

Remarks of Marianne Metzger
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Good afternoon, members of the Program Review & Investigations Committee and Education Committee. My name is Marianne Metzger, I'm a teacher in Middletown, and I'm here to comment on Raised Bills 329 and 330 pertaining to the BEST program recommendations.

I am a new teacher, and while there are some opportunities schools provide to help beginning teachers, there is much more that can be done to assure a successful transition into teaching. The most influential and significant person to help a beginning teacher is one's mentor. Unfortunately, there are not strong guidelines and policies in place to ensure that each new teacher at every school is provided with the same quality mentor-mentee relationship. In my experience at Middletown High School, each mentor has only one beginning teacher, and the two are matched up from the first day of employment. This has helped me immensely to quickly acclimate to the new school year and to become a better teacher from day one. In other districts, mentors have many beginning teachers to advise simultaneously, and cannot be an effective mentor, especially for the BEST portfolio, which is one of the most grueling and time consuming assessments of a teacher's career. In large urban schools, it is especially important that new teachers are specifically mentored so that they do not feel lost. In my experience, lack of support for new teachers contributes greatly to teacher attrition rates.

There is much to learn as a new teacher, and it is important to have a mentor teacher working with a beginning teacher on a consistent basis. New teachers need to learn basics such as school schedules, discipline policies, teacher duties, staff positions, and the layout of the school from day one. This information does not even touch on curriculum and teaching, which is a monumental learning process. Teachers

understand their content well, but when transitioning to a new school, they need to learn the timing and pacing of the curriculum for each class they teach, how the computer grading systems work, how to prepare for CAPT testing, or how to coordinate or schedule field trips. If I had not had a mentor, even a small task such as taking attendance and submitting it through the computer system would have been a complete mystery. Especially in a large urban school with hundreds of staff members, it would be overwhelming to figure out whom to go to for help with what seems with an endless list of questions. On my first day at Middletown High School, I had a list of over twenty-five items to ask my mentor, and I was not even a first-time teacher, having taught for a year in Massachusetts while earning a Master's Degree in Education. There is no doubt in my mind that without a mentor, a beginning teacher would be extremely frustrated. Therefore, it is important that schools provide common planning periods and release time for both mentors and beginning teachers. In Middletown, we have Professional Development Interns who cover classes when teachers need release time. Although these interns are certified teachers, they are not qualified enough to teach in our place. Instead, they act as substitute teachers, and I often find that it is more stressful to have an intern covering my classes than if I had actually taught the class myself. They routinely struggle with classroom management and lessons must be left with so much detail that it takes more time to plan a lesson for release days that it would to simply have remained in the classroom and not had release time. Although Middletown's solution is not perfect, it does allow teachers to collaborate, share ideas, and get important work done. Sadly, this opportunity is not guaranteed, even at Middletown High. With every new school year comes a new budget, and it has been discussed that either substitute teachers or interns may not be employed next year, leaving no time for teacher collaboration.

Teaching in an urban high school is never easy, but I feel that the relationship I have with my mentor and the release time that we are granted has allowed me to feel completely comfortable and confident in my teaching. However, I am worried that next year, when completing my BEST program, I will not have the same support that I have been given this year. The BEST portfolio is a highly stressful undertaking, and is one

that requires complete dedication. I feel that if I am not provided extra time to work on my portfolio with my mentor during the school day, then I will not be able to give my students the same quality instruction that they would otherwise receive. My afternoons and nights are routinely filled with lesson planning and grading, and if these had to be put aside for the completion of my BEST portfolio during after school hours, my students would be greatly affected.

New teachers are especially concerned that they provide their students with the highest quality instruction they can, so I believe it is necessary to provide the most support to beginning teachers as possible. This is especially important for schools like Middletown, who are in need of improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act. I therefore encourage the Connecticut Department of Education to adopt the recommendations for BEST in regards to mentoring. Mentors and beginning teachers need to have reduced teaching loads, common planning and release time, and a one on one relationship. Without the implementation of these recommendations in all schools in Connecticut, both teachers and students will suffer.

