

**SENATOR ROB SAMPSON**  
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**State of Connecticut**  
**SENATE**

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ELECTIONS COMMITTEE  
LABOR COMMITTEE

**MEMBER**  
COMMERCE COMMITTEE  
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

12/14/23

Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner  
Connecticut State Department of Education  
450 Columbus Boulevard  
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Commissioner Russell-Tucker,

I write to you today to discuss the "Right to Read" program and the CSDE's formal decision on K-3 reading waiver requests. I recently met with the Cheshire Board of Education and heard from them about their experience applying for a waiver and their subsequent denial. I also know that another one of my towns, Southington, was denied their waiver and I would ask that the CSDE please take another look at their applications and give them an opportunity to work with the department to find a middle ground for what works for their individual school systems under the current statutes.

Public Act 23-167 requires each district to implement a comprehensive reading curriculum model or program for grades K-3 of which there is unfortunately only a few options prescribed by the CSDE. Connecticut has a long history of not recommending, requiring, or mandating specific commercially available curriculum, text, or programs. Unfortunately, this reading statute and its implementation has changed this past practice to the detriment of towns like Cheshire and Southington who have already proven that their model has produced exemplary results.

Cheshire Public Schools for example has embraced the tenets of "the science of reading" since 2007 and has found that this model works best for their students. The town of Cheshire ranks third in the state in student performance for third-grade reading, and yet they were not able to avoid the right to read mandate even after applying for this waiver and proving a history of data illustrating the strong performance of both non-high needs and high-needs students in their school system. Without this waiver, and the need to implement a state approved program to be phased into the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years, the town of Cheshire has a considerable amount of concern and frustration regarding the issues of cost, efficiency, training of staff, and purchase and/or development of materials. After meeting with the Cheshire Board of Education, we agree that the CSDE should work to complete the waiver review process as soon as possible after the closing date and enter into conversations with any districts determined not to be in

**CHESHIRE, PROSPECT, SOUTHTON, WATERBURY, WOLCOTT**

compliance. There should be clear feedback as to what element of the district's preferred reading curriculum is not consistent with the research, any recommended adjustments for compliance, and give the district an expedient opportunity for reconsideration.

In closing, I must repeat my comments that I made on the floor of the Senate during the debate on Public Act 23-167. I'm worried about this policy and the danger of an unelected bureaucracy having so much impact on local boards and the quality of education in these individual communities. These towns in my district have found curriculum models that work for their students, and they should be given a waiver to continue using them.

Please feel free to reach out to my office with any follow-up or questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Sampson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

State Senator Rob Sampson  
16<sup>th</sup> District