, I think the answer is yes.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Buck-Taylor.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, as far as the surveys are concerned, may I inquire of the Chair as to how often these surveys are expected to be given? Through you to the Chair.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that these assessment instruments are to be used annually. Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Buck-Taylor.

REP. BUCK-TAYLOR (67th):

I don't have any other questions at this time, Mr. Speaker. I hope everyone will support this amendment. I think we need to put it in effect as soon as possible. And I thank the Chair of the Education Committee for his work on this and for his answers today. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Thank you, ma'am. Representative Carter of the 2nd District. Sir, you have the floor.

REP. CARTER (2nd):

Thank you and good evening, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Good evening, I guess.

REP. CARTER (2nd):

Mr. Speaker, I only have a few brief comments about the amendment. You know, my colleagues have mentioned a few times that parts of this bill, specifically Section 1, has been removed when we pushed this amendment on.

And I do support the amendment. I do think it makes sense that we're doing a school climate plan, that we make sure that those schools are actually

getting it -- are getting some sort of approval or feedback from the state. That makes sense.

But I got to tell you. Looking at Section 1 of the underlying bill, I understand that there is a lot of cost involved with that. But I think we're really missing the mark by not really addressing that problem square on.

Because ladies and gentlemen, you know, what happened a few Decembers ago was -- was definitely a tragedy. And there's no question that we live in dangerous times. I almost don't want to say it, because, you know, I -- I think -- I -- I cringe at the thought of what could happen in my community or my kids with respect to their transportation to and from school.

You know, in -- in one of my towns where the school bus farm is located, that my kids go to school on, they don't even have a fence around the school bus farm. And I drove by there and I -- I never realized it until recently, and it -- it really kind of gave me that -- that upset feeling in my stomach that somebody didn't even think to put a fence around the school bus farm.

So I'll tell you what. I know -- I know that this bill started out in a -- in a great fashion and I -- I applaud from my heart the members of the Education Committee, our esteemed Chair, our esteemed ranking, and the (inaudible) and -- and effort that they put into these bills.

But I do -- I do feel very uneasy about the fact that we're not doing something to address travel to and from school head on.

Now, I do like -- I do like the part of the bill in section two where we're talking about the -- the 211 possibilities. I do think that the -- the Chairman was right on the money when he mentioned that the school climate plan needs to include how the kids felt about that transportation.

But ladies and gentlemen, I -- I know \$4 million is a lot and, by the way, I don't agree totally how we would have spent it in Section 1. You know, basically being able to do 10 grants for \$400,000 each, I -- I don't think that was what we should be looking at.

So the fact that this amendment takes out Section 1, it's uncomfortable, I really would like to see more done. I know it's been mentioned that in the future, we could look at that.

And I support the amendment as it goes, but I -- I got to say I'm -- I'm disappointed deep down that we did not address that more aggressively. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Thank you, sir. Representative Bolinsky of the 106th. Sir, you have the floor.

REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I -- I'll go back to good afternoon. I have a couple of comments, then I'm going to ask to address a couple of questions to the proponent of the amendment, please.

Comments. First of all, I -- I want to acknowledge Representative Molgano's concerns about the deletion of Section 1, because I think that the safe travel to school grant program had serious merit.

And then, I also want to acknowledge the comments of Representative Carter a moment ago, because as he was expressing concerns about the safe travel program being omitted for budget reasons and his disappointment, I can't help but echo those disappointments for many reasons.

But following on Representative Carter's comments about school buses, transportation not being fenced

assets and being, really, the last -- or the first line of defense for our children going to school, as a Representative of Newtown, I can tell you for a fact that our school buses are not in a fenced yard either.

So considering that -- that I represent the town that was ground zero to many of these efforts, I -- I have to echo Representative Molgano's plea that we revisit this next year because this is -- this is just not, in my opinion, an acceptable omission.

That said, the spirit of the amendment and the spirit of the original bill are both concepts that, you know, very strongly support and have risen to strongly support in the Education Committee and all of the work that's gone into getting us to this point is commendable.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I do have a question for the proponent.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Please proceed, sir, with your question.

REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

Sorry? May I ask -- may -- may I ask a question of Representative Fleischmann?

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Yes, sir.

REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

Yes, sir. Thank you very much. Representative Fleischmann, in the original bill, there was in Section 3a, in the school security infrastructure grant program, a clause that allowed participation in the grant program by non-public schools.

And that being a very sensitive subject, we held a public meeting and there was an incredible turnout by non-public entities, particularly the Catholic Schools of Connecticut, commending us on the fact that, and telling us that, it was absolutely necessary that they be included in that grant program.

Because every school student in the State of Connecticut deserves more than just a wonderful education, but also an environment that they feel safe and are safe in.

And I've supported the inclusion of non-publics in that program, yet, as I look at the amended bill, and perhaps you can help me with this, Representative Fleischmann, in the amended bill, I don't find that inclusion of non-publics.

Can you please help me and let me know that is to be addressed? Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In its wisdom, the Finance Committee removed the section of the bill that involved school infrastructure improvement grants, including grants for private schools, and put it into the bond package.

So we will be able to consider that later on in the next 48 hours or so. But it's no longer in this measure because it will be in that one. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Bolinsky.

REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

So, through you, Mr. Speaker, if the good Chairman of the Education Committee could just repeat where that is now so that I -- I did not -- did not hear the response. Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, the measure providing for school infrastructure improvement grants for the

fiscal year to come will be in our general obligation bond bill. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Bolinsky.

REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

Just one more little detail question, through you, Mr. Speaker. That includes the non-publics, Mr. Chair?

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, yes.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Bolinsky.

REP. BOLINSKY (106th):

I am satisfied. Thank you so much. Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Representative Fleischmann, I will be supporting this amendment and I compliment the good work. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

. Thank you, sir. Will you remark further? Remark further on the amendment before us? If not, I will try your minds. All those in favor, please signify by saying Aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

All those opposed, Nay.

The Ayes have it. The amendment is adopted.

Will you remark further on the bill as amended?

Will you remark further on the bill as amended?

Representative Lavielle of the 143rd District. Ma'am,  
you have the floor.

REP. LAVIELLE (143rd):

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I did just  
have a question on Section 2 of the bill, which  
remains in the bill in its amended form, although it  
was not part of the amendment.

And so, I -- this is the -- the section of the  
bill that deals with a student safety hotline. And it  
is -- it is a study, so there's no -- there's no  
introduction of the hotline per se here. This is a  
study, which is a good thing.

But I am curious about one thing. The study is  
being performed here by the Department of Emergency  
Services and Public Protection. The report of the  
study is being made to the General Assembly's  
Committee on Education. And I wondered whether there

might be some merit in also having a report to and the input from the Public Safety Committee? Through you, Mr. Speaker

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I certainly will be glad to share this report with my colleagues from the Public Safety Committee. The reason the report is to the Education Committee is because, in this matter, the focus is on this anonymous tip line that is really meant to school -- serve schools.

And so, it's directly parallel to the situation, where the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection currently oversees the competitive grant program for school infrastructure grants.

Those -- that grant program was something that was meant to serve our -- our public school districts and public schools initially and -- and it was administered by DESPP. And I believe that, you know, to the extent that there's reporting is coming back to the Education Committee.

So I -- I think this section is very much parallel to that statute that we put in place last year. Through you, Mr. Speaker

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143rd):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I -- and I thank the good Chair for his answer. The -- just -- just for clarification really here, so it is DESPP that would be studying the feasibility, but the report and the evaluation of what to do next is done by the Education Committee and the Department of Education.

So is there any input into the study also from the Department of Education? Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Fleischmann.

REP. FLEISCHMANN (18th):

Through you, Mr. Speaker, as I read the amendment before us, there's no such input required. However, I am hopeful that the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection may, indeed, do such consultation in order to make sure it has the best possible study. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143rd):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the -- the good Chair of the Education Committee for his answers.

I just would certainly concur with him in his hope that there would be that sort of collaboration and full consultation since this is of particular applicability to school contexts, which are certainly different from anywhere else where you might be operating an anonymous tip line.

Again, there are -- there are children of all ages who might be communicating. There -- there certainly needs to be attention to the sensitivity that's necessary when someone who is very young makes a call and what the response is.

And also, to interpreting those calls sometimes, since, again, one's perceptions of things when -- when one is very, very young and when one is a teenager might differ.

So I would hope that there would be not just a -- a look at this in the development stage by DESPP, but also by -- by educators and then that equally, at the -- at the end, that there be some -- some evaluation

by both folks with experience in education or cognizance of education and those who can understand some of the typical behaviors on tip lines and the other sorts of things that are related to public safety.

So with that, again, I -- I am supporting the bill, but just wanted to know that for clarification. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Thank you, Representative. Will you remark further on the bill as amended? Will you remark further on the bill as amended? If not, will staff and guests please come to the Well of the House. Will the members please take your seats. The machine will be opened.

THE CLERK:

The House of Representatives is voting by roll.

Members to the Chamber, please. The House of Representatives is voting by roll. Members to the Chamber, please.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

Have all members voted? Have all members voted? Would the members please check the board to determine if your vote is probably cast. If all members have

voted, the machine will be locked and the Clerk will take a tally.

The machine will be locked and the Clerk will take a tally.

The Clerk will please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

House Bill 5564 as amended by House "A".

Total number voting	147
Necessary for passage	74
Those voting Yea	147
Those voting Nay	0
Absent and not voting	4

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

The bill as amended is passed.

Are there any announcements? Are there any announcements or introductions? If not, will the Clerk please call Calendar Number 341.

