



## OFFICE OF THE FIRST SELECTMAN

**Michael R. Criss**  
**First Selectman, Town of Harwinton**

### ***EDUCATION COMMITTEE***

March 8, 2021

Good Afternoon, my name is Michael R. Criss, I am the First Selectman for the Town of Harwinton and I am submitting testimony regarding S.B. 977 "An Act Concerning Virtual Learning."

#### **S.B. 977 "An Act Concerning Virtual Learning"**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and submit testimony on proposed S.B. 977 "An Act Concerning Virtual Learning." On behalf of the Town of Harwinton we support some provisions of S.B. 977. One of the key essential features of S.B. 977 would be the requirement of the State Department of Education to develop uniform standards for the provision of virtual learning, by conducting a full comprehensive audit of virtual learning programs throughout the state with guidelines for training educators in the world of virtual learning.

The pandemic continues to impact our lives in a variety of ways including, but not limited to; social anxiety, depression, financial burden, loss of income, etc. Our students and teachers throughout the State have been identified as one of the most impacted groups; They were forced to go from traditional classroom instruction to a virtual online environment with limited guidance and support. Some districts have been more successful than others, and while we are hopeful that the pandemic will subside and allow for traditional classroom education to continue, virtual learning will likely become an important component of our education system for years to come. S.B. 977 will enhance uniformity and provide direction for schools to effectively and adequately implement virtual learning.

## **TOWN OF HARWINTON**

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The Town of Harwinton would recommend that standards developed include local educational officials to ensure the practical application of such standards can be properly implemented in our educational system. As well, a uniform standard should be used as a minimum guide rather than a mandated prescribed method that includes a series of mandated requirements and has unintended consequences. A one-size-fits-all approach will not fit considering that each municipality and school district has its own set of needs and abilities. Therefore, any standards from SDE should be in the form of best practices and guidance to allow for the greatest amount of flexibility for school districts to properly implement.

In addition, The Town of Harwinton is requesting that there be no additional professional development requirements on our teachers. Each district will have to evaluate an account for its own specific needs and therefore mandated training will only limit the success and implementation of suggested guidelines as well as imposing costly mandates on towns and cities.

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on behalf of the Town of Harwinton. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at any time.

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General Assembly

January Session, 2021

***Raised Bill No. 977***

LCO No. 4303



Referred to Committee on EDUCATION

Introduced by:  
(ED)

***AN ACT CONCERNING VIRTUAL LEARNING.***

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) As used in this section and  
2 section 10-4 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, "virtual  
3 learning" means the provision of instruction on a virtual platform or as  
4 part of a remote learning model that is in accordance with the uniform  
5 virtual learning standards adopted by the State Board of Education  
6 pursuant to this section.

7 (b) Not later than July 1, 2021, the State Board of Education shall  
8 adopt uniform standards for virtual learning. Such uniform standards  
9 shall be used by local and regional boards of education for the  
10 authorized provision of virtual learning, and shall be developed, and  
11 updated as necessary, with consideration given to best practices,  
12 technological capabilities and equity.

13 (c) The state board shall make such uniform standards available on  
14 its Internet web site.

15 Sec. 2. Subsection (a) of section 10-4 of the general statutes is repealed

16 and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

17 (a) Said board shall have general supervision and control of the  
18 educational interests of the state, which interests shall include  
19 preschool, elementary and secondary education, special education,  
20 vocational education and adult education; shall provide leadership and  
21 otherwise promote the improvement of education in the state, including  
22 research, planning and evaluation and services relating to the provision  
23 and use of educational technology, including telecommunications, by  
24 school districts; shall adopt state-wide subject matter content standards,  
25 provided such standards are reviewed and revised at least once every  
26 ten years; shall prepare such courses of study and publish such  
27 curriculum guides including recommendations for textbooks, materials,  
28 instructional technological resources and other teaching aids as it  
29 determines are necessary to assist school districts to carry out the duties  
30 prescribed by law; shall adopt uniform standards for virtual learning, in  
31 accordance with the provisions of section 1 of this act; shall conduct  
32 workshops and related activities, including programs of intergroup  
33 relations training, to assist teachers in making effective use of such  
34 curriculum materials and in improving their proficiency in meeting the  
35 diverse needs and interests of pupils; shall keep informed as to the  
36 condition, progress and needs of the schools in the state; shall develop  
37 or cause to be developed evaluation and assessment programs designed  
38 to measure objectively the adequacy and efficacy of the educational  
39 programs offered by public schools and shall selectively conduct such  
40 assessment programs annually and report, pursuant to subsection (b) of  
41 this section, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly  
42 having cognizance of matters relating to education, on an annual basis;  
43 and shall establish and keep an inventory account, in accordance with  
44 the provisions of section 4-36, of all property owned and in the custody  
45 of the Department of Education, secure such inventory to prevent theft  
46 or loss and establish controls over the disposal of such inventory.

