

**Partnership
Responsibility
Integrity
Determination
Excellence**



**Vernon Thompson, Principal
Flora Padro, Assistant Principal
Louis Jackson, Assistant Principal
Matthew Corcoran, Assistant Principal**

Warren Harding High School

February 12, 2026

I am writing to express my strong support for continued, full funding of the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI). The impact of SBDI on our school community has been significant, measurable, and deeply meaningful for both students and staff.

At Harding, SBDI has helped us coordinate and optimize our behavioral health resources in ways we simply were not able to achieve before. Through stronger systems of communication, clearer protocols, and coordinated supports, we are now reaching and assisting more students than ever. Many of our learners who previously would have gone without timely intervention are now receiving the behavioral health supports they need to remain engaged in school and on track academically. The difference in student outcomes—both in the short term and over the course of the school year—has been unmistakable.

In addition, the professional development offered by SBDI has been truly top tier. Our teachers consistently describe the training as some of the most practical, relevant, and skill-building professional learning they have participated in. These sessions have strengthened staff capacity to respond to student needs with both confidence and compassion. As a result, we have seen a noticeable improvement in school climate: fewer crises escalating, stronger relationships between students and staff, and a more cohesive, student-centered approach across classrooms and departments.

SBDI has become an essential part of our school's infrastructure of support. It has allowed us to reduce unnecessary disciplinary referrals, increase access to mental and behavioral health services, and create a safer, more supportive learning environment for all students. The initiative is working—and its continued funding is vital.

I urge you to maintain full funding for SBDI in the upcoming budget. The return on investment is clear, and the benefits to students, families, and educators across our community are profound.

Thank you for your attention and for considering this testimony.

Sincerely,
Matthew Corcoran
Assistant Principal
Harding High School



Vance Elementary School

SARAH HARRIS, PRINCIPAL

183 Vance Street

New Britain, CT 06052

Phone: (860) 225-8731

February 10, 2026

To: The Appropriations Committee

From: Alyse Lamarre
Kindergarten Teacher
Vance Elementary School

RE: HB 5032 Governor's Proposed FY 27 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies

Dear Appropriations Committee,

My name is Alyse Lamarre, and I am a proud New Britain public school teacher. For the past decade, I have taught kindergarten at Vance Elementary School. Each day, in addition to teaching reading, writing, and mathematics, I help our youngest learners develop the social and emotional skills necessary to become compassionate, responsible, and engaged members of our community.

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the proposed 20% reduction in funding for the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) in the Governor's FY27 budget for Elementary and Secondary Education. The work being implemented through SBDI—both in our secondary schools and now in our elementary schools through SBDI-E—is not supplemental; it is essential.

In our school, the impact has been measurable and meaningful. We have seen a significant decrease in office referrals as a direct result of restorative practices supported by SBDI. Beyond the reduction in referrals, the nature of our response to student behavior has fundamentally shifted. Instead of relying on punitive discipline, we are using restorative approaches that emphasize accountability, reflection, and relationship-building.

This shift has strengthened our school community. Staff members have a clear framework for addressing conflict constructively, and students are learning how to regulate their emotions, repair harm, and remain engaged in their education. These skills are foundational—not only for academic success but also for long-term personal and civic growth.

Reducing funding for SBDI would undermine progress that has taken years to build. Restorative practices require training, consistency, and sustained support to be effective. Scaling back funding risks reversing the gains we have made in improving school climate, reducing disciplinary incidents, and keeping students connected to learning.

I respectfully urge you to fully fund the SBDI program in the FY27 budget. Continued investment in restorative practices is an investment in safer schools, stronger communities, and better outcomes for Connecticut's children.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to public education.

Sincerely,
Alyse Lamarre
Vance Elementary School

BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION

Carli Rocha-Reaes
Director of School Counseling
and Parent Partnerships

Office of Student Support

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Joyce Goodwin
Administrative Assistant



"Changing Futures and Achieving Excellence Together"

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Carli Rocha-Reaes, and I serve as the Director of School Counseling and Parent Partnerships for Bridgeport Public Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of maintaining full funding for the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI).

