

Remarks of Dr. Patricia Law
Assistant Principal
Granby Public Schools

Before the Program Review and Investigations Committee & Education Committee
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Good afternoon members of the Education Committee and the Program Review Investigations Committee. My name is Patricia Law, Ed. D. and I am an Assistant Principal at Granby Memorial High School. I am here today to comment on Raised Bill 329 and Raised Bill 330 pertaining to the BEST program. My experiences in education over the past 16 years have taken me through a variety of areas, from Compensatory Education teacher for grades K-5, to middle school teacher, to college professor to my current position as an Assistant Principal. My love of learning and education were also the impetus for me to get my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. However, none of this would have happened if it wasn't for the understanding, strength and caring of my mentor teacher many years ago. She helped pave the way for me to be successful in my teaching career today. Therefore, I am here to advocate for a relevant and realistic beginning teacher program which truly meets the needs of today's educators.

The past ten years have brought a flood of research to the topic of mentoring for new teachers. Charlotte Danielson (2007, 2000), John Holloway (2001), and James Rowley (1999) have all written about the need for comprehensive mentoring programs. Much of their research has found that attrition rates of new teachers are lowered, job satisfaction is increased and student achievement increases when new teachers are supported through a quality mentoring program. These beginning teacher programs must include extensive training for mentor teachers, explicit expectations for both mentor and mentee, as well as quality time for the mentor and mentee to meet. However, time is the factor most often over-looked in these programs.

TIME.... Time to observe the mentor teacher teaching. Time to observe the mentee teaching. Time to reflect on the lesson taught. Time to plan a unit of study. Time to develop the relationship necessary for professional dialogue, trust and risk-taking to occur (all the elements necessary for growth and learning). Time for

immediate and formative feedback in order to capitalize on strengths and improve on areas of need. Marzano (2001) indicates through his research that formative assessments are a best instructional practice and a strategy we should expect teachers to implement in their classrooms to increase student achievement. Therefore, shouldn't we be modeling this for our teachers as well? Where does the time for this professional discourse and reflection happen during the day for a teacher?

Currently, the BEST program asks mentor teachers to meet with their mentees during their limited preparation time during the day (time set aside to focus on the needs of students in the classroom) or after school when the reality of the classroom setting is no longer available. In Connecticut, we have high standards for our teachers. The Connecticut Common Core of Teaching (CCCT) articulates the many expectations we believe are important for quality teachers to demonstrate. For example, provide students and parents with regular and timely feedback, differentiate lessons, create a learning environment which meets the various learning styles of the students and present curriculum in a competent and engaging manner. However, how can we expect our top teachers, the ones who should be mentors, who care so much about their students, to meet all these competing expectations? The reality is mentor teachers need release time during the school day in order to give sufficient attention to the elements of a quality mentoring program. Therefore, as the State Department of Education looks to improve their mentoring program, they must fund quality release time for mentor teachers to work with mentees during the school day.

As a high school assistant principal, an important part of my job is to evaluate teachers. The evaluation process provides formal and informal input to teachers about their teaching and its impact on students. Through this process, I engage in reflective conversations with teachers about their practice in relation to the CCCT. In order to have meaningful conversations with teachers about instruction and learning, it is my job to help create a culture of professional discourse and collaboration. By modeling these expectation on a regular basis our school has developed a collaborative climate in which teachers share their knowledge and provide support for novice as well as veteran teachers. The continual focus on professional growth supports a beginning teacher mentor program by creating a large selection of capable and willing mentors who are

available to guide the development of new teachers. Consequently, these mentor teachers contribute to the continual development of a professional learning community which is the cornerstone of a 21st century school (Dufour, 1998) and the Framework for Connecticut's High School Redesign. Not only does a progressive and comprehensive mentoring program develop strong beginning teachers, it can help form the base for a culture of collaboration and professional growth within an entire building.

Today, classrooms are filled with a variety of students each with their own unique needs and strengths as learners. Administrators and teachers have the task of creating learning environments that will meet the needs of all these individual students and encourage them develop to their fullest potential. This is a enormous task, but one that can meet with success if we effectively train teachers, reduce teacher turnover, and support each other in this challenge. Therefore, I urge the committee to support release time for mentor teachers. Not only will this increase the success of our new teachers, but ultimately it will result in increased achievement and growth for students. And isn't that truly our priority?

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