THE CLERK:

On page 39, Calendar Number 341, Favorable Report of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations, substitute House Bill Number 5542, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONNECTICUT EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES PRIMARY SERVICE AREA TASK FORCE.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RYAN:

**S - 679  
CONNECTICUT  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
SENATE**

**PROCEEDINGS  
2014**

**VETO  
SESSION**

**VOL. 57  
PART 11  
3246 – 3508**

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THE CHAIR:

So ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

The second item, Madam President, Calendar 569, House Bill 5040, move to place on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President. Third item, Calendar 566, House Bill 5535, move to place on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President. Moving now to Calendar Page 27, Calendar 574, House Bill 5564, move to place on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

And also, Calendar Page 27, Calendar 578, House Bill 5220, move to place on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President. Moving to Calendar Page 28, where there are four items. The first, Calendar

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On Page 27, Calendar 574, House Bill 5564.

House Bill 578, House Bill 5220.

On Page 28, Calendar 580, House Bill 5310.

Calendar 584, House Bill 5334.

Calendar 585, House Bill 5586.

Calendar 583, House Bill 5289.

On Page 29, Calendar 586, House Bill 5402.

Calendar 589, House Bill 5550.

Calendar 590, House Bill 5262.

Calendar 587, House Bill 5377.

On Page 30, Calendar 593, House Bill 5526.

Calendar 592, House Bill 5476.

On Page 33, Calendar 215, Senate Bill 243.

On Page 39, Calendar 387, Senate Bill 432.

On Page 40, Calendar 475, House Joint Resolution  
Number 20.

Calendar 476, House Joint Resolution Number 26.

Calendar 532, House Joint Resolution Number 42.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk, can you please check on Consent Calendar  
House Bill 5593. I don't see if you called that, on  
the top.

THE CLERK:

That's on the previously adopted Senate Agenda House  
Bill 5593.

THE CHAIR:

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SENATOR LOONEY:

If we might pause for just a moment to verify a couple of additional items.

Madam President, to verify an additional item, I believe it was placed on the Consent Calendar and Calendar Page 30, on Calendar Page 30, Calendar 592, Substitute for House Bill 5476.

THE CHAIR:

It is, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

It is on? Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Madam President. If the Clerk would now, finally, Agenda Number 4, Madam President, Agenda Number 4 one additional item ask for suspension to place up on Agenda Number 4 and that is, ask for suspension to place on the Consent Calendar an item from Agenda Number 4.

THE CHAIR:

Seeing no objection, so ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President, and that item is Substitute House Bill Number 5566 from Senate Agenda Number 4.

Thank you, Madam President. If the Clerk would now, if we might call for a vote on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk. Will you please call for a Roll Call Vote on the Consent Calendar. The machine will be opened.

THE CLERK:

An immediate Roll Call has been ordered in the Senate.

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An immediate Roll Call on Consent Calendar Number 2 has been ordered in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

If all members have voted, all members have voted, the machine will be closed. Mr. Clerk will you please call the tally.

THE CLERK:

Consent Calendar Number 2.

Total number voting	36
Necessary for adoption	19
Those voting Yea	36
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	0

THE CHAIR:

The Consent Calendar passes. Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President. Two additional items to take up before the, our final vote on the implementer. If we might stand for just, for just a moment.

The first item to mark Go is, Calendar, to remove from the Consent Calendar, Calendar Page 22, Calendar 536, House Bill 5546. If that item might be marked Go.

And one additional item, Madam President, and that was from Calendar, or rather from Agenda Number 4, ask for suspension to take it up for purposes of marking it Go, that is House Bill, Substitute for House Bill 5417. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Seeing no objection, so ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

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what you have to share with us today. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Also, the Capitol Police have asked me to inform those of you who haven't found a seat, who may be standing and blocking the exits, that we have a rollover room today. It is 1C, as in "children," so if you wanted -- they will have audio, video, and treats. No -- they -- they will have audio and video in 1C --

SENATOR STILLMAN: The treat is not being squeezed in here.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: -- and you won't be -- yes, you won't be squeezed in here. So feel free to -- to sit down there if -- if you're lacking room here.

With that we invite up for the State Department of Education, Sarah Hemingway, to be delivering testimony on behalf of Commissioner Pryor who I understand is out of state today on business. Welcome, Sarah, and happy St. Patrick's Day.

SARAH HEMINGWAY: Happy St. Patrick's Day to you, too.

My name is Sarah Hemingway. I'm the legislative liaison at the State Department of Education. You have Commissioner Pryor's written remarks, but I wanted to come in person to share comments on just a couple of bills, and then if you have questions I'm certainly happy to try and answer them.

HB5564  
HB5567  
HB5563  
SB476  
HB5562

So first, House Bill 5564, AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL SAFETY. We certainly appreciate this committee's continued attention to two important and related topics within this bill: school safety and school climate.

This bill includes two new programs, one creating a safe route to school program, and one creating a student safety line through United Way's 2-1-1. We are supportive of these concepts, but concern that there is not funding in the Governor's current budget proposal. We would also welcome the opportunity to partner with the Department of Emergency Services on these projects as a collaborating agency.

We'd also like to comment on the new language regarding safe school climate plans. In our 2000 report to the General Assembly, one of our recommendations was to provide the department with the authority to conduct reviews of the safe school climate plan rather than just the authority to receive such plans. Additionally, we recommended an annual school climate survey, pilots in the area of social, emotional development for students, and updating the charge of the Safe School Climate Committee to better focus on creating a positive school climate.

We are pleased to report that the department has already engaged in some of the work this Legislation suggested, especially around the review of the school climate plan submitted to us by districts. We have reviewed these plans

against minimum criteria, and notified districts to the status of their plans. Formalizing our implicit authority to review plans via an explicit statutory provision is welcome, and we believe it is important that districts review this feedback and improve plans that do not meet these minimum standards. We would like to discuss the provision of the statute requiring the adoption of a model plan for districts that do not meet minimum requirements. We are concerned that because each district has unique needs, a single model plan might not address such local needs. We would welcome language requiring an iterative process for enabling the department to provide technical assistance.

I would also like to briefly comment on House Bill 5567, AN ACT CONCERNING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS. Again the department engaged in a study of alternative schools over the past year and submitted that study to this committee. Conceptually we agree with this legislation and think it helps to infer that alternative schools are a quality part of the educational system. We think it is critical to have better data and information on these programs and believe this legislation takes a positive step in that direction. We commend the committee for defining alternative programs, but have concerns around the language requiring them to adhere to Sections 10-15 and 10-16, and would be happy to discuss that with you further.

If you have any questions on those or other bills, I'm happy to answer them.

SARAH HEMINGWAY: Yes, it does. I think -- I would just note, you know, one of the things we found in the report that we submitted to this committee is there is a great discrepancy between the types of programs out there, and I think that's why we like the idea of the guidelines and some sort of standard, as we really do need to make sure that consistently there are quality programs for all students in them.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. And with regard to the Act Concerning School Safety, I appreciate your testimony. One of the reasons that there's some specific language about the annual school climate survey in that bill is that we were disturbed to discover, when we got the State Department's report, that while all school systems and schools were required to do surveys, the surveys of students differed from school to school, and district to district, which made it impossible for your department to offer us any kind of assessment across schools and across districts.

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And if we had any point to our efforts to -- to understand school climate, it was to allow for the department to analyze what was going on and -- and identify high schools, middle schools, elementary schools where students don't feel safe. So we currently lack any such comparative data now, and I'm just wondering what the department would recommend we could do to ensure that next year we were not sitting in the same circumstances.

SARAH HEMINGWAY: So again, I will do my best. I think we may need to get back to you with a very specific answer to that, but I think, in conversations with the Commissioner, certainly we acknowledge that there is a need for uniform data, and are looking at a few different options. There are some national surveys out there that do a very thorough comprehensive job of accounting for student data, as well as staff and parent data. They are expensive, so without funding that makes that a challenge. And then we need to have some conversations with stakeholders in the state about what other surveys we could use to accomplish that goal, which we certainly agree we need to meet.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you. I'll just observe in this day and age, there's free software available like Survey Monkey that would permit the department to go ahead and set up a uniform student survey, make it available to all districts, and not necessarily incur costs, and I'll be happy to continue the dialogue with the department. But to me, for us not to have uniform student surveys so that we -- we can know whether or not students feel safe, that's -- that's a fundamental concern.

Are there other questions from members of the committee?

Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for this testimony today. Just looking at it, while you were going along with it, as far

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REP. FLEISCHMANN: Any other questions for the witness? If not, thank you very much for your time, and your testimony, and your advocacy.

KYLA DALEY: Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Senator Carlo Leone, to be followed by Tom Rimkunas.

SENATOR LEONE: Good afternoon, Chairs, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Ranking Members Senator Boucher, Representative Ackert, and Members of the Education Committee.

I am Senator Carlo Leone. I wanted to thank you today for your consideration for H.B. 5564, AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL SAFETY, and specifically for including Sections 4, 5, and 6 on the establishment and submission of a Safe School Climate Plans and its importance in reducing bullying behavior in our schools.

Last year in my community and nearby, the effects of bullying behavior has led to suicides in our schools. In one extreme case, after the suicide, it was made public that the bullying behavior was known to too many for far too long, and no direct intervention occurred. Rather than submit to the ongoing behavior, the student chose to end his life. It never should have happened, but it did, and we must act.

I believe we must do all we can to prevent the harmful effects and behaviors that result from bullying. This behavior leads to isolation,

depression, fear, even aggression and retaliation. Ultimately, and to more times than necessary if unaddressed, it leads to suicide.

The measures put forth in H.B. 5564 require the submission of a plan for the schools on what needs to be done, and then shared with students and administrators. If the plan is rejected, it must simply be resubmitted, and approved, and again shared so that all can know its effects, and more importantly what to do when it manifests in our schools.

I thank you for your consideration, and I offer my support in passage of this important piece of legislation. Back home it's -- it's something that has touched us personally, and it's something that I think we can never do enough. I know this committee has done a very outstanding job in creating a process on which to achieve these desired outcomes, and I think this is an improvement upon that, so I want to thank you personally and the committee members as well. So I want to offer my support in any way possible, and if there are any hurdles, I'd be happy to assist.

