

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-312 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING ASSORTED REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION
Title: STATUTES.

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:

This bill is looking to support various areas of schooling by implementing a process to approve machine / AI instruction, mandating a student behavioral management course for educators, and establishing an American Sign Language (ASL) Education Working Group. Through this bill, the committee hopes to benefit student learning, support the growing ASL community in our public schools, and to better the overall learning environment.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute (1) eliminates secs. 1 and 2 of underlying bill (AI literacy product/app and student behavior management guidance) and (2) adds new section 3, which increases the monthly health insurance subsidy for certain teachers receiving a disability allowance from the TRS and participating in the group health insurance plan offered by such member's last employing board of education.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Charlene Tucker, Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education

This testimony provides a balanced perspective on SB 312, addressing all three key sections:

Regarding Section 1, the Commissioner emphasizes that while technology can support literacy, evidence-based instruction depends on skilled teacher judgment, responsive feedback,

language development, and student engagement. These are capabilities that machine-based systems cannot fully replicate. The Commissioner states that Connecticut has increased investment in K–3 literacy curriculum, assessments, and professional learning; and introducing a new approval process for AI literacy tools, risks diverting resources, fragmenting efforts, and undermining ongoing implementation.

For Section 2, the Commissioner notes that mandating a behavior management course through legislation, may conflict with the ongoing work of the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board (which is charged with creating coherent, research-based educator preparation regulations). Imposing a course now, could bypass this deliberative process.

Lastly, regarding Section 3, the Department supports the expansion of American Sign Language (ASL) as a world language where districts choose to offer it. The testimony encourages continued growth in ASL programming, while seeking clarification on the need for the working group requirements proposed in the bill.

Amy Porter, Commissioner, Department of Aging & Disability Services

The Department of Aging & Disability Services testifies in strong support of SB 312, particularly Section 3. The Commissioner notes that ASL is the third most studied language in the U.S. (with over 1,600 Connecticut students enrolled) and yet the state has very few certified teachers and interpreters, including only three interpreters for the Deafblind community. This working group would provide recommendations on curriculum, teacher certification, and educator preparation; and would ensure consistent, culturally accurate instruction across districts. The Commissioner emphasizes that the legislation would strengthen recruitment, training, and certification pipelines for ASL teachers and interpreters.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Anonymous 68, Anonymous 68

This testimony shows support for this bill.

John Board, Chair, ASL Expansion Task Force

In this testimony, this author supports Section 3 of SB 312. He claims that Section 3 helps to build a standards-and-pipeline backbone that can help support expansion of ASL education. The author states that inconsistent ASL offerings across Connecticut are due to a lack of qualified educators, and states that the bill addresses this concern by creating a coordinated pipeline involving state agencies and higher education. He highlights three key benefits: increasing the supply of ASL teachers, strengthening the interpreter pipeline, and expanding student career opportunities. This author supports the creation of a statewide working group to develop curriculum guidance, certification standards, and educator preparation aligned with national frameworks.

Linda Pelletier, Faculty & Coordinator, University of Connecticut

The author of this testimony strongly supports Section 3 of HB 312, to create an American Sign Language (ASL) Education Working Group. This author discusses the growth of ASL programs at UConn and across Connecticut high schools. This growth is driven by student interest in the language's cultural, linguistic, and community value. However, she notes a shortage of certified ASL instructors, with some schools forced to delay, cap, or discontinue programs due to lack of qualified teachers. The proposed Working Group would bring together educators, Deaf community members, higher education representatives, and policymakers to develop strategies for expanding ASL education. This Working Group would provide guidance on curriculum, teacher preparation, certification, and alternative pathways for fluent or native ASL users. This testimony also urges passage of HB 312 to strengthen ASL education and expand opportunities for Connecticut students.

Luisa Soboleski, President, Connecticut Association of the Deaf

This testimony strongly supports Section 3 of Raised HB 312. The author emphasizes that ASL is a full, natural language with its own grammar, structure, and cultural foundation, yet districts lack consistent standards for teacher qualifications and curriculum. Many instructors have limited proficiency and cultural knowledge, which undermines long-term language acquisition and professional pathways for students. A working group would align Connecticut's ASL programs with national standards, ensure qualified educators, and provide culturally competent instruction, strengthening both access and rigor. The author urges support to improve educational quality, inclusion, and communication for Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities statewide.

Mercedes Blye, Mother, Read School

The author described significant resource challenges and urges increased funding. As a parent of two children with different educational needs, the author emphasized the difficulty of ensuring both receive adequate support in an underfunded system. Comparing her experience to schools in the Danbury area, she discusses disparities in resources, including concerns about outdated food, frequent weather-related closures, limited transportation, safety issues, and insufficient staffing. This testimony calls on lawmakers to provide more funding to improve conditions for students and enable teachers to effectively meet diverse learning needs.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Anonymous 58, Anonymous 58

In this testimony, the author emphasizes on children having an in-person educator rather than a "machine-based system". This author is a special needs teacher, as well as parent, and suggests that struggling readers need less screen time and more face-to-face time with teachers.

