

Dear Neighbor,

The Connecticut General Assembly has passed measures to improve education state-wide. As you read this newsletter, you will see that these initiatives, ranging from school loans to safety, are realistic, concrete, and vital to the growth of our children and our state.

I hope that you enjoy a healthy, happy new year! If you have any questions or need help on a matter, please feel free to call me at (860) 240-8585. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Rep. Joseph C. Serra



State Representative Joseph C. Serra

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Rep. Joseph C. Serra

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TEACHING OUR CHILDREN HOW DEMOCRACY WORKS

Children are very impressionable and, given the opportunity to learn about the branches of government, how laws are made, the election process and citizenship, it may spark their interest in the great nation in which we live and enhance their knowledge of our rich and powerful history. Public Act 07-138, An Act Concerning Democracy Education in Elementary Schools, requires public and private schools to provide a program on democracy for students in the fourth and fifth grades. Students will learn U.S. History and, if the student does not receive a passing grade in this subject, will be prohibited from graduating.

SCHOOL SAFETY

School districts applying for a state school construction grant on or after July 1, 2008 for a new school or a major alteration, extension, renovation, or replacement of a school will be required to include in the project plans security infrastructure for any entrances involved.



In addition, by colleges, universities, and private occupational schools are required to have emergency response plans and, annually thereafter, submit their plans to the public safety (DPS) and emergency management and homeland security (DEMHS) commissioners, as well as local first-responders. The institution must consult local first-responders in developing their plans, and each plan must include a method for notifying the institution's students, employees, and visitors of emergency information.

CONNECTICUT STUDENT LOAN FOUNDATION

With students facing higher student loan interest rates and growing student loan debt, we took action enabling the Connecticut Student Loan Foundation to offer student loans at better, lower rates. The Connecticut Student Loan Foundation (CSLF) now is authorized to issue federal tax-exempt bonds, notes or other obligations subject to the private activity cap.



NEW SCHOOL SUSPENSION RULES

Beginning July 1, 2008, the maximum time for in-school suspensions will be extended from five to 10 days. Suspensions will now be required to be in-school suspensions unless the school administration determines, at the required informal suspension hearing, that the student poses a danger to persons or property or the student is so disruptive of the educational process that he or she must serve the suspension outside of school.

Students will be allowed to be placed in in-school suspension up to 15 times or a total of 50 days in one school year, whichever results in fewer days. Students can be suspended out-of-school only 10 times or 50 days in one school year, whichever results in fewer days.



IMPROVING COLLEGE ACCESSIBILITY

In an effort to improve students' ability to transfer within and among Connecticut's public institutions of higher education to pursue higher degrees, the General Assembly passed SB 1318. This bill asks the Department of Higher Education to review the current status and content of the transfer and articulation agreements between the community colleges, the state universities and the University of Connecticut to determine if the agreements are sufficient for the appropriate transfer of credits as well as the status of a common course numbering system for the community colleges and state universities.



TEXTBOOK LOANS

HB 7351 streamlines the state law to enable Boards of Education to more easily administer a textbook loan program to nonreligious or private schools located in the district, and thus allows both to benefit from economies of scale. Now, Boards of Education are permitted to lend textbooks to students who reside in the district yet attend a nonpublic school in a less cumbersome manner. Also, the legislation eliminates the requirement that the texts must be currently in use in the district and enables Boards of Education to loan books available from their book distributors to the nonpublic schools. PA 07-190