Also, I did hear some previous testimony on the bill concerning special education and dyslexia. I also want to offer my support there, and -- and the previous speaker talking about having to go to Lindamood-Bell and the extra assistance. I know, too, that firsthand of going through a process like that, so it is important, and -- and as Representative

Fleischmann said, the IEP is there to assist the parents for when it's needed. That doesn't always occur, and sometimes they're forced to go outside those -- those routes. So anything we can do to improve that situation, I would offer my support as well. And I want to thank you for your time.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you for your time, and your testimony, and your advocacy, and obviously I speak for the whole committee when I saw that, you know, it's -- it's just terrible that a child in your community would have been driven to suicide and -- and clearly, though we have been concerned about bullying, there's more that we can do. And one of the things that puts this bill in front of us is the fact that though there are school climate surveys happening around the state, they are not always similar surveys, so the State Department of Education is not able to give us simple comparables for different schools in different school systems, so we can't know how safe children feel in Westville High School, as compared to Central High School in Bridgeport, as compared to Hartford High. We just -- which to me is outrageous in this age when we are so aware that this is a problem. So -- so I share your frustration and your desire to do more, and appreciate your advocacy.

SENATOR LEONE: Thank you, and I think it's important to include the comments from the kids themselves, because sometimes, you know, we as adults may think of what the solution is, but if we don't hear directly from the students.

themselves, I believe that's insight that should not be discounted.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Great. Are there questions from other members of the committee?

Comment from Senator Stillman.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, Senator. It's always good to see you and I want to thank you for reaching out to the committee. I -- I truly believe that if your request had not been before us, I'm not sure we -- I don't think we would have known the loophole in the existing law that did not address the fact that if your climate plan is rejected, or your -- your bullying program is rejected -- well I think we all made the assumption that would mean the Department would ask you to come back with a revised plan, and the Department was not doing that. So again, there appears to be a need to be very explicit in statute as to what the Department is expected. And then the districts in turn would know what to expect as well.

Along with Representative Fleischmann, we do express our sympathies for the people of -- of your area who have been affected by the tragedies around us. And sadly it's not just in your neck of the woods. It's -- it's all over. We do hear terribly stories and terrible outcomes from bullying, and hopefully addressing the existing law by asking for more input and more work, really, on the part of the districts I think will be -- I hope will be helpful in the future. Thank you.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Senator.

Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.  
Thank you for your testimony, Senator.

I just had a quick question on Section 6 of this bill which refers to the analysis of information about students' perspectives and opinions regarding school climate. And I don't see -- I may be missing it, but I don't see any reference here to that information being collected anonymously, and I wondered if you saw that as necessary or an express omission, and what you think of keeping that anonymous.

SENATOR LEONE: I think to the extent that if a student chooses to be anonymous, then they should be allowed to do so, but if they feel that they don't need to be anonymous, then -- then it'd be with their consent, and if that information should be utilized accordingly. But if that is something that the committee desires or -- or needs, I think that's language that we could work through to the satisfaction of the committee.

REP. LAVIELLE: I'd appreciate that. I think it -- it might be -- there's a lot of concern about this recently; I think in all of society really, and it might make it easier for kids to express themselves about a sensitive subject like this if they know that their remarks can be made anonymously.

Thank you very much, Senator. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, Representative. And I would observe that there is also included in this bill a tip line that is purely anonymous. So we are sensitive to that concern.

Are there other questions or comments from members of the committee?

If not, Senator Leone, thank you for your time and advocacy.

SENATOR LEONE: Thank you, to you, the Chairs, and Ranking Members, and to all the committee members. I look forward to any input, and I thank you for your time.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Is Tom Rimkunas here?

And Tom is to be followed by Deputy Attorney General Perry Zinn-Rowthorn.

Please -- please press the button in front of you that will turn on the red light and allow us to hear you better. There you go.

TOM RIMKUNAS: Hi. My name is Thomas Rimkunas. I am 11 years old. My address is 66 Grant Street, CT. I support the dyslexia bill 5562, Section 1.

I found out I had dyslexia in the middle of first grade. Dyslexia has affected me since

I see on my list that there's a Kevin Kelly, Jr., listed, and if you'd like to do a father-son joint appearance, that is always welcome at the Education Committee.

SENATOR KELLY: Thank you, Chairman Fleischmann, Ranking Members, Representative Ackert, and Senator Boucher, and all Members of the Education Committee.

My name is State Senator Kevin Kelly. I represent the 21st District which includes Monroe, Seymour, Shelton, and Stratford. I also have with me my son, Kevin Kelly, who is a fifth grader at St. James in Stratford. And thank you for the opportunity testify in support of House Bill No. 5564, AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL SAFETY.

Following the tragedy at Sandy Hook, the State and Municipalities took a critical look at school safety infrastructure. Last session the General Assembly took significant action to help protect our schools with the establishment of School Security Infrastructure Grants. Our intention was, and is, to protect our children, and make every school a safe place to live, to learn, and to grow. However, by leaving private schools out of the equation, we are missing the mark and not fulfilling all of our intentions. We must extent school security grants to support every school in Connecticut, public and private.

To make our schools safe, significant infrastructure improvements need to be

considered. These include installing surveillance cameras, ballistic glass, entry door buzzer systems, panic alarms, or other school systems, and they all can be very costly. The investment is worth it, however. Securing the funding to make these changes is challenging for any school, and if the State did not offer support, many schools would go without any safety improvement. I do not believe it is fair or responsible to limit this funding to only one group of our schools. Parents should feel safe sending their child to school, and students should feel secure every day in any school setting.

By dedicating at least 10 percent of funding to non-public schools, we can better distribute available funds to reach every child in Connecticut. In my district this would help schools that served integral roles in our community take necessary steps to keep our children safe and secure. Schools like St. Jude in Monroe, St. Joseph in Lawrence -- in Shelton, as well as St. James and St. Mark in Stratford could all use this help.

It is our responsibility to do everything we can -- a couple of minutes -- to help make this -- every school safe.

I also have my son with me. Fifth graders in Stratford do come to the capital, and earlier in the school year, to help give the kids a little bit better understanding of how this legislative process works, I went into fifth grades at both St. James and Chapel Street, and

taught the students how a bill becomes a law. They identified this bill as a bill that they're going to track throughout the legislative session, and unfortunately we didn't have enough time to bring all classroom students up, but Kevin volunteered to come up today on St. Patrick's Day, by the way, Happy St. Patrick's Day to everybody in the crowd. He's come up to just give his two cents, and to explain the process, how we've been going to different committee rooms and seeing how it works.

Speak loud and into the mic.

KEVIN KELLY: Hi. My name is Kevin Kelly. I go to St. Jude School in Stratford. I am here to speak on this bill because I believe every kid deserves a safe school. Thank you, and happy St. Patrick's Day.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you, and may I say you have a gift for clarity and brevity that will serve you well in all of your endeavors.

Are there questions for Kevin Kelly, Senior or Junior?

If not, we thank you very much for your time, your testimony, and your advocacy. This bill is before us because obviously we concur with the sentiments that you express, and we appreciate your time.

SENATOR KELLY: Thank you very much.

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years.

RICHARD MURRAY: I'm well aware of that, sir.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Much appreciated. And if it were fully funded, would I be right in thinking that this tiered approach would sort of provide assistance for more of the students to whom your district provides special education because you have some who are in one band, and some who are in the next band, and so forth?

RICHARD MURRAY: Absolutely.

REP. FLEISCHMANN: Thank you.

RICHARD MURRAY: Thank you.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you, sir. Any other questions? Thank you.

RICHARD MURRAY: Thank you very much. Enjoy the rest of your day.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you. You too. Next is Steven Hernandez to be followed by Dawn Learcy and Melodie Peters.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: I want to win a prize too, so I'll be brief.

SENATOR STILLMAN: And that's without knowing what the prize is. That's a very brave man.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: I'll be careful too.

Good afternoon, Honorable Co-Chairs, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, ranking and other esteem members of the Education Committee. My name is Steven Hernandez, attorney and director of Public Policy and Research for the Connecticut Committee on

HB5564

Children.

I'm here to offer the commission's testimony on several bills, but I'd like to focus today in support of House Bill 5564, an act concerning school safety.

School climate and safety matters. According to the National School Climate Center, the promotion of positive school climate impacts every aspect of a child's educational experience. Sustained positive school climate is associated with positive child and youth development, effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention.

There is a documented correlation between positive school climate and student motivation to learn, a mitigating effect on socioeconomic distress, and diminished aggression, violence and sexual harassment.

This January, Secretary Duncan, at the US Department of Education released a variety of resources on school climate and safety. He noted that positive school climates also enhance safety in the school and community by increasing communication among students, families, and faculty, and reducing violence and bullying.

Recognizing that bullying intervention and positive school climate, a form of prevention, go hand in hand, in 2011, through the leadership of this committee, the General Assembly revised our anti-bullying laws to strengthen our efforts to improve school climate and prevent and address school bullying.

After 12/14, when the state and the world was touched by Newtown, the state again led the way in making the necessary connection between positive school climate and school safety. School climate is to school safety as bullying is to individual student safety, and your bill today is that next step in making that connection.

In addition to establishing a safe travel to school grant program and providing a clearinghouse for information and assistance through the 2-1-1 Infoline program, your bill would also authorize the Department of Ed. to approve or reject local and regional school climate plans, a prudent step.

As such, your bill is about leadership, accountability, and including the student voice as both the consumer and inheritor of your best efforts.

The Commission would recommend additional modest but important changes to our school climate law intended to strengthen the definition of bullying, and improve bullying enforcement, by clarifying areas in the law that parents, principals or the STE find confusing or contradictory. In no way are these changes intended to dilute the definition of bullying or its enforcement, but they're aimed at diminishing both technical and interpreted hurdles with the dual goal of protecting our kids and improving their learning environment.

I have submitted those recommended changes from the commission to the committee in electronic form as well, and I'd like to incorporate by reference, if I may, the testimony of our second grade teacher, Mr. Josue Lopez, in support of that bill, which is also very

poignant.

Thank you very much.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Thank you as well, and, yes, we do have your suggestions for the school climate and safety bill. We appreciate that.