Bridgeport is one of the largest districts in Connecticut, serving students and families with significant social-emotional and mental health needs. As a district leader overseeing school counseling and family engagement, I see firsthand how essential strong, coordinated supports are to keeping students safe, connected, and successful.

Bridgeport is currently in its first year of SBDI implementation. Although we are early in this work, SBDI has already provided meaningful professional development that is beginning to shift the way staff understand and respond to student behavior. These early steps are critical. SBDI is not a one-time training; it is a multi-year

capacity-building effort. A reduction in funding would disrupt this foundation at the exact moment when the work is taking hold.

A 20% reduction in SBDI funding would significantly limit the support available to districts in their formative years of implementation — precisely when consistent coaching, professional development, and technical assistance are most essential.

For Bridgeport, this cut would slow our ability to:

- Build sustainable, district-wide trauma-informed practices
- Strengthen mental health partnerships
- Reduce unnecessary arrests and juvenile justice involvement
- Improve student outcomes through preventative, supportive approaches

Given the level of need in our community, this work cannot be interrupted.

I respectfully urge the Education Committee to maintain full funding for the School-Based Diversion Initiative in the FY27 budget.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and your commitment to Connecticut's students. I appreciate the opportunity to advocate for an initiative that is essential to building healthy, supportive school communities.

Respectfully submitted,



Carli Rocha-Reaes

Director of School Counseling & Parent Partnerships

Bridgeport Public Schools



POLK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Place to Develop Heart & Mind

Thomas J. Hogrefe, Principal

Elayna L. Stein
School Social Worker
Polk Elementary School
Oakville, Connecticut
February 11, 2026

To: Members of the Appropriations Committee

Re: Governor's Proposed FY 27 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies

Dear Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Elayna Stein, and I have been the school social worker at Polk Elementary School in Oakville, CT for the last five years. I am writing to express my strong support for maintaining full funding for the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) in the FY27 state budget. I respectfully urge you to reject the proposed 20% reduction to this critical program.

Through my experience with SBDI, I have seen firsthand how it positively impacts students, staff, and the broader school community. In my second year as Leader in Residence at Polk School, I have benefited from meaningful networking with other participating schools, guidance and support from CHDI staff, and high-quality professional development opportunities, including Restorative Practices training. These supports have strengthened our school's capacity to respond to student needs in thoughtful, effective, and proactive ways.

As a result of SBDI, our school has strengthened and expanded several key systems and practices that support student behavior and well-being. Many of our teachers and paraprofessionals have had the opportunity to participate in Restorative Practices training, and our school has received consultation to improve the implementation and fidelity of these practices across classrooms. In addition, certified staff have engaged in targeted professional development on topics such as effective classroom management, de-escalation strategies, building a resilient school community, and promoting positive school climate and connectedness.

We are also developing a Graduated Response Model to manage student behavior in a restorative and developmentally appropriate manner. These systems have allowed us to respond to students with greater compassion, consistency, and effectiveness.

With additional funding through SBDI, our school was able to purchase supplies for all teachers to support the creation of calm-down corners in every general education classroom, further reinforcing proactive and supportive approaches to student regulation and engagement.

Most importantly, SBDI has helped students remain connected to their education while receiving the support they need to thrive. Over the past year and a half, we have seen a reduction in the use of exclusionary discipline, including suspensions. Stronger, more trusting relationships between students and staff have contributed to students feeling safer, more supported, and more willing to engage in problem-solving when challenges arise. Many of these students are young children who need guidance, connection, and understanding—not removal from their learning environment. At the same time, teachers feel better equipped and more confident using restorative strategies to address many behaviors proactively and constructively, rather than relying on exclusion. This shift has had a positive impact on overall school climate and student engagement. The initiative supports not only individual students, but also educators who are working every day to meet increasingly complex student needs with limited resources.

A 20% reduction in funding would significantly undermine the progress schools like ours have made. Reduced resources would limit our ability to sustain effective practices, provide staff training, and ensure students receive timely and appropriate support. At a time when student mental health and behavioral needs continue to grow, maintaining full funding for SBDI is more important than ever. Maintaining full funding for SBDI is not only critical for students today but also an investment in the long-term well-being, safety, and success of our school communities.

