



2024 CEA Priorities Summaries and Talking Points

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1. Salary Enhancements

Problem: *Connecticut is facing a teacher shortage crisis as fewer young adults enter the teacher preparation programs and worsening teaching conditions push current teachers to leave for other fields or retirement.*

Short Plain Language Description: *CEA proposes legislation to increase recruitment and retention of teachers by:*

1. *Increasing teachers' salaries so that they are comparable to other similarly educated professionals. CEA proposes establishing a minimum starting salary and tiered salary enhancement and creating a teaching enhancement fund at the State level to help municipalities fund any mandated increases.*
2. *Providing an assumption of step movement for all eligible teachers. CEA proposes protecting teachers' assumption of annual step movement (guaranteed 1 step per year to max).*

Talking Points

- **In Connecticut, there are school districts paying first year teachers less than \$42,000/year and more than half of the beginning salaries fall below the income threshold to qualify for certain state assistance (HUSKY B).**
- **Most teachers spend hundreds of dollars of their own money each year to purchase school supplies for their students.**
- **Teachers shouldn't have to work two or three jobs to make ends meet.**
- **Teachers are leaving the profession for other jobs with more pay, better working conditions, and respect.**
- **A 2023 CEA survey of teachers found that nearly three-quarters (74%) are planning to leave the profession or retire early.**
- **Connecticut voters support teachers' priorities. A 2023 CEA survey of Connecticut voters found:**
 - **In order to address the teacher shortage, 83% of voters say we must increase teacher salaries.**
 - **90% of voters believe teachers should be paid more than or comparable to professions with similar education and training requirements.**
 - **65% of voters say teachers in Connecticut are not paid enough.**

2. Ensure Fairness in the Workplace

Problem: School districts in Connecticut use an outdated and unfair system for addressing workplace discipline for certified employees. Without adequate and fair due process, educators experience arbitrary discipline and even termination for incidents found to be baseless. The result is a worsening of working conditions that makes fewer people want to enter and continue in the teaching profession.

Short Plain Language Description: CEA proposes the following revisions to statutory due process requirements:

1. **Require “Just Cause” Standard of Discipline:** Amend the Teacher Tenure and Dismissal Law to require employers to apply a “Just Cause” standard, which guides discipline in a way that is progressive and fair.
2. **Make Neutral Arbitrator Decision in Terminations Binding:** Replace the non-binding arbitration recommendation in a termination proceeding with a final binding decision by a neutral arbitrator.
3. **Revise Mandated Reporting Laws:** Provide mandated reporters with the ability to assess situations and make a good faith determination before initiating reporting.

Talking Points

- Connecticut’s teacher termination law is unfair to teachers. Teachers facing termination should have the right to be heard in front of an impartial hearing officer who has the authority to render a legally binding decision.
- Under the existing process, impartial hearing officers possess no real authority, and their determinations can easily be overruled by a Board of Education.
- Current mandated reporting requirements do not allow for educators to ask questions prior to filing a report and, as a result, DCF faces a huge backlog of cases and are unable to adequately investigate legitimate complaints.

3. Provide Educators with Acknowledgment for COVID-19 Service

Problem: *Teachers made many of the same sacrifices and took similar risks to other public workers when they returned to work in schools during the pandemic. Yet teachers have not received “Hero Pay” benefits provided to other essential workers or any other form of credit for their efforts. The lack of Hero Pay compensation is resulting in further discouragement among educators at a time when teacher recruitment and retention is already at a critical juncture.*

Short Plain Language Description: *CEA proposes acknowledging teachers’ critical role in providing quality education during the pandemic by offering some form of financial compensation in the form of Hero Pay, pension credit, or tax credit.*

Talking Points

- **During the pandemic and beyond, teacher showed selfless dedication to their students. Helping to feed them, coming up with new innovative ways to keep them engaged and motivated and teachers put themselves and their families at risk for their students.**
- **Teachers were heroes for all they did for their students.**
- **The lack of Hero Pay for educators is part of the overall pattern of not sufficiently valuing the teaching profession.**
- **Teachers who worked during the pandemic did not receive Hero Pay as other essential workers did.**
- **A COVID-19 compensation (Hero Pay, pension credit, or tax credit) would acknowledge the risks taken by educators for teaching during the pandemic while sending a signal that Connecticut values our teachers and the teaching profession.**

4. Kindergarten Start Age

Problem: *Recently, efforts have been made to delay the implementation of important legislation raising the kindergarten start age to 5 by September 1. This change brought Connecticut in line with the vast majority of states.*

During the 2023 session, the CT General Assembly approved a change in the kindergarten start date for Connecticut students requiring that they must be at least 5 years of age by September 1st beginning in the 2024-25 school year to be enrolled in kindergarten.