Questions anyone? Thank you for -- yes. I'm sorry. Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

SENATOR STILLMAN: Too much green in this room. I'm getting lost finding all the green, even myself.

REP. KOKORUDA: Even though it's St. Patrick's Day, if we had known, we would have worn red for sure.

Thank you for your testimony. Just one thing I'm having problems with. On the school safety bill that you're supporting, and you have your -- that you recommend that we strengthen the role of school climate committee to align with this new role, working to help improve school safety.

I totally agree with you, but, you know, after Sandy Hook, when our lives changed, I met with my schools. I met with my teachers. I met with my community, and obviously there were a lot of issues on the table then. But one of them that I was so happy with in the school safety bill was they wanted to make their own decisions on how to keep their kids safe. They wanted to make their own decisions on what they were going to do, what kind of a culture they were going to have in that building.

And I feel this bill with allowing the State

Department of Education to approve or reject the community's plan I just think is counter to all that, and I was surprised to see your organization -- your commission on children supporting that.

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: If you'll look to our recommended addition to the recommendation in the bill before us, we actually buttress the recommendation here by saying, yes, the State Department of Education should support the plan, which includes a lot of the elements that are mandated by state law, but also should receive school-based school climate plans that are based really on the surveys that are taken on a school by school basis.

And the school climate committee at each school should be empowered, just as you said, Representative Kokoruda. Should be empowered at the school level to make the decisions about what the problem is in climate at the particular school and how to resolve it and how to address those issues.

REP. KOKORUDA: And may I just ask; aren't you concerned that, you know, in this state, one size fits all is something we constantly battle; that this could happen with school plans?

STEVEN HERNANDEZ: Absolutely. And what the law does is very interesting in that it provides a framework for addressing these issues, a place and a membership through the committee of how to talk about these issues, but it doesn't say specifically what each school is to do; that is to be determined on the local level, and we're recommending to strengthen that conversation at the local level.

REP. KOKORUDA: Thank you.

State of Connecticut  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

Testimony before the Education Committee  
Submitted by Steven Hernández, Esq., Director of Public Policy and Research  
Connecticut Commission on Children  
March 17, 2014

Honorable Co-chairs, Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, Ranking and other esteemed members of the Education Committee:

My name is Steven Hernández, Attorney and Director of Public Policy and Research for the Connecticut Commission on Children. I am here to offer the Commission's testimony in support of:

- S.B. No. 476; An Act Concerning The Academic Achievement Gap;
- H.B. No. 5562; An Act Concerning Special Education; and
- H.B. No. 5564; An Act Concerning School Safety. /

I will focus the bulk of my testimony in support of House Bill 5564, *An Act Concerning School Safety*.

"School climate matters." According to Amrit Thapa at the National School Climate Center, the promotion of positive school climate impacts every aspect of a child's educational experience. "Sustained positive school climate is associated with positive child and youth development, effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention."

Mr. Thapa cited national and global research documenting the correlation between positive school climate and student motivation to learn, a mitigating effect on socioeconomic distress, and diminished aggression, violence and sexual harassment.

The Center draws a clear connection between the quality of school climate and improved academic outcomes as well as student personal development and well-being. I have attached the National Center for School Climate's Research Brief to my submitted testimony, and would be happy to supplement that with relevant research.

This January, Secretary Duncan at the U.S. Department of Education released a variety of resources on school climate and safety. He noted that "positive school climates also enhance safety in the school and community by increasing communication among students, families, and faculty, and reducing violence and bullying." Those resources may be found at ED.GOV and I would gladly provide them to the Committee.

Recognizing that bullying intervention and positive school climate (a form of prevention) go hand in hand, in 2011, through the leadership of this committee, the general assembly revised our anti-bullying laws to strengthen our efforts to improve school climate and prevent and address school bullying.

The law required—among other things—that each school board develop and implement a safe school climate plan, that each superintendent appoint a district safe school climate coordinator, and that the principal of each school serve as a safe school climate specialist.

After 12/14, when the state and the world was touched by Newtown, the state again led the way in making the necessary connection between positive school climate and school safety. School climate is to school safety as bullying is to individual student safety, and your bill today is the next step in making that connection.

In addition to establishing a safe travel to school grant program and providing a clearinghouse for information and assistance through the 2-1-1 Infoline program, HB 5564 would authorize the Department of Ed. to approve or reject local and regional school climate plans. Your bill would also require the analysis of student perspectives and opinions, which would be a key part of a school-based climate assessment survey.

As such, your bill is about leadership, accountability, and including the student voice as both the consumer and inheritor of your best efforts.

The Commission would recommend additional modest but important changes to our school climate law intended to strengthen the definition of bullying, and improve bullying enforcement, by clarifying areas in the law that parents, principals or the SDE find confusing or contradictory. In no way are these changes intended to dilute the definition of bullying or its enforcement, but they are aimed at diminishing both technical and interpreted hurdles with the dual goal of protecting our kids and improving their learning environment.

Specifically, we recommend strengthening the role of the school climate committee to align with its new role in working to help improve school safety, giving that committee the ability to use school climate surveys to create a strategy for positive school climate, and allowing the school principal to focus on intervening in and investigating acts of alleged bullying.

We further recommend clarifying the meeting requirement with parents at the conclusion of a bullying investigation, as principals and Superintendents have reported that the paragraph could and has been read to require that this meeting be held at the same time, with both the bully and the victim in the same room. As we know, research does not support putting the families of the bully and the target together.

I have attached these and other recommendations to my testimony, along with an analysis and rationale for each. The Commission would welcome the opportunity to assist in any way that we can to improve student safety, school climate, and to reduce incidents of bullying on our state.

In support of **S.B. No. 476, An Act Concerning The Academic Achievement Gap**, we note that research shows that full-day kindergarten helps improve student outcomes and close achievement gaps. According to the National Education Association, Full-day

**DRAFT PROPOSAL: An Act Concerning School Climate and Safety**

**Sec. 10-222d. Safe school climate plans. Definitions. School climate assessments.** (a) As used in this section, sections 10-222g to 10-222i, inclusive, and section 10-222k:

(1) "Bullying" means (A) the repeated use by one or more students of a written, oral or electronic communication, such as cyberbullying, directed at or referring to another student attending school in the same school district, or (B) a physical act or gesture by one or more students repeatedly directed at another student attending school in the same school district, that: (i) Causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student's property, (ii) places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property, (iii) creates a hostile educational environment at school for such student, ~~(iv) infringes on the rights of such student at school~~, or (iv) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. "Bullying" shall include but not be limited to, a written, oral or electronic communication or physical act or gesture based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, academic status, physical appearance, or mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with an individual or group who has or is perceived to have one or more of such characteristics;

(2) "Cyberbullying" means any act of bullying through the use of the Internet, interactive and digital technologies, cellular mobile telephone or other mobile electronic devices or any electronic communications;

(3) "Mobile electronic device" means any hand-held or other portable electronic equipment capable of providing data communication between two or more individuals, including, but not limited to, a text messaging device, a paging device, a personal digital assistant, a laptop computer, equipment that is capable of playing a video game or a digital video disk, or equipment on which digital images are taken or transmitted;

(4) "Electronic communication" means any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photoelectronic or photo-optical system;

(5) "Hostile educational environment" means a situation in which ~~bullying the use of communication or physical acts or gestures among students is sufficiently severe or pervasive to interfere with a student's education~~ alter the conditions of the school climate;

(6) "Outside of the school setting" means at a location, activity or program that is not school related, or through the use of an electronic device or a mobile electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education;

(7) "School employee" means (A) a teacher, substitute teacher, school administrator, school superintendent, guidance counselor, psychologist, social worker, nurse, physician, school paraprofessional or coach employed by a local or regional board of education or working in a public elementary, middle or high school; or (B) any other individual who, in the performance of his or her duties, has regular contact with students and who provides services to or on behalf of students enrolled in a public elementary, middle or high school, pursuant to a contract with the local or regional board of education; and

(8) "School climate" means the quality and character of school life with a particular focus on the quality of the relationships within the school community between and among students and adults.

(b) Each local and regional board of education shall develop and implement a safe school climate plan to address the existence of bullying in its schools. Such plan shall: (1) Enable students to anonymously report acts of bullying to school employees and require students and the parents or guardians of students to be notified annually at the beginning of each school year of the process by which students may make such reports, (2) enable the parents or guardians of students to file written reports of suspected bullying, (3) require school employees who witness acts which may constitute of bullying or receive reports of acts which may constitute bullying to orally notify the safe school climate specialist, described in section 10-222k, or another school administrator if the safe school climate specialist is unavailable, not later than one school day after such school employee witnesses or receives a report of bullying such acts, and to file a written report not later than two school days after making such oral report, (4) require the safe school climate specialist to investigate or supervise the investigation of all reports of acts which may constitute bullying and ensure that such investigation is completed promptly after receipt of any written reports made under this section, (5) require the safe school climate specialist to review any anonymous reports; except that no disciplinary action shall be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous report, (6) ~~include~~ require a school-based bullying prevention and school climate prevention and intervention strategy, as defined by section 10-222g, for school employees to deal with bullying, (7) provide for the inclusion of language in student codes of conduct concerning bullying, (8) require each school to notify the parents or guardians of students who commit any verified acts of bullying and the parents or guardians of students against whom such acts were directed not later than forty-eight hours after the completion of the investigation described in subdivision (4) of this subsection, (9) require each school to invite the parents or