I respectfully ask the legislature to maintain full funding for the School-Based Diversion Initiative in the final FY27 budget. Continued investment in SBDI is an investment in student success, school safety, and stronger communities across Connecticut.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your continued commitment to supporting Connecticut's students and educators. I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective and strongly urge you to protect this vital initiative.

Sincerely,

Elayna L. Stein, LCSW
School Social Worker
Polk Elementary School



Windsor Locks Public Schools

PUPIL SERVICES

58 S Elm St., Windsor Locks, CT 06096

Telephone 860 292-5707 Fax 860 292-6994

February 12, 2026

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of continued and sustained funding for Connecticut's School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI). As a district leader, I have seen firsthand the transformative impact this initiative has had on our students, our staff, and the overall culture of our school community.

The School-Based Diversion Initiative has fundamentally shifted how we respond to student behavior. Rather than relying on exclusionary discipline practices that often remove students from learning environments and contribute to long-term negative outcomes, SBDI equips schools with restorative practices and trauma-informed approaches that address the root causes of behavior. This shift has been invaluable.

Through SBDI, our staff have received meaningful professional development in restorative practices. These skills have allowed educators, administrators, and support staff to respond to conflict and misconduct in ways that promote accountability, reflection, and growth rather than punishment alone. Students are learning to take responsibility for their actions, understand the impact of their behavior on others, and actively repair harm. This process builds empathy, strengthens character, and fosters personal growth.

Importantly, restorative practices are not about eliminating accountability. In fact, they require deeper accountability. Students are guided through structured conversations where they must acknowledge what happened, who was affected, and what steps are necessary to make things right. They learn that their choices matter, that their actions have consequences, and that they have the power to repair relationships. These are lifelong skills that extend far beyond the classroom.

The initiative has also strengthened relationships across our school community. One of the most powerful outcomes has been the improvement in staff-to-student relationships. When students feel heard and respected, they are more likely to engage positively in school. Staff members report that they feel better equipped to manage challenging situations with confidence and empathy. This has reduced adversarial interactions and replaced them with opportunities for dialogue and problem-solving.

Equally important is the improvement in student-to-student relationships. Restorative circles and facilitated conversations create space for students to express themselves, listen to one another, and resolve conflicts constructively. As a result, we are building a culture where students feel a shared responsibility for maintaining a positive and respectful environment. These practices foster collaboration and mutual respect.

The School-Based Diversion Initiative also helps keep students in school and out of the juvenile justice system. By diverting appropriate cases away from court involvement and instead addressing behaviors within a supportive educational framework, we are reducing unnecessary criminalization of youth. This is not only beneficial for students and families, but it is also fiscally responsible and aligned with the state's broader goals of equity and justice reform.

The continued funding of this initiative is an investment in prevention. It is far more effective and far less costly to intervene early, build skills, and strengthen relationships than to address the long-term consequences of disengagement, suspension, or court involvement. The training, coaching, and partnership provided through SBDI are essential to sustaining this work and ensuring fidelity of implementation.

Our educators are committed to creating school environments where students feel safe, supported, and accountable. SBDI has been a critical partner in helping us achieve that mission. It has enhanced staff capacity, strengthened relationships, and fostered a positive culture within our building.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the State of Connecticut to continue and fully fund the School-Based Diversion Initiative. The return on investment is clear: safer schools, stronger relationships, increased student accountability, and a healthier, more positive school climate for all.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to the future adults of Connecticut.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rachel March', with a stylized, cursive script.

Rachel March
Coordinator of Pupil Services
Windsor Locks Public Schools



**GROTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ADMINISTRATION OFFICES**

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Testimony to the Connecticut Legislature: HB 5032

Members of the Elementary and Secondary Education Committee,

My name is Anne Marie Mancini, and I have been a public-school educator for nearly 30 years. I currently serve as the Assistant Superintendent for Groton Public Schools. I am honored to present this testimony in support of sustained funding for the Connecticut Health and Development Institute's (CHDI) School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) in the Department of Education Budget within HB 5032, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for The Biennium.