The act also permits children under age 5 to be enrolled upon a written request by their parent or guardian and a determination by the school principal and appropriate certified staff that attending would be developmentally appropriate for the child.

Short Plain Language Description: *Connecticut has made the right call by raising the minimum starting age for students entering kindergarten and delaying implementation would only prolong the problems the original legislation addresses.*

Talking Points

- **Children who start kindergarten later typically show improved academic outcomes and experience.**
- **Children who start kindergarten too early experience negative social and psychological effects.**
- **There are long term negative academic impacts when students start kindergarten before they are socially and emotionally or cognitively ready.**
- **Connecticut has made the right call by raising the minimum starting age for students entering kindergarten and delaying the implementation plan would only prolong the problems the original legislation addresses.**
- **Most districts have already taken the steps necessary to contact parents of impacted children and have adjusted for the waiver and additional modifications needed to address the changes.**

5. Teachers Retirement Board (TRB) Elections

Problem: Last year, PA 23-63 added two elected retirees to the TRB, but excluded active teachers from having a vote in their election. This disenfranchisement runs contrary to the election of other retired and active board members.

Short Plain Language Description: CEA proposes aligning the election of all four seats for retired teachers on the TRB and allowing active teachers to vote in the election of the two new retiree seats.

Talking Points

- Ensure that active teachers and retirees all have equal opportunity to participate in fair & transparent TRB elections by consolidating the election dates (into a single election date), and ensure that all participants get a vote, regardless of active or retiree status.

Background

TRB Board Composition (4 year Terms)

| Members (all have voting rights) | Nominated By | Elected by |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| State Treasurer | ex officio | NA |
| OPM Secretary | ex officio | NA |
| Commissioner of Education | ex officio | NA |
| Chief Elected Municipal Officer | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Public Member | Gov appointment | NA |
| Active Teacher (1985) | Actives | All |
| Active Teacher (1985) | Actives | All |
| Active Teacher (1991) | Actives | All |
| Retired Teacher (1991) | Retirees | All |
| Retired Teacher (1991) | Retirees | All |
| Active Teacher (2011 – Union Member) | Actives | All |
| Retired Teacher (2023 - must be pension recipient) | Retirees | Retirees |
| Retired Teacher (2023 - must be pension recipient) | Retirees | Retirees |

Retiree Health Fund Revenue Sources:

| Active Teachers Contribution | State Budget | Retiree Premiums |
|------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1.25% of salary | Approx 1/3 of cost | Vary by plan option |
| \$ 104 Million | \$ 16 Million | |

Retiree Health Plan Participation and Costs:

| Medicare Eligible | Medicare Advantage | Medicare Supplement |
|--|--|---|
| Individual Retiree and/or spouse: 65+ | (87% of retirees) \$90 p/m (33% of actual cost) State Subsidy= \$72 (included) | (13% of retirees) \$332 p/m (33% of actual cost) State Subsidy= \$72 (included) |
| Non-Medicare Eligible: | Can purchase local BOE plan at cost, less \$220 pp/m TRB subsidy | |

6. Protect Teachers' Retirement

Problem: Retired educators have paid their fair share and deserve their entitled and hard-earned benefits. The same is true for our active teachers who have planned for their retirements around these same promises. At times of financial uncertainty, certain individuals and organizations have promoted savings through cuts to these promised benefits while not considering the devastating impact to our retirees.

Short Plain Language Description: CEA supports efforts to ensure that all retirees receive their benefits including those to raise the income limits of state income tax exemption for teachers' pensions.

CEA will continue to monitor issues relating to teacher retirement, including funding, the TRB, and health care and other benefits for retirees.

Talking Points

- We need to take care of our current and future retired educators by ensuring that the State continues to appropriate the actuarially required amount to the pension and retiree health funds.
- Raise the threshold state income exemption for teachers' pensions to ensure that all retirees are provided the same opportunity to receive their hard-earned pensions.
- We oppose any weakening of the current defined benefit plan, including instituting any new tiers or proposals to shift the cost of educators' pension plans from the state to municipalities.