



Testimony by Dr. Carl Lovitt, Provost
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Before the Committees on Education and
Program Review and Investigations
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Good afternoon Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischman, Senator Meyer and Representative Wasserman and distinguished members of the Education and Program Review and Investigations Committees. For the record, I am Dr. Carl Lovitt, Provost for Central Connecticut State University. I am here on behalf of the Connecticut State University System representing Central Connecticut State University, Eastern Connecticut State University, Southern Connecticut State University and Western Connecticut State University.

I am here to testify on Senate Bill 329, *An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee Concerning the BEST Program* and Senate Bill 330, *An Act Concerning Funding for the Recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee Concerning the BEST Program*.

First, let me commend the proponents of Senate Bill 329, as it increases from one to two years the assignment of mentors for BEST teachers. We applaud this proposal because it will strengthen the Program and provide critical support to new teachers during that pivotal second year, thus increasing the likelihood for retention and success. The bill also provides for the end of the use of video tapes for new teachers doing their BEST Portfolios after July 2008. The quality of the video tapes varies widely from district to district and puts some BEST teachers at a disadvantage because the tapes may not accurately portray the quality of a BEST teacher's abilities in the classroom.

Throughout the Connecticut State University System, we offer quality programs at all of the Universities that fully reflect Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching (CCT). Beyond that, because we are NCATE accredited as well, we fully meet the standards as outlined by the various discipline-specific learned societies. This is affirmed by the State Department of Education's accreditation process. Moreover, by such measures of success as pass rates on the Praxis 2 and pass rates on the existing BEST portfolio, again, we do very well.

Senate Bill 330 allows for the State Department of Education (SDE) to fund the beginning teacher support and assessment program as well as the mentor training program. This is proposed to be done in cooperation with one or more regional educational service centers. I would respectfully request that institutions of higher education and school districts also be included.

The Universities often work with school districts to train BEST mentors. We do this because we need those mentors to host our student teachers. Mentors can host student teachers and/or serve as a mentor for beginning teachers in BEST. It costs money to train mentors and currently, we either have to work through the districts to seek funding to provide such training or have our faculty donate their time to train teachers to be

BEST mentors. If we could access the state funds, we could prepare more people as BEST mentors and thus help address the shortage of BEST mentors who serve both student teachers and beginning teachers.

As you consider how to strengthen the BEST Program, the impact on student teacher supervision must be considered. While the bill allows for a BEST mentor to supervise more than one person (e.g., a first year teacher and a student teacher), the reality is that most teachers cannot or should not work with more than one person. Principals generally share this view, so regardless of whether the law allows for it or not, principals and teachers avoid taking on more than one mentee.

Further, I would like to make members of the Committees aware of some potentially unintended consequences of thinking of the BEST Program only in terms of the needs of beginning teachers. Plans that call for disproportional incentives to support BEST mentors working with first year teachers and do not include cooperating teachers who work with student teachers will result in attracting teachers away from student teacher supervision to working with first year teachers. This may create a problem with the placement of student teachers and, thus, cause a bottleneck in the system of teacher preparation.

At an operational level, this could mean that as districts invest more in working with their new hires – for example, when mentors are invested in working with teachers going through BEST – they are not available to work with student teachers. This would create a problem in the pipeline of preparing future teachers, as institutions of higher education wouldn't be able to find enough placements for student teachers – which would exacerbate an already growing problem.

We would be happy to work with you to develop creative solutions to address this issue. One example may be to design an alternative type of training and certification for mentors of student teachers so that those who may not be interested in completing such training for first and second year teachers, would be encouraged to do so for student teachers.

Finally, with regard to the assessment of student teachers, the Universities would like to maintain their flexibility. As I mentioned, each University program is in compliance with state regulations and standards, and organizes courses around its own "conceptual framework." This is required by NCATE. Thus assessment tools used by each institution must be able to reflect the unique nature of each program. Second, if a common state assessment is sought, I would ask that the universities and districts be involved in its development so it is not viewed as too burdensome and thereby adversely impact our ability to place our student teachers.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you have at this time.