

Remarks of Pam Garwood
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Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee and Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is Pam Garwood, I'm an associate director for professional and instructional issues for the New Jersey Education Association, and have had a long career as a classroom teacher in an urban school. I'm here today to comment on Raised Bill 329 and Raised Bill 330 pertaining to the BEST program.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on a topic that we feel very passionately about in New Jersey—mentoring our new teachers. I have a professional connection to this topic as I taught first and second grade for 23 years in an urban setting. Then I spent seven years as the staff development coordinator for my school. At the same time, I served on our state's Professional Teaching Standards Board from its inception until I joined the staff of the New Jersey Education Association. Now I work as an associate director of professional development and instructional issues.

In all of these roles, I have come to understand the importance of a high quality teacher induction program that includes mentoring from an experienced colleague.

New Jersey's current mentoring program began in 1985 for alternate route teachers only. Four years later, all new teachers were required to be mentored for one year. Districts were solely responsible for planning, implementing and paying for the program.

This had its benefits and drawbacks. While it's important to allow districts to create their own mentoring program based on the unique needs of their staff and students, the lack of supervision and leadership from the state level caused problems. Some districts delivered a very poor product or, in some cases, none at all.

In 2001, these problems were rectified. Now the state appropriates money to local districts based on its number of new teachers and provides guidelines for the

selection and training of mentors. Local Professional Development Committees develop the mentoring plan for the district and it must be approved by the local school board.

Most important, these new policies were based upon New Jersey's Professional Standards for Teachers (www.nj.gov/njded/profdev/standards.htm), standards that apply to all teachers, whether they are a rookie teacher or a grizzled veteran.

These regulations can be found at <http://www.nj.gov/education/code/current/title6a/chap9.pdf>.

To ensure district administrators understood the new regulations, NJEA, along with our Principals and Supervisors Association and the New Jersey Department of Education, funded a series of regional meetings that were attended by approximately 1,500 administrators and teacher leaders.

Like any effective program, the new regulations were accompanied by supplemental materials that districts could use to create a mentoring plan and, more importantly, evaluate its success. A Mentoring Taskforce was formed, which included practicing teachers and administrators, and representatives from NJEA and the Department of Education among others.

The Taskforce provided much of the expertise and research used in the New Jersey Mentoring Toolkit, which was written and published by the Department of Education and the National Staff Development Council.

The resource package was then reviewed by more than a dozen Local Professional Development Committees. The Toolkit addresses the following topics:

- Development and Approval Processes of a District Mentoring Plan
- Program Evaluation
- Components of Mentor Training
- Components of Novice Teacher Training
- The School Leaders' Role in Mentoring, and
- Plan Approval and the Local Board of Education.

The Toolkit is available online at
www.nj.gov/education/njpep/pd/mentor_toolkit/folder_one/index.html

The true value of this Toolkit is that the state has provided guidance for districts as they formulate their *own* mentoring plan. The mentoring of new teachers must be coordinated at the local level, so that the program can meet the unique needs of teachers and students in that district.

Although every successful mentoring plan will feature a few of the same components, such as mentor training, careful criteria for the selection and assignment of mentors, and common time for the mentor teacher and the beginning teacher, some aspects of a district's plan must be designed around the specific characteristics of that community and a district's curriculum. Districts need flexibility when mentoring their new teachers. Over the last few years, we've certainly learned that a "one size fits all" policy doesn't work with our students, and it won't work with our teachers either.

Finally, I must note another facet of quality mentoring: time.

It is important that mentoring take place over the period of at least two years. That's because it takes time for a beginning teacher and a mentor to develop a trusting and productive relationship. Furthermore, beginning teachers can't possibly anticipate every question they will have or problem they will face at the start of their journey. They need to have a mentor by their side as they experience a full year of teaching. In September, they may need advice on Back-to-School Night. In November they may have questions about report cards or parent-teacher conferences. In the spring, they may be unsure about the administration of standardized tests.

Assuming the first year of mentoring addresses these logistical questions, the second year can be spent honing one's craft. Now the pair can discuss classroom strategies or the latest in assessment techniques.

Of course, the new teacher and the mentor need time within the school day to have these conversations. Mentor teachers must be released from some of their regular duties so they can observe the beginning teacher and provide feedback. In order for these meetings to be worthwhile, they must be frequent and well-developed. A quick

word during cafeteria duty or a short chat on the way to the football practice just won't do.

At the start of my remarks, I listed my credentials. But perhaps my greatest qualification is the fact that my daughter is a beginning teacher. Naturally, I hear about every trial and tribulation. She also tells me about the invaluable assistance provided by her mentor. While she is lucky to have a mother in the field of education, she is truly fortunate to have someone who works with her every day—a mentor who has been trained and is guided by a program that was developed right in her own district.

My daughter has made far more progress with a mentor than she would have in an isolated exercise in self-reflection. And she isn't the only new teacher helped by a quality mentoring program.

In recent years, we have established several truths in education. We know that the number one reason that young people leave teaching is that they felt a lack of support from their immediate school community. We also know that good teaching is the most important factor in raising student achievement. Given these facts, an extended high-quality mentoring program, designed at the local level, not only makes sense, it will make a difference here in Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.