As an educational leader deeply committed to the well-being and success of our students, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of SBDI on a community. Between SY 2021-2023, I worked closely with the CHDI team to implement SBDI into the middle school, high school, and alternative program as the Deputy Superintendent for East Hartford Public Schools. Following the pandemic, it was important that our teachers were equipped to manage student behaviors and that our students were connected with community-based mental health services. The SBDI program was instrumental in reducing suspensions, expulsions, and in-school arrests. One of the reasons for this was because it provided comprehensive training to school staff, administrators, teachers, and school resource officers on topics including adolescent development, recognizing trauma among youth, positive climate, culture and connectiveness, and classroom management and de-escalation. The SBDI program also connected families with community mental health services, ensuring students in crisis received critical support.

Upon making the transition to Groton Public Schools (GPS) in September of 2024, I reached out to the CHDI about implementing SBDI. Similar to East Hartford, our teachers have requested training to support students impacted by trauma and mental health issues, and our administrators need to be connected to community-based services that can provide additional resources to families. One of our district's elementary schools, Northeast Academy, immediately started working with CHDI to evaluate and improve its system of behavior interventions and provide professional learning to staff. Not funding this program would be a missed opportunity for additional GPS schools to enhance our work in this area.

The SBDI is a proven program that fosters safer and more supportive school environments. Its expansion to districts like Groton Public Schools is essential for continuing this positive trajectory. I urge you to prioritize funding for SBDI in the upcoming state budget to ensure that all Connecticut students have the opportunity to succeed in a supportive educational setting.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Anne Marie Mancini
Assistant Superintendent

February 16, 2026

To: Members of the Appropriations Committee

Re: HB 5032 Governor's Proposed FY 27 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies

To whom it may concern:

My name is Katie Seymour, and I have been a Connecticut educator for the past 15 years. Four years ago, I was fortunate enough to work closely with the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) program, as the SBDI Leader for Sedgwick Middle School. In this leadership position, I collected and analyzed schoolwide discipline data and led professional learning for faculty and staff. I regularly collaborated with our administrators to evaluate the inequities in our traditional discipline structure and make systemic changes aligned with restorative practices. I also led a small group professional learning experience to explore how restorative practices can cultivate a sense of belonging in the classroom.

I feel the need to testify because of the impact that the SBDI program has made in West Hartford Public Schools. Even in a desirable, high-performing district, our discipline data was inequitable and not representative of the school population. The SBDI program helped us to identify areas of weakness and strategically address them as a school and district.

The SBDI program helped to strengthen school climate and improve student outcomes through consistent, relationship-centered restorative practices in our middle schools. The plan prioritizes professional learning that builds staff capacity in relationship development, social-emotional learning (SEL), and proactive restorative circles, while sharing research and school data to demonstrate the effectiveness of restorative approaches. Learning about restorative practices can be challenging for educators, but it is essential to changing how we address student behaviors in schools. We need to provide students with reflection tools and steps to take to move forward and create change in their lives, otherwise, we are just perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline cycle.

One of the best ways that the SBDI program helped our school was to require us to create a graduated discipline model. We established clear expectations for Tier 1 classroom-managed behaviors, as well as Tier 2 and Tier 3 infractions, using scenario-based learning to help staff determine when behaviors should be addressed in the classroom instead of students being sent to the office. This initiative aimed to create consistent behavioral expectations at our school, streamlining the infraction and write-up process, as well as incorporating more reflective and restorative practices.

We also learned how essential it is to focus on proactive measures, and implemented a positive behavior protocol that included regular positive family communication, proactive circles and relationship building, aligning our grading practices, and creating a robust advisory program. Ultimately, we want students to come to school each day feeling like they belong. This is the key to ensuring students can learn and be successful in our schools.

