

Connecticut Commission On Educational Achievement



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Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement
Education Committee Public Hearing
2/23/11

- My name is Shana Kennedy-Salchow. I want to thank the members of the Education Committee for this opportunity to testify about Raised Bill 6324.
- I served as co-Executive Director of the Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement. The Commission is a bi-partisan group of 11 business and philanthropic leaders appointed by former Governor Rell to make recommendations for closing CT's widest in the nation achievement gap. Chaired by Steve Simmons, the commission met with 200 educational experts, held hearings across the state, visited schools and went to visit other states known for reform before issuing our report in October.
- Raised Bill 6324, An Act Concerning Teacher Employment Criteria, attempts to provide relief from an emerging teacher layoff crisis in Connecticut.
- Current layoff policies take only seniority into account and would be devastating for Connecticut's students, schools, and teachers, especially those in high poverty schools.
- Research has shown that high poverty schools bare a larger percentage of teachers with lower numbers of years in service. This results in these schools being impacted more by layoff policies focused only on seniority.
- Raised Bill 6324 attempts to provide districts the flexibility to avoid making layoffs based only on seniority. However, as written, this bill falls short.
- Raised Bill 6324 defers to existing bargaining agreements, and never requires that such a change to layoff provisions be made.
- This bill can be strengthened by
 - Requiring that any new contracts do not use years of service as the primary factor and that other factors be taken into account, such as

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- specialized skills and training in a particular school's theme or academic emphasis,
 - high-priority subject areas,
 - student achievement,
 - observations, and
 - peer review.
- The Commission is willing to help with language to strengthen this bill
- In the short-run, this bill can authorize the State Board of Education to intervene in staffing matters in any of the 120 low-achieving schools (defined as in need of improvement under NCLB).
 - These schools and the districts they reside in will be disproportionately affected by layoffs this spring and need flexibility on how to minimize the damaging impact of current "last in, first out" policies.
 - These districts need to be given the flexibility to take other factors, not just years of services, into account.
- Long term, our state should connect teacher tenure to teacher effectiveness. Teacher tenure and layoffs must be tied to teacher evaluations, not just to years on the job, and student achievement should be the dominant component of such a system.
- Last, I come to this meeting not simply as a policy wonk who has studied this issue but as a teacher who fell victim to seniority policies as a teacher. I had been trained to be the building's literacy specialist but due to seniority and bumping, I found myself ill-prepared in a PK-3 classroom. As bad as I felt for myself for being in an environment I was not comfortable with, it paled in comparison for how I felt for my little students who had a teacher who did not know what to do with them for the first couple of months- they were the ones who really lost out. It also resulted in my ultimate decision to leave the classroom.

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