Anonymous 652, Anonymous 652

Anonymous 653, Anonymous 653

These testimonies talk about parental rights when it comes to schooling and vaccines. The author(s) claim that these rights to decided what's best for your kids should not have the government involved.

Anonymous 866, Anonymous, 866

This testimony states opposition towards the bill, stating that the legislation is redundant and worthless.

Micheal Bartone, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Central Connecticut State University

This testimony opposes Sections 1 and 2 of SB 312. He criticizes Section 1 for relying on machine learning and data-driven approaches. He warns that this may reduce reading to simply “getting correct answers”, encourage more of a dependence on technology, and raise student privacy concerns. Regarding Section 2, he states that classroom management cannot be taught through a single course or standardized “best practices.”. The author says classroom management skills depend on teaching quality, student relationships, and educational philosophy. This testimony raises concerns about how the course would be defined, who would teach it, and how it would fit into existing college requirements. While opposing these sections, he expresses full support for Section 3 on American Sign Language education.

Elisabeth Campbell

The author, a parent of a fourth-grade student with dyslexia, oppose Section 1 of SB 312. They are arguing that computer-based reading programs cannot meet the individualized needs of children with language-based learning disabilities. They explain that dyslexia involves difficulties with decoding sounds and letters, which require targeted, personalized instruction rather than generalized software. They claim that consistent, one-on-one teaching and collaboration between educators have been the only way to improve on both academic performance and confidence. While they acknowledge that assistive technology can be helpful as a supplement, they suggest it should not replace direct instruction.

Marie Cheiban, Associate Dean, Southern Connecticut State University

Adam Goldberg, Chair – Curr. & Learning Dept., Southern Connecticut State University

Judith Terpstra, Professor, Southern Connecticut State University

The authors oppose Section 2 of SB 312 as currently written, specifically the requirement for a course on “student behavior management” in educator preparation programs. This testimony argues that the term “behavior management” may promote outdated, control-based approaches, rather than student-centered practices. The authors advocate for training that emphasizes positive behavior supports, restorative practices, and inclusive, evidence-based strategies aligned with current research on social-emotional development. The authors stress the importance of preparing teachers to support diverse learners, including neurodivergent students and those affected by trauma. They recommend revising the bill’s language to clearly reflect these modern, student-centered approaches.

Dr. Harvey Corson, Chair Emeritus, Connecticut Association of the Deaf

This testimony is in support of Section 3 of SB 312. Taking from his experience with a statewide task force on ASL education, he highlights the growing demand for American Sign Language, noting its popularity nationwide and increasing enrollment in Connecticut schools (despite inconsistent access across districts). He talks about a significant shortage of qualified ASL teachers and interpreters, which limits program expansion and access for Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing communities. He explains that stronger systems are needed to build educator and interpreter pipelines. The task force recommends establishing an ASL Education Working Group to develop curriculum guidance, certification standards, alternative pathways, and workforce partnerships. These recommendations have broad support from state and community organizations.

Elly Fatehi, PharmD MPH

The author opposes the use of AI and increased technology in classrooms, arguing that education is not broken and does not need technological solutions. This testimony claims that the rise of classroom technology has coincided with declines in student mental health and academic performance. Citing research, they assert that digital tools often impair rather than improve learning and that educational technology has largely failed to deliver on its promises. The testimony emphasizes that investing in unproven technological tools diverts resources away from other more effective methods (i.e. teachers and textbooks).

Allison Quirion, Founder, Decoding Dyslexia

This testimony opposes aspects of SB 312 that the author believes prioritize technology and product protection over effective, evidence-based instruction for students with dyslexia (and other reading challenges). The author argues that the bill appears to point to specific products rather than focusing on what the research shows will work best for literacy education. The author brings out concerns that Connecticut has not yet implemented earlier dyslexia legislative mandates (meaningful compliance measures, accountability systems, and evidence-based teacher preparation) despite repeated statutory deadlines and advocacy.

Diane Willcutts, Director, Education Advocacy, LLC

This testimony opposes Section 1 of SB 312. The author argues there is no need for state-approved computer-based literacy instruction. They also express concern around promoting AI instruction for struggling readers who require high-dosage, teacher-led tutoring. They emphasize that effective reading interventions rely on human expertise, supervised practice, and evidence-based instruction. The testimony urges the state to focus on proven teacher-driven literacy supports rather than adopting AI “shortcuts” for students who need more help.

