

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5329 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTICUT EDUCATION INNOVATION
Title: GRANT PROGRAM.

Vote Date: 3/16/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/4/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill creates a Connecticut Education Innovation Grant Program to help schools test and expand ideas that improve learning. Starting in FY 27, it offers planning and implementation grants focused on areas like early literacy, math, tutoring, career pathways, and family engagement. Schools can request limited rule waivers, must report results, and the state tracks progress for accountability. Grants are exempt from minimum budget requirements, making participation easier.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute expands the types of proposals that can receive priority for grant funds and specifies statutes that the commissioner may not waive.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Connecticut State Department of Education, Commissioner, Charlene Tucker Strongly believes that schools and districts should be seeking to innovate in all aspects of their work. With this new stream of funding, however, would come significant administrative processing burdens, according to Ms. Tucker. The Department cannot support appropriations above the proposed Governor's budget but recommends that an allocation be made to fund existing initiatives.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

East Hartford Public Schools, Supervisor of Secondary Science, Laurie Abo Supports the bill and vouches for programs that generate top-notch research and professional preparation. Ms. Abo states that the results of these programs are impressive: with confidence and academic persistence on the rise, families and students are better equipped for a professional career.

Connecticut Cradle to Career Coalition, Policy Civic Engagement Director, Kathleen Callahan Appreciates how HB 5329 works to improve outcomes by establishing a grant program. She believes the legislation aligns with her coalition's priorities of literacy/numeracy, high-dosage tutoring, college/career navigation, early pathways, and community engagement. Ms. Callahan is hopeful that a non-lapsing fund would allow the state to support multi-year implementation of strategies.

Connecticut Business & Industry Association, Policy Director, Danielle Cloud Supports the bill, particularly its provisions on prioritizing college, career, and service navigation and early pathways for middle/high school students. Ms. Cloud believes employers face pressing workforce challenges and that grants have the potential to support students early on.

Project Oceanology, Executive Director, John Andrew Ely Asks that Project Oceanology be an eligible partner as the state looks to identify, support, and scale innovative education models. Mr. Ely references his center's relationships with urban/rural school districts and various programs, from the lobster trap recoveries to participation in Save the Sound's Unified Water study.

ConnCAN, Executive Director, Steven Hernandez:

School and State Finance Project, Deputy Executive Director, Michael Morton:

Supports the bill as districts face persistent challenges that call for new approaches. Mr. Hernandez adds that a well-designed innovation fund will accelerate improvements in the following ways: enabling districts to pilot solutions, supporting cross-district learning, allowing time-bound regulatory flexibility, and building district capacity.

Special Education Equity Kids of Connecticut, President, John Flanders:

Milestones Behavioral Services, CEO, Lisa Gregory:

Benhaven School, Director, Karen Helene:

Solterra Academy, Executive Director of Education, Gwen Killheffer:

St. Vincent's Special Needs School Program, Director of Education, Karen King:

Rushford Day School, Principal, Alexandria Lazzari:

Options, Director, Scott Wells:

Emphasize how, currently, an achievement gap exists between students with and without disabilities. They are confident that a well-funded grant could pay large dividends by seriously addressing this discrepancy, requesting that private special education schools be approved as eligible recipients.

Educators for Excellence Connecticut, Executive Director, Daniel Pearson Support the bill and grant program establishment, adding how its focus on innovative staffing and compensation models could help unblock stagnancy, address teacher vacancies, diversify the workforce, and deliver a deserving education to students.

CT State Community College, Employee, Aaron Morabito Supports the bill and believes students must have access to properly funded and safe learning environments. Mr. Morabito finds that good college preparedness is a sign of a successful K-12 education.

Connecticut Area Health Education Center, Volunteer, Kathi Ellison:

Mother, Jessica Cohen:

Both involved in the program believe that further funding will continue to improve outcomes by increasing motivation, persistence, a sense of community, and engagement with technology.

Mother, Mercedes Blye with two children at different learning stages, Ms. Blye shares that it would be great if schools received additional funding. With additional resources, she believes districts could accommodate the evolving needs.

Father, Franklin Mora Testifies to the importance of childhood development programs. He found them to be accessible and supportive in raising his kids' understanding of culture, heritage, literacy, confidence, engagement, and sense of possibility. He argues these measures help families and students "build strong futures."

Mother, Olga Pagan Writes in support of expanding funds, as resources have previously allowed her children to feel a sense of belonging, even offering instruction in their home language. She attests to the quality help programs like this are bringing to families before challenges become crises.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Education Association, President, Kate Dias Have numerous questions about the proposed grants, including how and in what way "High Dosage Tutoring" (HDT) is delivered to a student. Additionally, the CEA cannot support "innovation grants" as they are considered loosely defined and disapprove of the bill's statutory waivers.

Anonymous 652:

Anonymous 653:

Oppose the bill because they believe that parents have the right to decide how their children attend school and to what extent the government gets involved.

Anonymous 866 Cannot support HB 5329, calling it "redundant" legislation.

Reported by: Zachary Robinson

Date: 3/26/2026