Finally, one of the most integral parts of the program was our work with Kris Wraight, a Restorative Practices trainer and facilitator. Kris' work with the SBDI program and our schools taught us that restorative practices can create more accountability for students, and create lasting change. Their influence was profound, both at off-site visits and when they came to our school for professional development. They are truly an expert in the field, and made the mission of the SBDI program

Connecticut has always been a leader when it comes to educational policy and doing what is best for students and teachers; all of our schools need exposure to the SBDI program in order to make lasting changes that align with the state's vision for school climate and culture. **It is critical that you fully fund the SBDI program, aligned with the state's vision for School Climate Policy (Bill 1166).**

Our students need schools that believe in the power of restorative practices, make data-informed decisions in the best interest of students, and use these tools to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions. My students need champions who are advocating for change to our inequitable systems. Simply put, the SBDI program is transformative for teachers and administrators, and it needs to remain a priority for the State of Connecticut.

I thank you for your time and consideration as you make decisions in the best interest of our students and our future as a leader in education.

Sincerely,

Katie Seymour

WHPS Educator

February 12, 2026

Re: HB 5032 Governor's Proposed FY 27 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Kristofer Schumacher, and I am a special education teacher in Windsor Locks, Connecticut. I am testifying today in opposition to the proposed 20% reduction to the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) in the Governor's FY 27 budget adjustments.

The SBDI is a small but high-impact investment (about \$900,000 annually) that supports schools in reducing exclusionary discipline, school-based arrests, and juvenile justice involvement by connecting students with behavioral health services instead of law enforcement interventions. Cutting this line item would weaken one of Connecticut's most promising strategies for ending the school-to-prison pipeline.

There is quite a bit of evidence that demonstrates SBDI's impact:

- Since 2009, SBDI has been implemented in 82 schools across 29 districts, demonstrating measurable reductions in court referrals (an average reduction of 25%) and increased student access to behavioral health supports (a 24% increase in referrals).
- Earlier cohorts of schools participating in SBDI have reported 17% to 78% reductions in juvenile court referrals compared to the year before implementation — evidence that the initiative works across diverse contexts.
- As schools move toward trauma-informed, restorative practices, they see greater student engagement and fewer discipline incidents overall, creating safer, more supportive learning environments.

SBDI also plays an integral role in student well-being and equity. This initiative plays a critical role in addressing disproportionality in discipline and juvenile justice involvement. Students of color and those with unmet behavioral health needs have historically been more likely to be excluded from school or referred to court — outcomes we know are correlated with increased dropout rates and longer-term justice involvement. SBDI's emphasis on diversion over punishment helps interrupt those patterns by intervening earlier and more constructively.

SBDI also provides our society with long-term cost savings when compared to traditional forms of discipline. Keeping students in school and out of the juvenile justice system saves significant public resources. Even modest reductions in juvenile court involvement translate into long-term savings for the justice system, social services, and community health infrastructure. Programs like SBDI reduce reliance on more expensive interventions, such as detention, repeated court appearances, and long-term incarcerations — outcomes that cost the state far more than prevention-focused supports.

Moreover, by reducing suspensions and arrests, SBDI helps minimize instructional loss, improves attendance, and supports graduation — all of which correlate with higher lifetime earnings and reduced dependency on public services. While exact state savings require comprehensive cost modeling, national research consistently shows that early intervention and diversion programs produce multiple dollars in savings for every dollar invested when compared to the costs of justice involvement.

As a Connecticut teacher of 30 years, the SBDI training is simply the best, most effective, most efficient to implement training I've ever received. Thanks to implementation of SBDI processes, the growth of the connections and relationships between myself and students has grown significantly to where we care about each other as human beings, rather than the typical teacher-student dynamic.

At a time when many students are returning to school with increased behavioral health needs, maintaining robust diversion and support systems must be a priority — not an afterthought. A 20% cut would undercut years of progress, limit the number of schools that can participate, and weaken Connecticut's long-term goals of equity, safety, and opportunity for all students.

I respectfully urge this committee to reject the proposed reduction and protect full funding for the School-Based Diversion Initiative.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kristofer Schumacher

Windsor Locks Public Schools, Connecticut

February 2026

RE: Governor's Proposed FY 27 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies

Testimony in Support of HB 5032 – Maintain Full Funding for the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI)

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Lauren A. Miele, and I am the Principal of an alternative school serving students with significant behavioral, social-emotional, and academic needs in Waterbury, Connecticut. I am writing in strong support of maintaining full funding for the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) in HB 5032 and to urge you to reject the proposed 20% reduction.