guardians of a student who commits any verified act of bullying and the parents or guardians of the student against whom such act was directed to a meeting to communicate to such parents or guardians the measures being taken by the school to ensure the safety of the student against whom such act was directed, and policies and procedures in place to prevent further acts of bullying, (10) require each school to invite the parents or guardians of a student who commits any verified act of bullying to a meeting, separate and distinct from the meeting required in section (9) of this paragraph, to discuss specific interventions undertaken by the school to prevent further acts of bullying, (1011) establish a procedure for each school to document and maintain records relating to reports and investigations of bullying in such school and to maintain a list of the number of verified acts of bullying in such school and make such list available for public inspection, and annually report such number to the Department of Education, and in such manner as prescribed by the Commissioner of Education, (1112) direct the development of case-by-case interventions for addressing repeated incidents of bullying against a single individual or recurrently perpetrated bullying incidents by the same individual that may include both counseling and discipline, (1213) prohibit discrimination and retaliation against an individual who reports or assists in the investigation of an act of bullying, (1314) direct the development of student safety support plans for students against whom an act of bullying was directed that address safety measures the school will take to protect such students against further acts of bullying, (1415) require the principal of a school, or the principal's designee, to notify a school resource officer or the appropriate local law enforcement agency when such principal, or the principal's designee, believes that any acts of bullying may constitute criminal conduct, (1516) prohibit bullying (A) on school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, at a school bus stop, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by a local or regional board of education, or through the use of an electronic device or an electronic mobile device owned, leased or used by the local or regional board of education, and (B) outside of the school setting if such bullying (i) creates a hostile environment at school for the student against whom such bullying was directed, (ii) infringes on the rights of the student against whom such bullying was directed at school, or (iii) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school, (1617) require, at the beginning of each school year, each school to provide all school employees with a written or electronic copy of the school district's safe school climate plan, along with a written or electronic copy of school-based bullying intervention and school climate improvement strategy developed pursuant to Sec. 10-222k and (1718) require that all school employees annually complete the training described in section 10-220a or section 10-222j. The notification required pursuant to subdivision (8) of this subsection and the invitation required pursuant to subdivision (9) of this subsection

shall include a description of the response of school employees to such acts and any consequences that may result from the commission of further acts of bullying.

(c) Not later than January 1, 2012, each local and regional board of education shall approve the safe school climate plan developed pursuant to this section and submit such plan to the Department of Education. Not later than thirty calendar days after approval of such plan by the local or regional board of education, the board shall make such plan available on the board's and each individual school in the school district's Internet web site and ensure that such plan is included in the school district's publication of the rules, procedures and standards of conduct for schools and in all student handbooks.

(d) On and after July 1, 2012, and ~~biennially~~ annually thereafter, each local and regional board of education shall require each school in the district to complete an assessment using the school climate assessment instruments, including surveys, approved and disseminated by the Department of Education pursuant to section 10-222h. Each local and regional board of education shall collect the school climate assessments for each school in the district and submit such school climate assessments to the department.

(e) For the purpose of collecting and sharing school-based best-practices or successful strategies to improve school climate, not later than January 1, 2016, and every two years thereafter, each local and regional board of education shall update the safe school climate plan developed pursuant to paragraph (c) of this section and submit such plan to the Department of Education, to include summaries of school-based bullying intervention and school climate improvement strategies along with district-wide climate improvement initiatives and anti-bullying policies.

**Sec. 10-222g. Prevention and intervention strategy re bullying and school climate.** (a) For the purposes of section 10-222d, the term "school-based bullying intervention and school climate prevention-improvement and intervention strategy" may include, but is not limited to, (1) implementation of a positive behavioral interventions and supports process or another evidence-based model approach for safe school climate or for the prevention of bullying identified by the Department of Education, (2) school rules prohibiting bullying, harassment and intimidation and establishing appropriate consequences for those who engage in such acts, (3) adequate adult supervision of outdoor areas, hallways, the lunchroom and other specific areas where bullying is likely to occur, (4) inclusion of grade-appropriate bullying education and prevention curricula in kindergarten through high school, (5) individual interventions with the bully, parents and school employees, and interventions with the bullied child, parents and school employees, (6) school-wide training related to safe school climate, (7) student peer training, education and support, and (8) promotion of

parent involvement in bullying prevention through individual or team participation in meetings, trainings and individual interventions, and (9) culturally competent school-based curriculum focusing on social-emotional learning, self-awareness and self-regulation. Funding for this strategy may originate from public, private, federal or philanthropic sources.

**Sec. 10-222k. District safe school climate coordinator. Safe school climate specialist. Safe school climate committee.** (a) For the school year commencing July 1, 2012, and each school year thereafter, the superintendent of each local or regional board of education shall appoint, from among existing school district staff, a district safe school climate coordinator. The district safe school climate coordinator shall: (1) Be responsible for implementing the district's safe school climate plan, developed pursuant to section 10-222d, (2) collaborate with the safe school climate specialists, described in subsection (b) of this section, the board of education for the district and the superintendent of schools of the school district to prevent, identify and respond to bullying in the schools of the district, (3) provide data and information, in collaboration with the superintendent of schools of the district, to the Department of Education regarding bullying, in accordance with the provisions of subsection (b) of section 10-222d and subsection (a) of section 10-222h, and (4) meet with the safe school climate specialists at least twice during the school year to discuss issues relating to bullying and school climate in the school district and to make recommendations concerning amendments to the district's safe school climate plan.

(b) For the school year commencing July 1, 2012, and each school year thereafter, the principal of each school, or the principal's designee, shall serve as the safe school climate specialist and shall (1) investigate or supervise the investigation of reported acts of bullying in the school in accordance with the district's safe school climate plan, (2) collect and maintain records of reports and investigations of bullying in the school, and (3) act as the primary school official responsible for preventing, identifying and responding to reports of bullying in the school.

(c) (1) For the school year commencing July 1, 2012, and each school year thereafter, the principal of each school shall establish a committee or designate at least one existing committee in the school to be responsible for developing and fostering a safe school climate and addressing issues relating to bullying in the school. Such committee shall include at least one parent or guardian of a student enrolled in the school appointed by the school principal.

(2) Any such committee shall receive and analyze the results of the school climate assessments completed pursuant to Sec. 10-222d(d) and other reported data in the

aggregate on incidents of bullying, collected in accordance with the provisions of subsection (b) of section 10-222d, and use these data to (A) identify patterns of bullying among students in the school, (B) monitor the progress of school climate improvement and identify any strengths and weaknesses at the school with respect to school climate improvement, (C) ~~(A) receive copies of completed reports following investigations of bullying, (B) identify and address patterns of bullying among students in the school, (C) review and amenddevelop,~~ in consultation with the safe school climate specialist, a school-based bullying intervention and school climate improvement strategy ~~school policies relating to bullying, providing annual recommendations to the school climate coordinator on improving school climate,~~ ~~(DD)~~ review and make recommendations to the district safe school climate coordinator regarding the district's safe school climate plan based on issues and experiences specific to the school, ~~(EE)~~ educate students, school employees and parents and guardians of students on issues relating to bullying and school climate, and ~~(FF)~~ collaborate with the district safe school climate coordinator in the collection of data regarding bullying, in accordance with the provisions of subsection (b) of section 10-222d and subsection (a) of section 10-222h, and (G) perform any other duties as determined by the school principal that are related to the school-based bullying intervention and school climate improvement strategy ~~prevention, identification and response to school bullying for the school.~~

(3) Any parent or guardian serving as a member of any such committee shall not participate in the activities described in subparagraphs (A) and (B) of subdivision (2) of this subsection or any other activity that may compromise the confidentiality of a student.

**NEW SECTION:** Within available appropriations, the Office of Early Childhood, in collaboration with the State Department of Education, may offer a competitive grant for up to three Alliance School Districts to develop and implement a 3-year-old to third grade strategy for social emotional well-being and health, with a focus on instructional tools and family engagement. Funds for this grant may originate from public, private, federal or philanthropic sources.

## Section-by-Section analysis

### DRAFT PROPOSAL: An Act Concerning School Climate and Safety

#### Overview

These changes are intended to strengthen the definition of bullying and improve bullying enforcement by clarifying areas in the law that parents, principals or the SDE find confusing or contradictory. In no way are these changes intended to dilute the definition of bullying or its enforcement.

#### Proposed change to Sec. 10-222d (a) (1) (A) (iii) and Sec. 10-222d (a) (5):

**What it does** — This change clarifies the phrase “hostile environment” in the definition of “bullying”, making it more similar to definitions used in CA, NJ, NY and other states which also intend to protect the educational environment of targeted students. *As such, this does not delete the definition of bullying from our law; it simply removes the redundant term from the definition of bullying to avoid confusion.*

**Why the change** — Bullying occurs when repeated acts or communications against a student “(1) Causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student’s property, (2) places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property, (3) creates a *hostile environment* at school for such student, (4) infringes on the rights of such student at school, or (5) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.”

A *hostile environment* is defined as a situation in which bullying among students is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the school climate.

Superintendents and school principals find the definition of *hostile environment* confusing because, as written, it requires a principal to *first* find that school climate is impacted by the behavior directed at the individual student to *then* determine whether a student has been bullied. Bullying may impact school climate, but impacting the individual student should be enough to find that bullying occurred.

The phrase *among students* in the definition of hostile environment also makes it more difficult for the principal to determine that bullying has occurred because, as written, it is unclear whether it refers to the bully and the target or among students generally.

It is recommended that the word "bullying" be replaced in the definition of "hostile environment" because it is confusing to principals to find the word bullying used in its own definition as it seems to create a second definition of bullying.

**Proposed change to Sec. 10-222d (a) (1) (A) (iv):**

**What it does** — This change strikes the source of confusion, which at best repeats that a student has rights which are protected by federal and/or state law, avoiding what may be an unnecessary administrative step at the school level.

**Why the change** — The State Department of Education, Superintendents and school principals find this definition vague and confusing because it does not refer to any specific rights. The provision has been interpreted by some schools to refer to rights under state and federal protected class categories, in which case this provision is unnecessary, as these rights are protected through alternate federal and state laws.

**Proposed change to Sec. 10-222d (b)(1):**

**What it does** — This change promotes timely notice by clarifying that notice on the process for making anonymous reports should be provided at the beginning of each school year, when it is most useful to parents and guardians.

**Why the change** — Parents have reported that they did not know that there was a process for students to anonymously report "acts of bullying" because they had never received such information, or the information was provided into the school year.