Kim Zolvik, Parent

This testimony opposes Section 1 of SB 312 and questions the efficacy and safety of introducing AI-based literacy tools. They argue that before adopting expensive AI tools, the state should address root causes of reading struggles - such as staffing, teacher training, and foundational literacy instruction - rather than relying on AI as a “Hail Mary” solution to problems already identified in SB 220.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Kate Dias, President, Connecticut Education Association (CEA)

The Connecticut Education Association (CEA) opposes Section 1 of SB 312, expressing concern over the use of machine learning and AI in literacy instruction. This testimony argues that trained educators are best equipped to teach reading and should be central to any literacy solutions. The CEA also raises concerns about proposed grants tied to technology-based programs like virtual “high-dosage tutoring.”. They state that such models may rely on non-certified instructors and lack strong evidence of effectiveness. Citing recent research, they warn that increased classroom screen time is associated with declining literacy and cognitive skills. Additionally, the CEA opposes the “innovation grants” in HB 5329, criticizing their vague structure, reliance on technology, and potential for statutory waivers that could undermine educational standards and labor protections.

Andrew Feinstein, Legislative Chair, SEEK

SEEK supports Section 2 of SB 311, arguing that exclusionary discipline undermines schools’ duty to educate all children and often increases misbehavior and alienation. They speak about the disproportionate impact on Black students and students with disabilities, as well as the concerning number of suspensions for very young children. SEEK advocates for limiting exclusions, particularly for students in grades K–2, ensuring trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate interventions, and expanding referrals to support services for students with serious behavioral issues, rather than relying on suspension or expulsion.

John Flanders, President, SEEK

In Section 1 of SB-312, SEEK has serious concerns about any attempt to move literacy instruction to a machine-based system. The author believes that effective literacy instruction comes from a trained human teacher who understands the science of reading. The fact that well-financed vendors of on-line applications say that their product can be “effective” is not convincing to the author. In Section 2, this testimony states that all teacher candidates should be trained in classroom management and that the use of the term “behavior management” is inherently reactive.

Stacy Tie, Special Education Advocate, SEEK

This author opposes aspects of SB 312 on behalf of families and advocates for students with disabilities in Connecticut. She argues that allowing the Department of Education to approve machine-learning literacy tools, risks prioritizing unproven technological solutions over the individualized supports students with disabilities need. They express concern that without clear safeguards and commitments to evidence-based practice, the legislation could inadvertently divert resources or attention away from critical special education needs. SEEK urges lawmakers to ensure that literacy interventions, and other reforms in SB 312, are here to

enhance rather than undermine the quality, equity, and individualized nature of education for students with disabilities.

Drew Michael McWeeney, Ed. M., Assistant Professor, CT State College

This testimony offers mixed opinions on SB 312, opposing Section 1 while supporting Sections 2, 3, and 4. The author states that Section 1 places too much emphasis on AI-driven literacy tools, equating them with human instruction and undermining the role of trained educators. He warns that this could shift resources away from hiring reading specialists and weaken the foundation of human-centered teaching.

In contrast, the testimony strongly supports requiring a classroom management course. The author states that new teachers often struggle in this area and would benefit from consistent, formal training. Additionally, he supports expanding American Sign Language education, placing emphasis on its cultural and linguistic importance, its role in promoting inclusion, and addressing workforce shortages.

Faith Sweeney, Bridgeport Resident, Westport Teacher

This testimony, submitted by a former literacy interventionist and coach, comments on SB 312, Section 1, cautioning against overreliance on machine-learning literacy tools. While supportive of improving reading outcomes through early identification, targeted intervention, and progress monitoring, this testimony states that automated systems cannot replicate the diagnostic nuance, comprehension assessment, or contextual judgment provided by skilled teachers. They note that effective literacy instruction integrates decoding, language comprehension, vocabulary, background knowledge, and executive function, which machines alone cannot fully comprehend or teach. The testimony recommends that any machine-based tools be explicitly supplemental, not replace certified educators, and align with evidence-based, teacher-driven instruction grounded in the science of reading.

Cecil Tengtenga, Associate Director, CT AHEC

The Connecticut Area Health Education Center (CT AHEC) submitted testimony in support of multiple education bills, including S.B. 7, S.B. 34, S.B. 35, S.B. 139, S.B. 140, S.B. 141, S.B. 142, S.B. 143 and related infrastructure measures. This testimony emphasizes that equitable school funding, strong special education support, and modern facilities are essential to student success and community wellbeing. Citing on its statewide work in schools, CT AHEC highlighted the importance of increasing the ECS funding to reflect real costs, fully reimbursing special education expenses, and investing in student supports (such as mental health services, STEM programming, and career pathways). The organization also stressed the value of safe, updated school infrastructure and recommended leveraging existing school-based programs and partnerships to implement these reforms effectively. The author urges lawmakers to take comprehensive action to strengthen educational equity and long-term workforce development.

Reported by: ReAnna Jean Adams

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