I have had the privilege of partnering with CHDI through the SBDI framework both in my current role as principal and previously as an assistant principal in another building in New Britain, CT. I can say without hesitation that SBDI/ CONNECT IV has been transformative for our students, our staff, and our broader school community.

SBDI provides far more than guidance- it provides structure, accountability, data systems, funding, and expert coaching that help schools fundamentally shift how we respond to student behavior and behavioral health needs. In underfunded urban school communities like ours, these supports are not supplemental; they are essential.

Through SBDI and CHDI's Connect IV work, we have strengthened our ability to identify students with unmet mental health needs early and connect them to appropriate services. The initiative has sharpened our use of meaningful data tracking and analysis so that interventions are targeted, responsive, and equitable. Rather than reacting to behavior with exclusionary discipline, we now analyze patterns, identify root causes, and intervene proactively.

Exclusionary practices (suspension, expulsion, and arrest) disproportionately impact students with trauma histories, special education needs, and mental health challenges. We know that approximately 65–70% of youth in juvenile detention have a diagnosable behavioral health condition. Schools must be equipped to respond to these needs in restorative and preventative ways. SBDI gives us that capacity.

Importantly, SBDI also provides funding tied to implementation milestones. For schools like mine, those funds make it possible to create calming spaces, provide incentives that reinforce positive behavior, invest in restorative programming, and build staff capacity. Without this support, many of these efforts would not be financially feasible within existing school budgets.

Beyond resources, SBDI drives mindset change. It helps educators shift from asking “What rule was broken?” to “What happened to this student, and what support do they need?” It champions restorative justice practices that keep students connected to school, reduce justice involvement, and improve long-term outcomes.

A 20% reduction in funding would significantly weaken this work at a time when student behavioral health needs remain high. Schools cannot maintain fidelity to the model, sustain data systems, or continue meaningful staff training and coaching with reduced support. The cost of scaling back SBDI will not only be measured in lost progress- but in increased exclusion, disengagement, and potential justice involvement for vulnerable youth. **The youth is our greatest asset!**

I respectfully urge you to maintain full funding for SBDI in the FY27 budget. This initiative works. It keeps students in school, improves outcomes, and ensures that discipline is fair, appropriate, and responsive to behavioral health needs.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your commitment to Connecticut's students. I am deeply grateful for your consideration and for your continued investment in initiatives that strengthen our schools and protect our youth.

Sincerely,

Lauren Miele
Principal

lauren.miele@waterbury.k12.ct.us

203.727.0999



February 12, 2026

Dear Legislators:

I am writing to voice my strong support for the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) and to express concern regarding the proposed budget allocations. In my role as a public school administrator, I have witnessed the meaningful difference this program has made for our students, staff, and school community. I respectfully ask that you maintain SBDI's current funding.

In 2022, as our district worked to address increased student dysregulation and absenteeism following the disruptions caused by COVID-19, we recognized the need to better equip staff with effective strategies. Our goal was to strengthen our ability to de-escalate challenging behaviors, respond appropriately to students experiencing emotional distress, and minimize suspensions whenever possible. Through SBDI, we were able to provide focused professional development and establish supportive systems that led to fewer referrals, greater utilization of 211 services, and the creation of designated spaces for students to regulate and reflect.

After seeing measurable success in our middle schools, we expanded SBDI to our high schools, where similar challenges persisted. Although some pandemic effects have eased, student mental health and behavioral needs remain elevated, and SBDI continues to be an essential support. We continue to use restorative practices that we learned through this program.

Altering the program's funding risks undermining its effectiveness and limiting access for districts that rely on it. I respectfully urge you to maintain full funding for this valuable program.

Thank you for your dedication to Connecticut's students.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne T. McKernan".