**Proposed change to Secs. 10-222d (b)(2), (3) and (4):**

**What it does** — This change promotes reporting of witnessed incidents by school employees by removing discretion from school employees in deciding whether a witnessed act is bullying. These changes also clarify that this is a determination that the school climate specialist must make upon investigation.

**Why the change** — The requirement in this section that school employees report or investigate bullying is vague because it allows a school employee to decide whether an act is bullying before deciding whether or not to report the act.

**Proposed changes to Secs. 10-222d (b)(6); 10-222g; and 10-222k(b)(2)(C):**

**What it does** — These changes promote accountability by focusing on improving school climate on a school-by-school basis. This approach places the responsibility of creating an anti-bullying and climate strategy on the individual

school's climate committee. This promotes prevention at the school level by creating a more active role for the school climate committee. This also promotes parent and community participation and transparency by removing the requirement that reports of investigations be released to the Committee, which is currently interpreted by schools to violate the non-disclosure provisions of FERPA.

**Why the change** — The State Department of Education reported that school district plans do not tell us what each school is doing to respond to its school climate surveys to reduce incidents of bullying and to improve school climate generally. Furthermore, a school climate committee that has the ability to use school climate surveys to create a strategy for positive school climate would allow the school principal to focus on intervening in and investigating acts of alleged bullying.

**Proposed changes to Secs. 10-222d(b)(9):**

**What it does** — These changes protect the safety of the bullying target by clarifying that these meetings should be held separately. The recommended change also clarifies that the parents of the target should receive both information about specific measures being taken to protect the target, along with policies and procedures in place to protect the target and intervene with the bully.

**Why the change** — Principals and Superintendents reported that the paragraph requiring meetings with the parents of the bully and the target was being read as requiring that this meeting be held at the same time, with both the bully and the victim in the same room. Research does not support putting the families of the bully and the target together.

**Proposed change to Secs. 10-222d(b)(15):**

**What it does** — These changes promote the use of school resource officers to address acts that may rise to the level of a crime, if they are an available resource at a school, promoting diversion and intervention where possible. The word bullying is removed from this section to make clear that a principal does not need to wait to determine, after investigation, whether specific act were bullying in order to seek the involvement of law enforcement where there may have been a crime.

**Why the change** — After Newtown, many schools have chosen to employ school resource officers to promote safety and to build relationships between students and public safety officials.

**Proposed change to Secs. 10-222d(d):**

**What it does** — These changes would improve school safety and would allow school climate committee's the data they need to improve climate by annualizing the climate assessments. Climate data is essential to multi-tiered intervention logic, as well as other research-based bullying interventions.

**Why the change** — Having frequent, accurate and uniform assessments of school climate is essential to implementing research-based bullying interventions at the District, School and student level.

**Proposed change to Secs. 10-222d(e) (NEW):**

**What it does** — These changes would improve school climate and safety by promoting accountability at the school and District level, and the sharing of best practices statewide.

**Why the change** — Superintendents and school principals reported that it would be helpful to know what Districts and school are doing to improve school climate. Under current law, there is no requirement that District update their school climate plan based on learning from implemented programs or interventions or state and national best practices.

**Proposed change to Secs. 10-222g(9) and NEW SECTION (NEW):**

**What it does** — This change would promote school choice in improving school climate through access to resource and culturally competent curricula which focuses the most recent science on social-emotional learning, self-awareness and self-regulation.

Furthermore, a NEW SECTION would promote innovative prevention and positive school climate in the early years by promoting a 3-3 model for social emotional well-being, beginning in up to three of our districts which show persistent gaps in academic achievement.

**Why the change** — In the past few years, as research-based climate improvement and bullying intervention has taken hold, so too have the options available to schools to improve climate through a state-of-the-art interventions and trainings. The State Department of Education reports that it would like the flexibility to access innovative programs and private and philanthropic resources to provide assistance to school schools and districts that agree to pilot innovative programs.



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## SCHOOL CLIMATE RESEARCH

February 2013  
 By Amrit Thapa

Research highlight the following promising strategies for school climate improvement efforts:

1. Engage all stakeholders as active participants and agents of change.
2. Focus on long-term programming, impacts, infrastructure and support.
3. Create school networks to share best practices and discuss challenges.
4. Engage students at all stages of the process to build capacity and sustain reform efforts.
5. Create and share tools and information with teachers, administrators, staff and parents.
6. Establish a school climate policy agenda to support quality practices built on research.

### Overview

School climate reform, an evidence-based strategy, supports K-12 students, school personnel, parents/guardians and community members learning and working together to promote pro-social education. Done well, these efforts will result in even safer, more supportive, engaging, helpfully challenging and harmonious schools. The U.S. Department of Education, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the Institute for Educational Sciences, President Obama's Bully Prevention Partnership, the US Departments of Justice and Education's School Discipline Consensus project, a growing number of State Departments of Education and foreign educational ministries support and/or endorse school climate renewal as a strategy to increase student learning and achievement, enhance school connectedness, reduce high school dropout rates, prevent bullying and other forms of violence, and enhance teacher retention rates.

### School Climate Research

As early as a century ago educational reformers had recognized that the distinctive culture of a school affects the life and learning of its students (Perry, 1908; Dewey, 1916). However, the rise of systematic empirical study of school climate grew out of industrial/organizational research coupled with the observation that school-specific processes accounted for a great deal of variation in student achievement (Anderson, 1982; Kreft, 1993). Since then the research in school climate has been expanding systematically, and many countries are showing a keen interest in this field.

There is empirical evidence being documented on various aspects of school climate in several languages (for a summary, see Benbenisty & Astor, 2005; Cohen et al., 2009 in English; Debarbieux, 1996 in French; and Del Rey, Ortega & Feria, 2009 in Spanish).

The research on school climate overlaps with several fields, including social, emotional, intellectual, and physical safety; positive youth development, mental health, and healthy relationships; school connectedness and engagement; academic achievement; social, emotional, and civic learning; teacher retention; and effective school reform. Further, it must be understood that both the effects of school climate and the conditions that give rise to them are deeply interconnected, growing out of the shared experience of a dynamic ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ma, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009). In general, the research on school climate can be categorized on four or five essential areas of school climate: Safety, Relationships, Teaching and Learning, Institutional Environment, and the School Improvement Process (Cohen et al., 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey & Higgins-D'Alessandro, in press).

The rising interest and attention in school climate reform efforts in recent years is due to the following three factors (Thapa et al., in press). First, there is a growing body of empirical research that supports the notion that context matters: group trends, for example, norms, expectations, and belief systems shape individual experience and learning as well as influence all levels of relationships. Second, there is an increasing awareness that school climate reform supports effective violence prevention in general and bullying prevention efforts in particular. As a result, local, state, and federal interest in school climate reform as an effective, data driven and evidence-based process is emerging. Third, research-based prosocial educational

efforts are being given tremendous attention in recent years. These efforts include character education, social emotional learning, mental health promotion efforts, service learning and civic engagement, and others (for a compendium of the wide-range of interventions, see Brown, Corrigan, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2012). Moreover, school climate reform is a process that necessarily focuses on and supports students, parents/guardians, and educators in considering how effective current prosocial educational efforts are and how we can strengthen these instructional and intervention efforts.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that there are a number of limitations that influence current school climate research findings, concerned with definitions, models, and experimental methodologies. For example, comprehensive reviews by both Anderson (1982) and Freiberg (1999) highlighted that defining school climate was complicated by the fact that practitioners and researchers used a wide range of school climate definitions and models that were often more implicit than explicit in nature. Naturally, how we define school climate has implications for what we measure. There is not a national or international consensus about how to define "school climate," a "positive and sustained school climate," or the "school climate process" and the dimensions that need to be regularly measured in school climate research and improvement efforts. To some extent, this has stymied and continues to stymie the advancement of school climate research so necessary to inform school improvement efforts. In addition, it hampers the development of the field in general and measurement practices in particular.

School climate matters. Sustained positive school climate is associated with positive child and youth development, effective risk

prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention. There seems to be an abundant literature on school climate from different parts of the world that document a positive school climate having a powerful influence on the motivation to learn (Eccles et al., 1993), mitigating the negative impact of the socioeconomic context on academic success (Astor, Benbenisty, & Estrada, 2009), contributing to less aggression, violence and sexual harassment (Attar-Schwartz, 2009; Gregory, Cornell, Fan, Sheras, Shih, & Huang, 2010; Karcher, 2002), and acting as a protective factor for the learning and positive life development of young people (Ortega, Sanchez, Ortega Rivera, & Viejo, 2011). Furthermore, it is found that quality of the school climate contributes to academic outcomes as well as the personal development and well-being of pupils (Haahr, Nielsen, Hansen, & Jakobsen, 2005; OECD, 2009).

### **Strategies to Guide Effective Practice**

Following are some school climate practices and recommendations that can be implemented to effectively use the research summary and advance school climate research. These practices have evolved from the lessons learned and challenges identified during the recent School Climate Improvement Project (SCIP) in Queens, New York.

- Engage all members of the school community, including teachers, students, parents, administrators as active participants and agents for successful school climate improvement implementation.
- Focus on long-term programming, impacts, infrastructure and support to ensure school climate reform is sustainable.
- Create school networks to share best practices and provide a forum to discuss

challenges openly and honestly. While a number of schools feel isolated in their school climate reform efforts, networking ensures that schools continue to learn from each other to improve teaching, learning, and overall leadership activities.

- Engage students at all stages of the school cycle improvement process to build capacity and sustain reform efforts. This includes students as action researchers to collect and analyze school climate data.
- Create and share tools and information for teachers, administrators, staff and parents to promote a positive school climate.
- Establish a school climate policy agenda to support quality practices built on research.

