



Advocating for teachers  
and public education

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:  
Robert Murphy

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*Testimony of Robert Murphy  
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Connecticut Education Association*

Regarding

***Raised Bill No. 7345 An Act Concerning Great Schools for All***

Before the

*Joint Committee on Education*

*March 12, 2007*

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Association**

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My name is Bob Murphy. I am the Director of Policy for the Connecticut Education Association. I am here today to testify on Raised Bill No. 7345 "An Act Concerning Great Schools for all."

CEA strongly supports universal access to high quality preschool opportunities. Some of you may recall the words of Dr. Jack Shonkoff at an event hosted by CEA when he spoke to a joint hearing of the Education and Appropriation Committees of the "... need to address the paradox of a rich and growing science base and increased awareness of the importance of the early years of life, yet persistent resistance to significant investment in the healthy development of young children." In the two years since that event Connecticut has made a commitment to address this problem and this budget will be an important indicator of our willingness to provide the necessary resources. Our one caveat regarding subsidies is that we need to ensure that parents have the necessary support in making informed choices among high quality programs.

**Section 3 – Pilot Schools**

CEA supports the concept of pilot schools. We have been working for over a year with a coalition looking at systemic change. With support from our national affiliate (NEA) we brought in nationally acclaimed experts who have direct experience with small school initiatives and particularly pilot schools in Boston. You will hear testimony today on the details of the culmination of our deliberations, a proposal we are calling the Urban Initiative.

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#### Section 4 – Small High Schools

CEA supports the encouragement of experimentation with small high schools since this is a movement that has shown considerable promise. A number of the pilot schools in Boston were first initiated and supported through a Gates Small Schools grant.

#### Section 5 – teacher and principal all star program

CEA does not support the importation and encouragement of national programs that diminish the significance and rigor of teacher certification. Connecticut has a well-deserved reputation over the course of the last two decades in raising its standards for teacher certification. Our Urban Initiative would focus much of its attention on attracting and retaining quality and qualified teachers to our most challenging schools.

#### Section 6 – District-wide school improvement program

CEA supports additional support from the state for the implementation of district-wide school improvement plans. It is interesting to note that the federal government has totally withdrawn support for comprehensive school reform and has never funded the school improvement component of NCLB.

#### Section 7 – State-wide public information system

CEA supports the improvement of the data-gathering capacity of the state department of education, but we do not support the development of a complex, burdensome, and unnecessary system of grading public schools with an accountability system attached to it that mirrors the flawed paradigm of No Child Left Behind.

We have already gone on the record in support of the accountability provision in the Governor's implementer bill. We participated on the ECS Commission and supported the final set of recommendations.

We hope that you will give careful consideration to the implications of this proposal and reject it.

Connecticut has a well-established system of providing information to the public about its schools in the form of Strategic School Profiles. We maintained the algorithm of reporting progress based on two statewide tests the CMT and the CAPT. The information has been disaggregated by subgroup for over a decade. CMT and CAPT are the established basis for measuring student achievement in Connecticut. Many of the other elements called for in this proposal are already collected by the state.

NCLB has added an additional layer of complexity for the public to understand and required Connecticut to establish an additional standard called "proficiency."

The addition of a “grading” system will only obscure rather than clarify the status particularly since assigning grades is of necessity arbitrary. The arbitrariness is further exacerbated by the complexity of basing the letter grade on performance in multiple grades and on multiple subjects.

There is great potential for conflict with the requirements of NCLB in this proposal which also raises the issue of timeliness. The Congress is due to reauthorize NCLB in 2007 and that process is already underway. Hearings have begun and our information is that markup will begin late spring and debate could begin in early fall. One consistent recommendation and one which seems to have an increasingly broad consensus is the incorporation of some form of growth model. The department of Education has been preparing for incorporating a growth model in its accountability system and will be ready should the federal law turn in this direction.

The quality indicators as part of a high stakes accountability system pose a whole different set of problems. Not the least of these is that three out of the five indicators will of necessity rely on self-reporting (teacher and staff morale, parent participation, and student motivation) These areas would rely on surveys – likely very time consuming surveys- which will raise complex issues of validity particularly in a high stakes context.

Finally and perhaps most importantly we should ask what, if anything this will contribute to the teaching and learning process. Last week Bill Gates testified before the Senate HELP Committee. He urged the Congress to form a national Center for State Education data. In the course of his testimony, he said that it is not good enough just to collect data. He said, “We also need to use the data we collect to implement change, including by personalizing learning to make it more relevant and engaging for students – and thereby truly ensure that no child is left behind.”