

February 12, 2025

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) and urge you to maintain its dedicated funding in the Department of Education budget within HB 6864. SBDI has been instrumental in fostering a positive school climate by equipping educators with the tools and training needed to support students' behavioral health in a proactive and effective manner.

Bristol Public Schools benefited from SBDI for several years, allowing us to reduce school-based arrests, keep students engaged in their education, and implement Restorative Practices that strengthen relationships between staff and students. The program has provided critical mental health resources, de-escalation strategies, and early interventions that lead to long-term student success rather than punitive disciplinary measures. Without dedicated funding, these gains would be at risk, limiting districts' ability to effectively support students' mental health and behavioral needs.

SBDI is a proven, research-based initiative that keeps students in school and on a path toward success. I urge the legislature to preserve SBDI as a standalone program with dedicated funding and to prioritize investments in student well-being through the Department of Education budget. Ensuring continued support for these initiatives is essential to the future success of Connecticut's students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Erika Treannie

Director of Climate, Culture, and Family Engagement

Bristol Public Schools

(860) 584-3361 Office





NEW BRITAIN HIGH SCHOOL

DAMON PEARCE, PRINCIPAL

ASSOCIATE PRINCIPALS

JAMES BRASILE, EDGAR GARCIA
ALEX ORTIZ, MARGARET SHEA

SUPERVISORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

JESSICA FOLIGNO, STEPHEN HOWEY

ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

LISA KAWECKI

FEBRUARY 12, 2025

TO: THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

FROM: MR. GENO AYALA
SCHOOL COUNSELOR
NEW BRITAIN HIGH SCHOOL

RE: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BUDGET WITHIN HB 6864

HELLO,

MY NAME IS GENO AYALA, AND I HAVE BEEN A COUNSELOR AT NEW BRITAIN HIGH SCHOOL FOR 16 YEARS. I AM CURRENTLY THE COORDINATOR OF THE NBHS PEACE ROOM, AND ASSIST STUDENTS IN CONFLICT-TRANSFORMATION, MEDIATIONS, RESTORATIVE PRACTICES, AND ENGAGEMENT.

I AM CONCERNED THAT GOV. LAMONT AND THE STATE LEGISLATURE IS CONSIDERING ELIMINATING FUNDING FOR SBDI AS A STAND-ALONE PROJECT. SBDI HAS BEEN VERY HELPFUL IN ASSISTING NBHS TO BRING CRUCIAL SERVICES TO THE STUDENTS OF NEW BRITAIN. AS THE LEADER IN RESIDENCE FOR SBDI AT NBHS, I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN GREAT TRAININGS AROUND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES, AND HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GUIDE THE STAFF AND STUDENTS AT NBHS THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL PROGRAMING, AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT.

WITH SBDI, THE STAFF AND STUDENTS AT NBHS HAVE HAD A FRAMEWORK AND WAY OUT AFTER COVID DEVASTATED OUR SEMBLANCE OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND ACDEMIC PROGRESS. WITHOUT SBDI, I ANTICIPATE A REGRESSION TO PRE-COVID TIMES, OF HIGH ABSENTEEISM, LOW ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND HIGH BEHAVIORAL REFERRALS.

PLEASE CONSIDER SUPPORTING SBDI AND THE STUDENTS AT NBHS, BY CONTINUING TO FULLY FUND THIS INITIATIVE. I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO WHAT I DO AT NBHS FOR THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS, IN PART, BECAUSE OF THE SUPPORT SBDI HAS GIVEN ME.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE, AND CONSIDERATION.

SINCERELY,
MR. GENO AYALA
NBHS





Consolidated School District of **NEW BRITAIN**
272 Main Street New Britain, CT 06051
860.827.2266

February 12, 2025

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Keira Soler, and I serve as the Assistant Coordinator for School Culture PK-12 in the Consolidated School District of New Britain. I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the proposed consolidation of the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) funding within the Department of Education's budget under HB 6864. This change could result in SBDI losing critical funding as of July 1, 2025, for FY 26 and FY 27.

SBDI has been an invaluable resource for our district, equipping behavior support staff, teachers, and administrators with the training and tools necessary to implement restorative practices effectively. Through professional development on mental health topics, access to expert consultants, and financial support for instructional tools and student incentives, SBDI has directly contributed to creating a more supportive and responsive school environment.

Without dedicated funding, schools may struggle to sustain these essential efforts, potentially leading to an increase in disciplinary referrals, student disengagement, and mental health challenges. I urge the committee to preserve SBDI as a standalone program within the State Department of Education's budget, ensuring continued access to these critical services.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to supporting Connecticut's students and educators.

Keira Soler
Assistant Coordinator for School Culture PK-12
Consolidated School District of New Britain





WINDSOR LOCKS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CENTRAL OFFICE

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February 12, 2025

Dear Appropriations Committee,

We are writing to express our strong support for the continued funding of the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI), a program that is having an immeasurable positive impact on our students, staff, and community. We represent Windsor Locks Public Schools and collectively, we are School Social Workers, Administrators, Climate Specialists and Special Education Teachers. We are passionate about what we do and how we can make that stronger and more meaningful in the future. We feel that our voices need to be heard as you consider the future of the SBDI program. We are seeing firsthand the difference this program makes and feel it is crucial to share our experiences in the hopes of preventing the proposed consolidation of SBDI Department of Education Budget within HB 6864's funding.

SBDI is providing invaluable support, resources, and training that directly benefit the educational experience of our students and educators. The program's focus on professional development has allowed our staff to deepen their skills and knowledge, which in turn is improving student outcomes. Whether it is through curriculum enhancements, the development of culturally responsive teaching practices, or fostering inclusive learning environments, SBDI is equipping us to meet the diverse needs of our students with greater confidence and effectiveness.