Anne McKernan
Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.
anne_mckernan@whps.org



February 12, 2026

To: Members of the Appropriations Committee

Re: HB 5032 Governor's Proposed FY 27 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies

Partnering with the Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI) and receiving the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) grant has been transformative for our school. Their phenomenal trainers provided high-level restorative practices training for our faculty, but the impact went far beyond the classroom. Through SBDI, we've empowered students to engage with their school community positively, most notably through a student-led mural in our lunch courtyard and the use of listening circles to resolve school-wide conflicts. The level of support from the SBDI team is unprecedented; they were partners in every sense, attending school events and co-facilitating circles until our staff felt confident. Now that restorative practices are a matter of state law, programs like SBDI are no longer just 'nice to have'; they are essential. To meet state mandates and truly support struggling schools, continued full funding for CHDI and SBDI is imperative.

Bethany Brown and Emily Burstein,

Hall High School

February 12, 2026

To: Members of the Appropriations Committee

Re: HB 5032 Governor's Proposed FY 27 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies

My name is Tom Ferrell and I am a school counselor at Rogers Park Middle School in Danbury. I am writing today regarding HB 5032. When our school received the SBDI grant, I knew it would bring change—but I could not have fully anticipated just how transformative it would be for our students, staff, and community.

Before the grant, we were doing our best with limited resources. Our teachers were creative and committed, but there were clear gaps in the tools and supports we could offer. The SBDI grant gave us the opportunity to think beyond maintenance and begin building meaningful growth.

One of the first positive changes we experienced was the ability to invest directly in classroom resources. We were able to bring restorative practices to our building, increase campus beautification, and reinforce school climate by purchasing translators to help bridge the communication gap for our students and educators. I watched engagement levels rise almost immediately. Students who once hesitated to participate became more confident when using digital tools that allowed them to collaborate, create, and explore content in new ways.

Professional development was another area profoundly impacted by the grant. Our teachers were able to attend specialized training sessions and collaborate more intentionally as a team. This investment in our staff translated directly into stronger instruction in the classroom. I noticed a renewed sense of energy among our faculty—they felt supported, valued, and empowered to try innovative strategies.

Beyond academics, the SBDI grant helped us enrich the overall school experience. We were able to enhance student wellness initiatives. Through social-emotional learning resources, our students benefited from a more well-rounded educational environment.

Perhaps the most meaningful impact has been the shift in school culture. The grant signaled trust in our vision and our ability to make decisions that best serve our students. It encouraged collaboration among staff, strengthened communication with families, and reinforced a shared commitment to continuous improvement. I have seen greater pride in our school community and a stronger belief that we can achieve ambitious goals together.

Looking back, the SBDI grant was not just financial support—it was an investment in possibility. It allowed us to move from simply sustaining programs to intentionally enhancing them. Most importantly, it has helped create a learning environment where our students feel supported, challenged, and inspired every day. For that, I am deeply grateful. Thank you for your time and consideration

Thomas Ferrell

School Counselor (7th Grade)

203-797-4884

Rogers Park Middle School

21 Memorial Drive

Danbury, CT, 06810



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Matthew T. Warner, Principal
Jennifer Leveille, Assistant Principal

Morgan Perry, School Counselor
Laurie Woron, School Counselor
Lindsay Mellon, School Psychologist
Tracy Gibbons, School Social Worker

Dear Appropriations Committee Members;

I am writing to you today to express my sincere support for the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) that our school has been fortunate enough to be a part of over the past two school years. I am a School Social Worker and I spend my days working with students who are troubled and struggling and we as staff are working to help them learn new skills that will increase their academic success and decrease their behavioral challenges that may lead to in or out of school suspension. The direct funding that we have received from this program as well as the restorative practices training has had a positive impact on our school community; but there is still so much more to be done.

The grant money that we received from SBDI has allowed us to start new programs and reward our students for their success such as our mentoring program that pairs an adult with a struggling student to build a trusting bond while rewarding both student and staff for their hard work, dedication and improvement. It has also allowed us to include teachers and staff in incentives and positive reinforcements that lead to more positive staff morale which of course leads to more positive interactions with both staff and students. Teaching is hard and adults need to know that they are appreciated for the hard work that they do; our climate initiatives have allowed us to thank our staff for the hours of time they put into their students in and out of the classroom.

