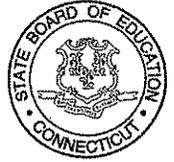




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM REVIEW AND
INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE
AND
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
February 27, 2008

**TESTIMONY OF
MARK K. MCQUILLAN, COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION**

ON

**RAISED BILL 329
AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PROGRAM REVIEW
AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE CONCERNING THE BEST PROGRAM**

AND

**RAISED BILL 330
AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE CONCERNING THE
BEST PROGRAM**

The Department of Education greatly appreciates the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee's interest in the Department of Education's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BEST) program and compliments the committee on the thoroughness of the study. BEST is a program for the induction of educators in Connecticut and is an extremely important activity as it plays a critical role in the development of effective teaching practices leading to student learning.

As you may know, the BEST program was put into place 20 years ago. Since its inception, it has become a nationally-recognized model of a comprehensive induction program providing school and state-based support through mentoring and professional

development. In addition, it provides a standards-based performance assessment through a content-specific teaching portfolio.

When the BEST program was established, it was part of a much larger package of state-funded initiatives designed to raise standards for the teaching profession and to more effectively recruit, develop, retain and recognize teachers. In addition to the BEST program, this continuum of initiatives raised teachers' salaries, introduced a three-tiered certification system, provided financial incentives for veteran teachers to become mentors and cooperating teachers, and instituted comprehensive professional development through summer institutes. However, in the years since these initiatives were put into place, state funding for a number of them was eliminated or significantly reduced.

In light of the changes to the BEST program that have occurred, we are aware that modifications are needed if it is to meet the goals of a strong teacher induction program, i.e., to improve the quality of teaching, reduce teacher turnover and result in positive gains in student achievement. However, we believe that many of the proposals for change that are included in Raised Bills 329 and 330 require state and local resources. There are no funds in the Governor's budget for these purposes.

Additionally, we do not agree with many of these proposals. In particular, the Department does not agree with the proposal in Raised Bill 330 regarding the replacement of the video component of the current BEST program assessment instrument with an on-site classroom observation effective on or after July 1, 2008. There are significant funding and logistical issues associated with replacing the video component of the portfolio with an on-site observation by an assessor. For example, the estimated cost for a single on-site observation conducted as part of the Ohio's

observation-based assessment system was \$897 in 2006-07. If such a system were to be adopted in Connecticut, it would cost an additional \$2.7 M to assess 3000 beginning teachers. In the mid-1990s, the Department replaced the on-site assessment observation system with the video component because of the costs and the increasing inability of school districts to release teachers to conduct these observations due to the unavailability of substitute teachers.

In light of the issues described above, our belief in the importance of educator induction and the need for changes that can be sustained over a long period of time, the Department requests that no legislative action be taken this session. Instead, the Department of Education would like to work for a full year with our constituents and the State Board of Education to more thoroughly explore alternative models of assessment so that we can make recommendations for 2009 to improve Connecticut's teacher induction efforts and thereby work to improve the quality of teaching, reduce teacher turnover and bring about positive gains in student achievement.