

CMEA 2009 Legislative Session Summary

This past school year, CMEA hired a lobbying firm to assist us in working towards a dedicated arts graduation requirement and to monitor activity supporting the outsourcing of arts instruction. It was a wise investment as we would not have been nearly as successful in the political arena without them.

As you know, it was a very active year with many twists and turns along the way. We advocated for one bill and against another with both issues eventually ending up on the same bill! Such is the world of politics! We came extremely close yet still short of obtaining a dedicated graduation credit and unfortunately, the bill we were against was passed during special session, though we did have some success narrowing its scope. The following is a summary of the progression of both bills and CMEA's role throughout the process.

High School Reform

- Fall of 2008 The State Board of Education approved *The Connecticut Plan* which recommends increasing the high school graduation requirements from the 20 to 25 credits. *This plan includes 1 dedicated credit in the fine arts largely due to the huge advocacy effort made by our members.*
- March 2009 Senate Bill 944 was presented in the Education Committee. Its language is similar to *The Connecticut Plan* but it does not delineate the graduation credits. CMEA/CAEA/CAAA advocated specifying the credit breakdown, including the Arts credit. A public hearing was held with testimony in favor of the Arts credit. World Language folks also came out in force to ask that 2 World Language credits also be added. This bill died in the Education Committee without any further action.
- On April 1 our lobbyist informed us that the essence of SB 944 had been "substituted" into House Bill 6488. It was introduced by the Education Committee on the final meeting day prior to the committee's deadline. HB 6488 reflected most of the language cited in SB944 but also included two credits of World Language and did not include a dedicated arts credit, keeping the arts at status quo. Without much discussion HB 6488 was passed onto the House floor.
- CMEA began a grass roots and grass tops campaign to make sure the arts were a part of any education reform package going forward. (Grass roots: bringing advocates together to move around an issue. Grass Tops: identifying advocates who have a connection to key decision makers) CMEA sent weekly mailings to the legislature and generated phone calls to the chairs of the education committee. Just as we heard that there were plans to include an arts credit, the House referred HB 6488 to the Appropriations Committee where it died.
- The next step would be for the chairs of the Education Committee to find an appropriate bill to be used as a "vehicle" for an amendment containing the high school reform language. This would need to be a bill that had already passed both the Education and Appropriations Committees.
- CMEA continued to generate phone calls and emails to the general assembly. A district-specific mailing was prepared for each legislator highlighting their districts arts industry jobs and hand delivered during a legislative session. Many legislators were responsive to our message and supportive of including one credit in the arts in the reform package.

- With only two weeks left in the legislative session, the “vehicle” found was Senate Bill 941 and an amendment was filed that included 1 credit specifically in the fine arts!
- One week to go and it looked as though SB 941 was not going to make it onto the floor before the end of the session. CMEA once again rallied members to call state leaders to urge them to move this bill.
- A short time later, the Education chairs filed the same amendment onto Senate Bill 939: An Act Concerning Educator Certification, which ironically was the bill that CMEA and its allies had been working against! SB 939 would be discussed on the senate floor six days before the end of the session.

Magnet School Adjunct Instructor Permits

- (March) Senate Bill 939 had started off as House Bill 6666. Both bills were chock full of changes to teacher preparation and certification. Section 5 caught our attention because it created an adjunct instructor permit which would allow non-certified artists to teach part time at interdistrict magnet schools. The bill’s original language was quite broad. It did not require applicants to have work experience in the arts or any experience working with children. It also mandated the State Dept. of Education issue these permits based solely upon a request of the regional educational service center, with no option to run background checks or deny an application.
- At a public hearing, we learned that Section 5 was drafted on the request of ACES/ECA in New Haven. Educational Center for the Arts, in existence for over 30 years, had always been allowed to use non-certified artists as part time teachers and had recently been asked to comply with highly qualified teacher requirements. Many people submitted testimony on ECA’s behalf. It was clear that they were well organized, had garnered a lot of political support and were primarily interested in preserving their status quo. Following the hearing, CMEA generated letters and phone calls to the Education Committee and legislature articulating our concerns about the far reaching ramifications of Section 5. There were groups opposing other sections of HB 6666 and it died in committee.
- The Education Committee then “substituted” the relevant language into Senate Bill 939 Section 11. CMEA members continued to call and write their legislators.
- It soon became clear that the legislative support in favor of Section 11 was strong and it would most likely get approved if not on this bill then added into another. It would pass with or without our input. We began to work toward improving its language. It is important to know that throughout this process, CMEA did not support using non-certified artists in place of certified arts educators. We remain opposed to what this bill allows.
- At a stakeholders meeting with CMEA, ECA, CEA and AFT, compromise language was forged that would create higher standards for adjunct permit holders. After many, many discussions language was written that 1) made the bill’s language permissive as it related to the State Dept. of Education granting the permits, 2) limited the venues that an adjunct instructor permit could be used to existing part time interdistrict arts magnet high schools, 3) required applicants to have work experience in the arts and at least 180 hours experience working with children and, 4) limited the positions to part time, no more than 15 hours per week.
An amendment was filed onto SB 939 with the negotiated language changes to section 11.

High Reform and Adjunct Permits....together

- SB 939 now containing BOTH of our concerns was presented in the Senate, six days before the end of the session and was passed by the Senate unanimously.

- In the House, the debate did not go so smoothly. Representatives had many concerns regarding the whole reform section. In the end, House leadership determined that the curriculum reform piece was too controversial to debate given the timing so close to the end of the session. An amendment was adopted that eliminated the high school reform sections.
The House passed SB939 as amended.
- Senate Bill 939 was now a disagreeing action with the House. The bill went back to the Senate and was called for debate just minutes before the midnight deadline on June 3.
It was not called for a vote in time to become law. The bill died.
- The failure of the legislature to act on this bill immediately drew a lot of negative press, generated by parties whose interests lied in the other sections of this large bill.
- On June 19th in special session, House Bill 6901 “An Act Concerning Educator Certification and Professional Development and Other Educational Issues” was presented. It was an emergency certified bill, which means it was introduced by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. It did not have to go through the traditional public hearing process. HB6901 did not include high school curriculum reform and largely resembled the final incarnation of SB 939 as it had passed in the House. It passed both chambers and was signed into law by the Governor on June 22.

As of this writing, the State Department of Education is planning on pursuing High School Curriculum Reform in the next legislative session.

That we did not achieve a dedicated graduation credit in the arts during this legislative session is certainly not a reflection of anything that we (you and I) failed to do, but rather due to legislators’ concerns with the overall package which were beyond our control.

Collectively, we have made a great advocacy effort this past school year! We have made our position known, elevated our profile and made some really great connections, all of which will surely help us in our continuing advocacy efforts this year.

Please make sure to send a thank you note to any legislator who responded positively to you regarding the arts and request their continued support toward quality arts education for all of Connecticut’s children.