In addition, we have received training both through CHDI and restorative justice, which has given us new tools to address student challenging behaviors in more proactive ways, decreasing the need for reactive practices with many of our students. This has been an invaluable tool for our team as we move forward.



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Jennifer Leveille, Assistant Principal

Morgan Perry, School Counselor
Laurie Woron, School Counselor
Lindsay Mellon, School Psychologist
Tracy Gibbons, School Social Worker

Decreasing the funding for SBDI will have a profound negative impact on the work that still needs to be done throughout the state of CT. Please consider the needs of the students and needs of the teachers as you take into consideration funding for this program. I can't say enough good things about all that I have learned and all that I have been able to share with my colleagues.

Respectfully submitted;

Tracy Gibbons, LCSW

School Social Worker

February 16, 2026

To: Members of the Appropriations Committee

Re: HB 5032 Governor's Proposed FY 27 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies

My name is Gretchen Kelly, and I am proud to work and be part of the team at Conard High School in West Hartford. I am the Triage Social Worker at Conard High School in West Hartford Public Schools. I am writing in support of continued funding for HB 5032 and the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI).

I have had the privilege of collaborating with the Child Health and Development Institute to implement the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) in two West Hartford schools over the course of three years: Bristow Middle School and Conard High School.

Through a collaborative, team-based approach, SBDI has supported our efforts to reduce suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests, while simultaneously strengthening students' sense of belonging within our school communities. By investing in connection, community-building, and inclusive practices, we have seen students become more engaged and invested in their schools, student body and community. This proactive focus on fostering a sense of belonging directly contributes to reductions in behavioral referrals, disciplinary actions, and judicial involvement.

SBDI funding has also allowed us to more effectively address students' behavioral health needs and strengthen partnerships with families. We have been able to connect families to mental health and community-based resources, ensuring that students receive appropriate supports both inside and outside of school.

Additionally, SBDI funding created opportunities for meaningful development of students and staff. Conard students participated in a mural project through Rise Up and engaged in workshops facilitated by the CT Center for Non-Violence in Schools. These initiatives fostered student voice, empowerment, and belonging. Conard proudly displays three student-created murals that reflect what our school community means to them and promote inclusion and connection. Staff also benefited from learning alongside outside clinicians, deepening our understanding of students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs and strengthening our interventions.

These are examples of the preventative and community-centered work made possible through SBDI. This initiative keeps students in school, supports their mental health, and nurtures environments where they feel welcomed, valued, and understood.

Reducing or eliminating funding for SBDI would significantly impact our ability to sustain this critical work and would limit other districts that could greatly benefit. Continued—and increased—investment in SBDI is an investment in student well-being, school safety, and stronger communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I deeply appreciate your commitment to supporting initiatives that foster belonging and positive outcomes for all students.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Kelly, LCSW
Triage Clinician
Conard High School

February 12, 2026

To: Members of the Appropriations Committee

Re: HB 5032 Governor's Proposed FY 27 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies

Good morning,

My name is Rachel Hess and I have been an educator in Connecticut for nine years. I am writing to you today about HB 5032: An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2027. I am requesting that the state does not cut funding to the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) as it has been an integral and impactful part of my students and my educational journey. I was trained in Restorative Practices as a part of the SBDI grant that our school received, and it completely changed my outlook on teaching and my students' outlook on education. After receiving the training and implementing it into my classroom, there was a significant decrease in disruptive behaviors and more an increase in academic success across all of my classes. Restorative Practices and SBDI have provided me with extremely valuable resources, and it would be a shame if other teachers did not receive the same opportunity due to a lack of funding. When teachers have access to SBDI and Restorative Practice training/materials, we have access to how to incorporate human nature, growing from mistakes, and vital teaching moments for our students. I have seen my students grow not only academically, but as humans; humans that are okay with making mistakes, who apologize sincerely, who make right when wrong is done, and overall, who are more interested in being active citizens to make this world a better place. A cut in funding to SBDI is a cut to helping our students be the best that they can be.

Thank you for your time,

Rachel Hess