### **Summary**

School Climate research is clearly evolving. The field demands rigorous and empirically sound research that focuses on relating specific aspects and activities of interventions to changes in specific components of school climate. We also need empirical evidence based on sound research techniques on how both interventions and climate affect specific socio-moral, emotional, civic, and cognitive development and the teaching and learning of both students and teachers. Understanding the interactions of these processes in the contexts of interventions will enable schools to successfully adapt interventions that have been shown to promote one or more of these positive outcomes. We need to translate these researches into smarter educational policies to transform low performing schools to better schools and to enhance the quality of lives of our students. The research in school climate points out the need for the individuals, educators in every school community and policy makers to work hand-in-hand to achieve these essential goals. Six effective practices are offered to support school climate integration and sustainability.

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**Suggested citation:** Thapa, A. (2013). School climate research. In Dary, T. & Pickeral, T. (ed) (2013) *School Climate Practices for Implementation and Sustainability*. A School Climate Practice Brief, Number 1, New York, NY: National School Climate Center.

*This School Climate Practice Brief is one of 11 briefs presenting the latest in research and best practice for effective school climate reform from leading experts. All School Climate Practice Briefs can be found at <http://www.schoolclimate.org/publications/practice-briefs.php>*

## Connecticut After School Network

### Testimony to the Education Committee In Support of Funding for Summer Learning Grants to Close the Achievement Gap (S.B. 476)

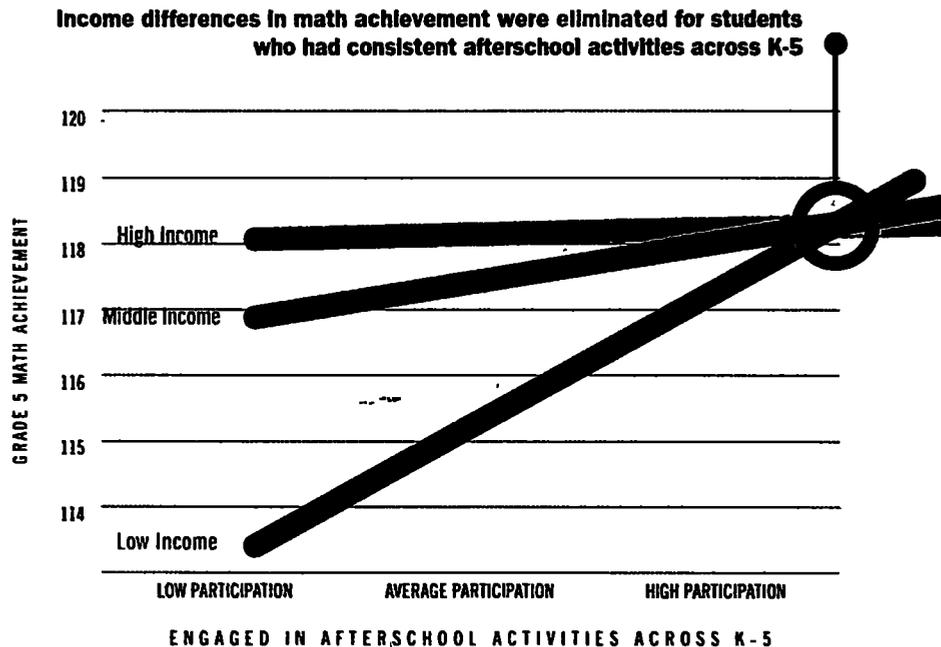
March 17, 2014

Submitted by Michelle Doucette Cunningham  
Executive Director, Connecticut After School Network

Good afternoon, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Michelle Doucette Cunningham, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut After School Network, a statewide alliance representing the thousands of children, parents and staff who participate in after school and summer programs all across the state.

I am here today to urge you to add language to Senate Bill 476, An Act Concerning the Academic Achievement Gap that would create new Summer Learning Grant program in the Department of Education budget.

After school and summer programs are one of the best tools in the state's arsenal for combatting the persistent achievement gap between high-income and low-income students. The latest national research by Deborah Vandell and her colleagues at University of California clearly shows that income differences in math achievement were eliminated for students who had consistent after-school activities across grades K-5 (see graph next page).

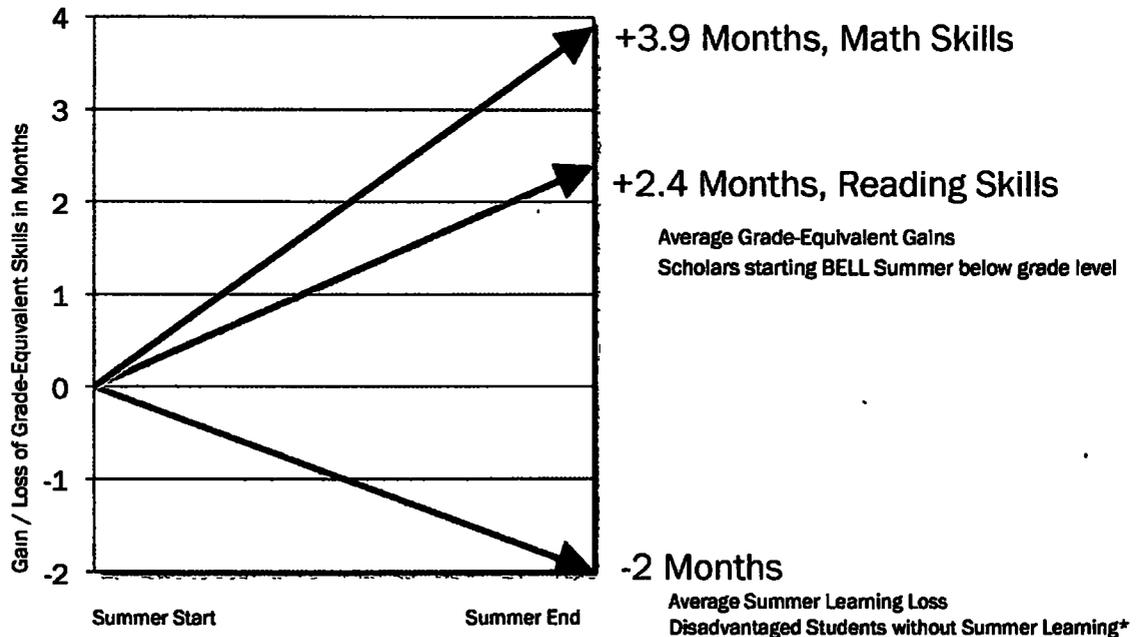


Pierce, K M., Auger, A and Vandell, D L. (April, 2013) Narrowing the Achievement Gap Consistency and Intensity of Structured Activities During Elementary School Unpublished paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Seattle, WA

Summer learning loss is a major contributor to the state's achievement gap, and I urge you to expand summer programs by creating a new competitive grant program that would allow Connecticut programs to replicate the successful BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life)

model, which started outside of Boston and has shown significant improvements in students reading and math levels. Specifically the types of programs we are hoping SDE will fund with these grants would blend rigorous small-group academic instruction in reading and math with hands-on enrichment courses in science, technology, creative arts, and fitness and health. Based upon the successful After School Grant program, the programs would require collaborative community partnerships and would provide a minimum of 240 hours of programming.

### AVERAGE SUMMER LEARNING GAINS OF UNDERPERFORMING SCHOLARS VS SUMMER LEARNING LOSS



\* Sources: McCombs, et al. (2011). Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children's Learning. Rand Education & The Wallace Foundation, and Cooper, Harris (2003) Summer Learning Loss: The Problem & Some Solutions. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education

The BELL Summer program helps scholars gain academic skills. Most students - and disadvantaged students, in particular - lack access to structured summer learning opportunities and as a result experience "summer learning loss."

Because these Summer Learning Programs are community-based, they are significantly more cost effective than other possible solutions to address the achievement gap. The average cost for this type of summer program is between \$800 and \$1500 per student, (\$3.33 - \$6.25 per hour), depending upon the level of in-kind services that are provided.

A typical day at a Summer Learning Program starts with a healthy breakfast and community-building events. Scholars then transition into classrooms, where certified teachers and trained teaching assistants lead small-group instruction in literacy and math. Staff use research-based curricula and apply data from computer adaptive assessments to differentiate instruction according to scholars' unique learning needs. After lunch, scholars rotate through a series of enrichment courses and activities focused on topics such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), creative arts, and health & exercise. Examples of courses include

robotics, digital music production, creative writing, drama, tennis, character development, and financial literacy.

Summer learning programs supported by these grants keep young people safe, help working families, and help students succeed in school and in life. The benefits are clear and well-documented — please expand the state's investment in these programs so that we can address the achievement gap in a way that is truly cost effective.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly  
Education Committee  
Testimony of Commissioner Stefan Pryor  
March 17, 2014

Sen. Stillman, Rep. Fleischmann, Sen. Boucher, Rep. Ackert, and members of the Education Committee, thank you for offering the opportunity to share some thoughts with you on a number of the bills on your agenda. I regret that I cannot join you today, but am certainly open to further dialogue around any of these issues.

**HB 5563: An Act Concerning the Technical High School System and Agricultural Science and Technology Education Centers**

Acknowledging that the Technical High School System now has its own governing board, we would appreciate the Committee's support for this legislation, which would permit the new board to oversee the reports submitted by the CTHSS system. We further appreciate the fact that the Committee is considering our proposal allowing the technical high schools to be eligible for all grant opportunities other public schools are open to.

**SB 472: An Act Concerning State Funding For Education and the Budgets of Boards of Education**

The Department appreciates the Committee's willingness to raise the minor, though important, language in the initial six sections. This will allow payments to proceed to districts for a number of grants as intended.

We would like to discuss the language in section 7 delaying the implementation of the Uniform Chart of Accounts. We believe this language may be unnecessary as we have been working diligently with stakeholders to ensure that in the first year – a transition year – the collection is not burdensome for districts, but will still provide us with necessary information to continue improving the system. In this first year we are asking districts to upload information in the way they always have, and we are making adjustments on our end to align the system accordingly. We join you in a commitment to relieve districts of burdens and mandates, and are open to a further dialogue on this issue.