47 Sec. 3. (*Effective from passage*) (a) The Department of Education shall  
48 conduct a comprehensive audit of the virtual learning provided by local  
49 and regional boards of education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

50 during the school years commencing July 1, 2019, and July 1, 2020. As  
51 used in this section, "virtual learning" means the provision of instruction  
52 on a virtual platform or as part of a remote learning model.

53 (b) Such comprehensive audit shall include, but need not be limited  
54 to, an examination of (1) whether and how local and regional boards of  
55 education initially provided virtual learning during the beginning of the  
56 COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on the technological capabilities or  
57 limitations at such time, (2) the curriculum used as part of virtual  
58 learning and whether students were able to complete the grade level  
59 curriculums, (3) the level of preparation or training in virtual learning  
60 that educators received prior to and during the provision of virtual  
61 learning during such school years, including the nature of such training  
62 and whether it was offered as part of a program of professional  
63 development, pursuant to section 10-148a of the general statutes, as  
64 amended by this act, or as part of in-service training program, pursuant  
65 to section 10-220a of the general statutes, as amended by this act, and (4)  
66 the level of improvement, if any, of the provision of virtual learning  
67 from the school year commencing July 1, 2019, to the school year  
68 commencing July 1, 2020.

69 (c) Following the completion of such comprehensive audit, the  
70 department shall develop a report that uses the results of such  
71 comprehensive audit to (1) evaluate the efficacy of virtual learning, and  
72 hybrid learning models, and the potential to leverage technology for  
73 teaching in other scenarios and rethinking the delivery of instruction,  
74 (2) identify a system of metrics to hold local and regional boards of  
75 education accountable for virtual learning access and equity, and (3)  
76 review and make recommendations regarding ongoing public  
77 education requirements, including what defines a "school day", by  
78 aligning technology and how virtual learning may be optimally  
79 integrated into the program of study and the provision of public  
80 education.

81 (d) Not later than January 1, 2022, the department shall submit such  
82 comprehensive audit and report, and any recommendations for

83 legislation, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly  
84 having cognizance of matters relating to education, in accordance with  
85 the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.

86 Sec. 4. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) As used in this section and  
87 sections 10-148a and 10-220a of the general statutes, as amended by this  
88 act, "virtual learning" means the provision of instruction on a virtual  
89 platform or as part of a remote learning model that is in accordance with  
90 the uniform virtual learning standards adopted by the State Board of  
91 Education pursuant to this section.

92 (b) Not later than July 1, 2021, the Department of Education shall  
93 develop guidelines for the provision of training in virtual learning  
94 offered as part of a program of professional development, pursuant to  
95 section 10-148a of the general statutes, as amended by this act, or as part  
96 of in-service training program, pursuant to section 10-220a of the  
97 general statutes, as amended by this act. Such guidelines shall be used  
98 by local and regional boards of education, and shall be developed, and  
99 updated as necessary, with consideration given to best practices,  
100 technological capabilities and equity.

101 (c) The department shall make such guidelines available on its  
102 Internet web site.

