AN ACT CONCERNING THE BEST PROGRAM.

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

Section 1. Subsection (d) of section 10-220a of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective July 1, 2009):

(d) The Department of Education may fund, within available appropriations, in cooperation with one or more regional educational service centers: (1) A cooperating teacher program to train Connecticut public school teachers and certified teachers at private special education facilities approved by the Commissioner of Education and at other facilities designated by the commissioner, who participate in the supervision, training and evaluation of student teachers; and (2) institutes to provide continuing education for Connecticut public school educators, assessing cooperators, and cooperating teachers, including institutes to provide continuing education for Connecticut public school educators offered in cooperation with the Connecticut Humanities Council; and (3) a beginning teacher support and assessment program to train Connecticut public school teachers and other qualified persons approved by the Commissioner of Education and certified teachers at such private special education and other designated facilities who serve as mentors or assessors for
beginning teachers and who supervise, train and assist or assess
beginning teachers in their initial years in teaching and to pay stipends
to assessors.] Funds available under this subsection shall be paid
directly to school districts for the provision of substitute teachers when
cooperating teachers [teacher mentors, beginning teachers and
assessors] are released from regular classroom responsibilities and for
the provision of professional development activities for cooperating
and student teachers [teacher mentors, assessors and beginning
teachers.] The cooperating teacher [and beginning teacher support and
assessment programs] program shall operate in accordance with
regulations adopted by the State Board of Education in accordance
with chapter 54, except in cases of placement in other countries
pursuant to written cooperative agreements between Connecticut
institutions of higher education and institutions of higher education in
other countries. A Connecticut institution may enter such an
agreement only if the State Board of Education and Board of
Governors for Higher Education have jointly approved the institution's
teacher preparation program to enter into such agreements. Student
teachers shall be placed with trained cooperating teachers. [Beginning
teachers shall participate in a beginning teacher support and
assessment program as made available by the board. School districts
shall be responsible for providing support to beginning teachers which
shall include, but not be limited to, the placement of beginning
teachers with trained teacher mentors who may be full or part-time
teachers in the same or a different building than the beginning teacher
and provision of trained assessors to conduct assessments of beginning
teachers. Cooperating teachers, teacher mentors and assessors may
serve concurrently in more than one capacity and may be assigned
more than one student teacher or beginning teacher in each such
capacity. The assessment of each beginning teacher shall be based
upon, but not limited to, data obtained from observations conducted
by assessors using an assessment instrument. A beginning teacher
shall be assessed by educators with teaching experience in the same
general subject area as such beginning teacher.] Cooperating teachers
[and teacher mentors] who are Connecticut public school teachers [and
assessors who are employed by school districts] shall be selected by local and regional boards of education. Cooperating teachers [and teacher mentors and assessors] at such private special education and other designated facilities shall be selected by the authority responsible for the operation of such facilities. If a board of education is unable to identify a sufficient number of individuals to serve in such positions, the commissioner may select qualified persons who are not employed by the board of education to serve in such positions. Such regulations shall require primary consideration of teachers' classroom experience and recognized success as educators. The provisions of sections 10-153a to 10-153n, inclusive, shall not be applicable to the selection, placement and compensation of persons participating in the cooperating teacher [and beginning teacher support and assessment programs] pursuant to the provisions of this section and to the hours and duties of such persons. The State Board of Education shall protect and save harmless, in accordance with the provisions of section 10-235, any cooperating teacher [, teacher mentor or assessor] while serving in such capacity.

Sec. 2. (Effective July 1, 2008) Notwithstanding the provisions of section 10-220a of the general statutes, as amended by this act, or any regulation adopted by the State Board of Education pursuant to said section, for the 2008-2009 school year, the Department of Education shall not require any beginning teacher being assessed as part of the beginning teacher support and assessment program to complete a video component as part of such assessment program.

Sec. 3. (Effective from passage) (a) There is established a task force to develop a plan to replace the beginning educator support and training program with a mentor assistance program starting with the 2009-2010 school year. The plan shall include, but not be limited to, the following: (1) Requirements for an initial educator's successful completion of the mentor assistance program, (2) sequence support modules based on state standards as set forth in the Common Core of Teaching, as developed by the Department of Education, (3) requirements concerning (A) mentor eligibility and assignments and training of
mentors, and (B) the frequency with which mentor teachers should meet with beginning teachers, (4) methods to encourage collaboration from the Department of Education, Regional Educational Service Centers and local and regional school districts to identify, recruit and retain mentors, and (5) recommendations concerning the development of a data collection and evaluation system for monitoring the mentor assistance program on local and state-wide levels. The task force should consider whether legislative changes should be made, including, but not limited to, amending section 10-220a of the general statutes to (i) require a reduced classroom teaching work load for mentors, as determined by the school district, (ii) expand the categories of persons who can become mentors, (iii) require that beginning teachers receive and complete the mentor assistance program during their first two years of certification, and (iv) require that school districts receive full funding to implement the mentor assistance program.

(b) The task force shall consist of the following members:

(1) The chairpersons and ranking members of the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, or their designees;

(2) The chairpersons and ranking members of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee, or their designees;

(3) Four appointed by the House of Representatives chairperson of the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, one of whom shall be a member of the Connecticut Education Association, one of whom shall be a member of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, one of whom shall be a member of the Connecticut Association of Schools and one of whom shall be a member of the Connecticut Federation of School Administrators;

(4) Four appointed by the Senate chairperson of the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters
relating to education, one of whom shall be a member of the Connecticut chapter of the American Federation of Teachers, one of whom shall be a member of Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, one of whom shall be a member of the Connecticut Parent Teacher Association and one of whom shall be a teacher at a regional vocational-technical school; and

(5) The Commissioner of Education, or the commissioner's designee.

(c) All appointments to the task force shall be made no later than thirty days after the effective date of this section. Any vacancy shall be filled by the appointing authority.

(d) The chairperson of the task force shall be the Commissioner of Education, or the commissioner's designee. The chairperson shall schedule the first meeting of the task force, which shall be held no later than sixty days after the effective date of this section.

(e) The administrative staff of the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education shall serve as administrative staff of the task force.

(f) Not later than January 1, 2009, the task force shall report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes, its findings and recommendations to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education and to the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee. The task force shall terminate on the date that it submits such report or January 1, 2009, whichever is earlier.

| This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections: |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Section 1        | July 1, 2009     | 10-220a(d)       |
| Sec. 2           | July 1, 2008     | New section     |
| Sec. 3           | from passage     | New section     |
ED  Joint Favorable Subst.