

Testimony for Cathy Sosnowski

Joint Public Hearing of Program Review and Investigations Committee And Education Committee

February 27, 2008

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Senator Meyers, Representative Fleischmann and Representative Wasserman, and members of the Education and Program Review and Investigation Committee. I am here in support of SB 329 and SB 330.

My name is Cathy Sosnowski, and I am a teacher in Bristol. I am here today to comment on the staff recommendations for the BEST program. First, let me give you my background. I have taught for 26 years. I am a cooperating teacher for student teachers, a mentor for beginning teachers as well as a BEST assessor, table leader and conferencer. Currently, I also teach 6 sections of sophomore English and mentor 3 young ladies who are doing their portfolios even as I speak. On their behalf, I am here today to urge you, to implore you to adopt all the staff recommendations pursuant to mentors.

My mentees are lucky to work in Bristol which has made a commitment to provide all its beginning teachers with a full two years of mentoring. I know, however, from my former student teachers, from the beginning teachers I conference with that is not the norm. Too often, these young teachers are overwhelmed and unsupported in their portfolio year; too often their first year mentor was not in their content area or not in their building or both. I understand that many districts simply cannot afford the perceived luxury of a two year mentorship. I understand that many of my colleagues look at the burden mentoring adds to an already grueling daily schedule and say, "No way! Let someone else do it." But...I know in my heart and soul these are not only easily remedied, but cheaper in the long run than hemorrhaging young teachers who leave the profession.

By strengthening the mentoring piece, beginning teachers will have the support they need to demonstrate their ability. We mentors serve as sounding boards, back checkers, cheerleaders, and venting posts. Just knowing they are not alone during this process, makes a huge difference whether the district is Simsbury or Bristol. One thing I am very proud of is that Bristol has one of the highest rates if not the highest rate of teacher success on the portfolio of all urban areas in Ct. That is not luck; that was the foresight to know that money invested early pays those dividends. But even those districts that

provide can do better. Please help districts to make the leap to fulltime mentors who can concentrate on their mentees. For years my colleagues have rued the fact the only way to advance in teaching was to leave it for administration. By adopting the recommendations you accomplish not only support for the beginning teachers, but allow those of us more veteran an avenue to continue to teach what we know best- how to teach. Please dignify the expertise and experience of the mentors by classifying them as Master Teachers whose sole role is to improve and inform the teaching of those teachers they work with.

In the end, this is not about the portfolio or the teachers or the unions or the state department of education or even this illustrious committee. It has been, is and ever shall be about the kids and only the kids. On their behalf, I fervently urge this committee to adopt all recommendations pertaining to BEST mentors.