103 Sec. 5. Subsection (a) of section 10-148a of the general statutes is  
104 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from*  
105 *passage*):

106 (a) For the school year commencing July 1, 2019, and each school year  
107 thereafter, each certified employee shall participate in a program of  
108 professional development. Each local and regional board of education  
109 shall make available, annually, at no cost to its certified employees, a  
110 program of professional development that is not fewer than eighteen  
111 hours in length, of which a preponderance is in a small group or  
112 individual instructional setting. Such program of professional  
113 development shall (1) be a comprehensive, sustained and intensive  
114 approach to improving teacher and administrator effectiveness in

115 increasing student knowledge achievement, (2) focus on refining and  
116 improving various effective teaching methods that are shared between  
117 and among educators, (3) foster collective responsibility for improved  
118 student performance, (4) be comprised of professional learning that (A)  
119 is aligned with rigorous state student academic achievement standards,  
120 (B) is conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by  
121 principals, coaches, mentors, distinguished educators, as described in  
122 section 10-145s, or other appropriate teachers, (C) occurs frequently on  
123 an individual basis or among groups of teachers in a job-embedded  
124 process of continuous improvement, and (D) includes a repository of  
125 best practices for teaching methods developed by educators within each  
126 school that is continuously available to such educators for comment and  
127 updating, [and] (5) include training in culturally responsive pedagogy  
128 and practice, and (6) include training in the provision of virtual learning,  
129 in accordance with the guidelines developed pursuant to section 4 of  
130 this act. Each program of professional development shall include  
131 professional development activities in accordance with the provisions  
132 of subsection (b) of this section.

133 Sec. 6. Subsection (a) of section 10-220a of the general statutes is  
134 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from*  
135 *passage*):

136 (a) Each local or regional board of education shall provide an in-  
137 service training program for its teachers, administrators and pupil  
138 personnel who hold the initial educator, provisional educator or  
139 professional educator certificate. Such program shall provide such  
140 teachers, administrators and pupil personnel with information on (1)  
141 the nature and the relationship of alcohol and drugs, as defined in  
142 subdivision (17) of section 21a-240, to health and personality  
143 development, and procedures for discouraging their abuse, (2) health  
144 and mental health risk reduction education that includes, but need not  
145 be limited to, the prevention of risk-taking behavior by children and the  
146 relationship of such behavior to substance abuse, pregnancy, sexually  
147 transmitted diseases, including HIV-infection and AIDS, as defined in  
148 section 19a-581, violence, teen dating violence, domestic violence and

149 child abuse, (3) school violence prevention, conflict resolution, the  
 150 prevention of and response to youth suicide and the identification and  
 151 prevention of and response to bullying, as defined in subsection (a) of  
 152 section 10-222d, except that those boards of education that implement  
 153 any evidence-based model approach that is approved by the  
 154 Department of Education and is consistent with subsection (c) of section  
 155 10-145a, sections 10-222d, 10-222g and 10-222h, subsection (g) of section  
 156 10-233c and sections 1 and 3 of public act 08-160, shall not be required  
 157 to provide in-service training on the identification and prevention of  
 158 and response to bullying, (4) cardiopulmonary resuscitation and other  
 159 emergency life saving procedures, (5) the requirements and obligations  
 160 of a mandated reporter, (6) the detection and recognition of, and  
 161 evidence-based structured literacy interventions for, students with  
 162 dyslexia, as defined in section 10-3d, [and] (7) culturally responsive  
 163 pedagogy and practice, and (8) include training in the provision of  
 164 virtual learning, in accordance with the guidelines developed pursuant  
 165 to section 4 of this act. Each local or regional board of education may  
 166 allow any paraprofessional or noncertified employee to participate, on  
 167 a voluntary basis, in any in-service training program provided pursuant  
 168 to this section.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 2	<i>from passage</i>	10-4(a)
Sec. 3	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 4	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 5	<i>from passage</i>	10-148a(a)
Sec. 6	<i>from passage</i>	10-220a(a)

**Statement of Purpose:**

To require the Department of Education to develop uniform standards for the provision of virtual learning in public schools, conduct a comprehensive audit of virtual learning programs in the state and develop guidelines for training educators in the provision of virtual learning.



*[Proposed deletions are enclosed in brackets. Proposed additions are indicated by underline, except that when the entire text of a bill or resolution or a section of a bill or resolution is new, it is not underlined.]*