The training and tools provided by SBDI are making us better educators. We are able to bring more innovative strategies into the classroom, ensuring that students not only succeed academically but also feel supported emotionally and socially. The impact on their growth and well-being is tangible. SBDI is helping us create an environment where every student can thrive, regardless of their background or challenges.

Moreover, the sense of community and collaboration that SBDI fosters extends beyond the classroom. It is bringing together educators, families, and local leaders in meaningful ways to create a shared vision for student success. This collective effort is essential to building stronger, more resilient communities.

The potential loss of funding for SBDI would be a significant setback, not only for the direct beneficiaries of the program but for the broader community that relies on its support. As educators who are witnessing the program's transformative power, we urge you to consider the lasting, positive effects that SBDI has had and will continue to have on future generations. Students who are taught restorative practice instead of punishment, are more likely to learn to self-regulate and make more positive choices. The work that is being done through the SBDI grant is intended to keep students out of the school to prison pipeline, which in the future will save the state far more money than what is currently budgeted for the SBDI program.

We respectfully ask that you stand with the educators, students, and families who are benefitting from SBDI by ensuring its continued funding. Our work is far from done, and with SBDI's support, we are better equipped to create the educational environment our students deserve. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rachel March
Coordinator of
Alternative Services
Pine Meadow Academy

Tracy Gibbons
School Social Worker
Windsor Locks
Middle School

Joshua Robinson
Director of
Pupil Services
Windsor Locks
Public Schools

Megan Parrette
Director of Curriculum,
Instruction and Assessment
Windsor Locks
Public Schools



Testimony to the Connecticut Legislature: Advocating for Continued Funding of the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI)

Members of the Appropriations 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 6864.

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 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. Not funding this program would be a missed opportunity for our district to enhance our support systems and improve student outcomes.

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



School

Pulaski Middle

Respect. Responsibility. Pride

Ms. Whitehead, Principal
Ms. Melluzzo, Assistant Principal
Mr. Fortier, Assistant Principal
Mr. Roberts, Assistant Principal
Mrs. Norton, Dean of Students

757 Farmington Avenue, New Britain CT 06053
(860) 225-7665 Fax (860) 223-3840

To the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Michelle Norton, and I have been working for CSDNB for nearly 15 years, focusing on discipline and serving as the Dean of Students at Pulaski Middle School in New Britain, CT. My main role is to assist administrators in equitably resolving disciplinary problems, per Board of Education policies, administrative procedures, and rules and regulations. I know about adolescent development and strive to minimize the number of school suspensions and arrests.

SBDI (School-Based Diversion Initiative) was co-developed in 2008 by CHDI, the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Judicial Branch, and the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. CHDI is the state Coordinating Center for SBDI. Pulaski Middle School is in its second year of participating in SBDI, which has played a significant role in reducing suspensions, expulsions, and arrests among students with behavioral health needs. SBDI provides training to teachers, administrators, and school resource officers to recognize health crises in the school. It builds connections, engages youth and families, helps with data-informed decisions, and revises school policies and practices.

We are requesting your continued support to enable this program to thrive within the school environment and assist schools in addressing the mental health needs of students. SBDI funding has been vital in educating both our staff and students in restorative practices and initiating new programs that help our students achieve success at school. It would be a substantial loss not to have SBDI in our school in the coming years.

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding this crucial matter for the future of our students in the educational system.

Respectfully,

Michelle Norton
Dean of Students
Pulaski Middle School
norton@csdnb.org

Our commitment to Pulaski Middle School is to provide a safe, equitable, and intellectually challenging environment that will empower all students to become culturally competent, innovative thinkers, creative problem solvers and inspired learners.

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WWW.CSDNB.ORG



February 17, 2025

Dear Legislators:

I am writing to urge your continued support for the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) and to advocate against the proposed changes outlined in House Bill 6864. As an administrator in a public school district directly benefiting from SBDI, I have seen firsthand the impact this program has had on our students, staff, and overall school climate. I strongly encourage you to maintain its current structure and funding through the Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI), as this approach has proven to be effective and essential.

In 2022, while serving as the Assistant Superintendent of Administration, I led a district-wide effort to address the heightened levels of student dysregulation and absenteeism following the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our goal was to provide our educators with the necessary tools to de-escalate emotional outbursts, respond effectively to students in distress, and keep students engaged in their education rather than resorting to suspensions. The SBDI program emerged as a vital solution, offering professional development tailored to the needs of our schools and equipping staff with the skills needed to support students in crisis.

With the support of the SBDI grant, we successfully implemented programs in our three middle schools, reducing student referral rates, increasing calls to 211 support services, and creating safe spaces for students to process their emotions. The initiative provided invaluable professional development for all staff and in-depth training for a core team, ensuring sustainability and school-wide impact. CHDI's approach fostered self-sufficiency, allowing us to integrate these practices in ways that best served our unique student populations.

Encouraged by the success in our middle schools, both Conard and Hall High School sought to expand the program to their students, who faced similar challenges. We applied for and received the SBDI grant for our high schools, strengthening our district's capacity to support student well-being. While some effects of the COVID-19 era have lessened, schools continue to experience high levels of student dysregulation and an increased need for mental health and behavioral support. The SBDI program remains an essential resource in addressing these ongoing challenges.

This program is making a real difference in the lives of students, teachers, and families across the state. Changing its structure or funding could jeopardize its effectiveness and limit access for schools that need it most. I urge you to oppose House Bill 6864 and to continue supporting the SBDI program in its current form so that more schools can benefit from its proven success.

Thank you for your time and commitment to the well-being of our students.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne T. McKernan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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