**SB 473: An Act Concerning Magnet Schools**

The language in section 1 requiring magnet operators to notify parents of lottery results makes sense. We think this information is important for parents to be able to plan appropriately. We would note that the language in section 2 does not yet fully address our concerns around this issue. We have attached language submitted to the Committee, and ask that you consider substituting that language so that the Sheff Phase 3 settlement can be appropriately implemented.

**SB 476: An Act Concerning the Academic Achievement Gap**

The Department is supportive of opportunities for extended learning time for students, especially in our Alliance Districts and including full-day kindergarten. Of the 30 Alliance Districts, only 3 do not currently have full-day kindergarten. Several Alliance Districts have already chosen to use their additional funds to implement full-day kindergarten in their districts, so while this language may not be necessary, we are not opposed to it.

HB5561  
HB5564  
HB5566  
HB5567  
SR7  
HR4

We would also like to request the chance to discuss the extension of bilingual services for students to 60 months from the current 36 months. We join with you in support of strengthening services to English language learners. However, it's already the case that bilingual educators are a shortage area, and requiring additional time for students in this program would mean that we would need even more teachers to fulfill this goal.

**HB 5561: An Act Concerning State and Local Charter School Accountability and Transparency and Participation in Cooperative Arrangements**

We thank the Committee for raising the language approved by our State Board of Education regarding this subject. We think it is of vital importance that state and local charters be treated equally as pertains to their accountability and transparency. This legislation now ensures that local charter schools will be expected to follow the same accountability and transparency procedures regarding the posting of public information, chances for random annual financial audit, and the opportunity for cooperative agreements.

**HB 5564: An Act Concerning School Safety**

We appreciate this committee's continued attention to two important, and related, topics – school safety and school climate.

There are two new programs contemplated in this proposal – one creating a safe route to school program, and one creating a student safety line through United Way's 2-1-1. We are supportive of these concepts, but are concerned that there is not funding in the budget for either proposal. We would also welcome the opportunity to partner with the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection on these projects as a collaborating agency.

We would also like to comment on the new language regarding school climate plans. In our 2014 report to the General Assembly on school climate, one of our recommendations was to provide the Department with the authority to conduct reviews of the safe school climate plans (rather than just the authority to receive such plans). Additionally, we recommended an annual school climate survey (to begin in 2016 out of acknowledgement of the current administrative burdens upon districts), pilots in the area of social-emotional development for students, and updating the charge of the safe school climate committees to better focus on creating a positive school climate. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our observations and proposals in greater depth at a future point in time.

We are pleased to report that the Department has already engaged in some of the work this legislation suggests – i.e. the review of safe school climate plans submitted by districts. Already, we have reviewed submitted plans against minimum criteria, and we have notified districts as to the status of their plans accordingly. Formalizing our implicit authority to review plans via an explicit statutory provision is welcome. We believe it is important that districts review feedback and improve plans that do not appear to meet minimum requirements. However, we would like to discuss the provision requiring the adoption of a model plan for districts that do not meet this requirement, as suggested in the proposed legislation. Each district has unique needs, and a single model plan would likely not address such varied local needs. However, we would welcome language requiring an iterative process with districts, or enabling the Department to provide technical assistance in order to enable districts to meet minimum guidelines.



Mary C. Roberts  
Director

Testimony of Mary C. Roberts  
Director of CT Federation of Catholic School Parents

Committee on Education  
March 17, 2014

House Bill 5564, "An Act Concerning School Safety"

Good Morning, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and other distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Mary Roberts and I am the Director of the CT Federation of Catholic School Parents. I appreciate this opportunity to offer my comments in support of House Bill 5564, "An Act Concerning School Safety."

I have the honor of representing the 113 Catholic schools in the state of Connecticut, with 30,000 students in attendance and more than 2,000 dedicated teachers, administrators and employees working at our schools. We also have hundreds of volunteers helping us promote and enhance our educational and community service programs.

As part of my job, I travel across the state to speak with Catholic School Principals, Parents and students regarding the Legislation that could impact their Catholic School communities. In January, at one of my school visits, I learned that a certain town in CT had its public schools go into lockdown because a person with a gun was walking back and forth in front of one of the schools. The Catholic School in this town was not notified and it is across the street from where the person with a gun was spotted. Thankfully, the students were inside at an assembly, but had it been a nicer day, they would have been at recess and at risk for harm. As a parent of future Catholic school students, I want to ensure that my children are able to learn in a safe and nurturing environment, and I believe that supporting HB 5564 does just that.

Respectfully, we believe that improved safety for all school students—regardless of where they may go to school—should be a collective goal for the state of Connecticut. We applaud the Education Committee's efforts to include non-public schools in the school security funding available and ask you humbly to please continue to support HB 5564 and make the safety of every student in Connecticut a priority, regardless of where they may go to school.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Mary C. Roberts  
Director  
CT Federation of Catholic School Parents



**CT FEDERATION**  
OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS

Mary C. Roberts  
Director

Testimony of Tracy Heim  
Parent and Development Consultant, St Rose of Lima School, Newtown  
Committee on Education  
March 17, 2014

House Bill 5564, "An Act Concerning School Safety"

Good Morning, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischman and other distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Tracy Heim and I am the parent of three students at St Rose of Lima School, Newtown and I also act as Development Coordinator for the school and I join the CT Federation of Catholic School Parents in an effort to support House Bill 5564, An Act Concerning School Safety.

On December 14, 2012, the St Rose of Lima School community was directly impacted as a result of the shooting event that occurred at Sandy Hook School. I happen to be one of three parents present in our school that day, and my experiences of the events as they unfolded are still quite present in my mind today. I have watched with heartache what the continuing effects have been on my children, their school mates, and our community.

Due to budget constraints, Newtown will not include St. Rose of Lima School within its provision of an officer onsite for the each of the public schools in our town. A significant portion of our school community finds the presence of the police on campus to be comforting. And while in the months immediately following 12/14 we were provided police presence on our campus, this concluded with the end of the school year in June of 2013. Since that time, it is only through parent and other constituent generosity that we have been able to cover the cost of having an officer on our campus for four hours on Friday, which is when the students are walked from our main school to our parish so that they may attend mass.

I am here today on behalf of all the parents and students at St. Rose of Lima School in Newtown, to share my support of the Education Committee and appreciate that Bill 5564 is being proposed. All students, whether public or non-public school educated should and must be afforded the same access to funding for security enhancements at their school. Each Connecticut child is equal, their safety and security while at school should be equal as well and the playing field should be level.

I respectfully request that the Education Committee support HB 5564 and allow non-public and Catholic schools be allowed to access the grant funding.

Thank you very much for your consideration.  
Respectfully submitted,  
Tracy Heim  
CT Federation of Catholic School Parents  
St. Rose of Lima School, Parent  
Marketing & Development Consultant

**SENATOR CARLO LEONE**  
*Twenty-Seventh District*

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**State of Connecticut**

**SENATE**

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Banks Committee  
Veterans' Affairs Committee

*Member*  
Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee  
Transportation Committee

**TESTIMONY OF STATE SENATOR CARLO LEONE RE:  
HB 5564 AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL SAFETY**

Good Morning Chairs Sen. Stillman, Rep. Fleischman and Ranking members Sen. Boucher, Rep. Ackert and members of the Education committee. I want to thank you for considering HB 5564 **An Act Concerning School Safety** and specifically for including sections 4, 5, and 6 on the establishment and submission of safe school climate plans and its importance in reducing bullying behavior in our schools.

Last year, in in my community and nearby, the effects of bullying behavior has led to suicides in our schools. In one extreme case, after the suicide, it was made public that the bullying behavior was known to many for far too long but no direct intervention occurred. Rather than submit to the ongoing behavior, this student chose to end his life. It never should have happened. But it did, and we must act.

I believe we must do all we can to prevent the harmful effects and behaviors that result from bullying. This behavior leads to isolation, depression, fear, even aggression and retaliation. Ultimately and to more times than necessary if unaddressed, it leads to suicide.

The measures put forth in HB 5564 require the submission of a plan for the schools on what needs to be done and shared with students and administrators. If the plan is rejected it must simply be resubmitted until approved and again shared so that all can know its effects, and more importantly, what do when it manifests in our schools.

I thank you for your consideration, and I offer my support in passage of this important piece of legislation.



## State of Connecticut

### SENATE

STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**SENATOR KEVIN KELLY**  
TWENTY-FIRST SENATE DISTRICT

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RANKING MEMBER  
AGING COMMITTEE  
INSURANCE AND REAL ESTATE COMMITTEE

MEMBER  
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Education Committee  
In Support of

H.B. No. 5564 An Act Concerning School Safety

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Boucher, Representative Ackert and members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H B No 5564 An Act Concerning School Safety

Following the tragedy at Sandy Hook, the state and municipalities took a critical look at school safety infrastructure. Last session, the General Assembly took significant action to help protect our schools with the establishment of school security infrastructure grants.

Our intention was and is to protect our children and make every school a safe place to live, learn and grow. However, by leaving private schools out of the equation, we are missing the mark and not fulfilling our intentions.

We must extend school security grants to support every school in Connecticut, public or private

To make our schools safe, significant infrastructure improvements need to be considered. These improvements, including installing surveillance cameras, ballistic glass, entry door buzzer systems, panic alarms or other systems, can be very costly.

The investment is worth it. But, securing the funding to make these changes is challenging, for any school. If the state did not offer support, many schools would go without any safety improvements. I do not believe it is fair or responsible to limit this funding to only one group of schools. Parents should feel safe sending their child to school, and students should feel secure every day, in any school setting.

By dedicating at least 10 percent of funding to non-public schools we can better distribute available funds to reach every child in Connecticut.

In my district, this would help schools that serve integral roles in our community take necessary steps to keep our children safe and secure. Schools like St. Jude in Monroe, St. Joseph and St. Lawrence schools in Shelton, as well as St. James and St. Mark regional schools in Stratford could all be helped.

It is our responsibility to do everything we can to make each and every school in our state safe.

Thank you for raising this bill and for the opportunity to testify today.