



Alex Johnston
Testimony on House Bill No. 6498

ConnCAN strongly opposes the provisions of House Bill Number 6498 that propose to delay key reforms that are absolutely critical to improving schools in Connecticut. Specifically, this bill proposes a two-year delay to implementation of the state data and teacher evaluation systems that were passed by the General Assembly last year in Public Act 10-111 (delayed from 2013 until 2015).

House Bill 6498 would delay fundamental reforms needed to improve our schools. In particular, this bill would delay:

1) *Full implementation of a state data system* to track and report on student, teacher and school, and district performance growth data and make that information available for use in evaluating teacher and student performance and growth. Such a statewide data system is absolutely fundamental to school improvement and accountability efforts, yet Connecticut lags well behind many states in this regard.¹ Without this system, too many parents, teachers, principals, districts, and state leaders lack the kind of data they need in order to know what's working, what's not, and how to fix it. For example, our current data systems do not allow us to match student-level Pk-12 and higher education data to track matters like college enrollment, remediation rates, college graduation rates, etc. Our state has already begun to develop and pilot some components of these systems, and we need to accelerate, not delay, this work.

2) *Systems to measure the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs.* We know that too many teacher preparation programs are not turning out graduates who are prepared to deliver an excellent education to students. Recent test results show that nearly one in every three graduates from Connecticut's teacher preparation programs does not know how to teach children how to read.² In some programs, nearly 50 percent of prospective teachers failed a test of teaching reading skills that became part of the teacher certification process in 2009.³ Last year's Public Act 10-111 required, for the first time, the state to create a data system that links students to their teachers and teachers to their training programs. We cannot delay implementation of this system that will be critical to ensuring that graduates of teacher training programs are prepared to take on the challenges of the job.

¹ For example, see <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/stateanalysis/states/CT/>

² <http://ctmirror.com/story/7654/exam-trips-prospective-teachers-90810>

³ <http://www.conncan.org/sites/default/files/research/StateOfCTPubEd2009-Web.pdf>

3) *A statewide teacher evaluation system.* With the exception of New Haven's nationally recognized teacher evaluation plan, Connecticut's current teacher evaluation systems are woefully inadequate. In their annual review of state teacher policies, the National Center for Teacher Quality gave Connecticut a 'D+', placing our state far behind the nation's leaders on making sure every child has access to a great teacher.⁴ Without an evaluation system that will provide meaningful data, feedback, and support to all teachers, we cannot formally recognize effective educators, help those who are struggling, or remove those who are consistently underperforming. It is precisely because of our lack of a functional teacher evaluation system that we find ourselves in the devastating situation of having to rely on seniority in the thousands of teacher layoffs that will happen this year. In the short term, we need to give districts the flexibility to use more than just seniority when making layoff decisions this year. Common sense dictates that factors such as specialized training, student performance, teacher observations, and peer review should be considered before teachers are laid off. In the long term, we need a statewide educator evaluation system that allows us to measure a teacher's effectiveness and use that information in a range of staffing decisions. With no end in sight to our budget woes, we cannot delay implementation of a strong statewide teacher evaluation system.

Connecticut is already obligated to implement many of these reforms by 2011. Delaying their implementation will put us out of compliance.

Last year, Connecticut received about \$541 million under the federal State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) that were intended to help stabilize State and local government budgets in order to minimize and avoid reductions in education and other essential public services. Our state has already distributed those funds to districts. To qualify for these funds, the State was required implement a number of education reform initiatives by September 30, 2011, including:

- Maintaining our state-wide student identifier for pre-k through postsecondary, linking teachers to students, and the capacity to communicate with our higher education system; and
- Providing student achievement growth data to teachers of reading/language arts and mathematics and provide those teachers with reports of individual teacher impact on student achievement on state assessments.⁵

Connecticut has already lost opportunities for millions in federal education funds. House Bill 6498 jeopardizes our chances at future funding.

During the last two years, approximately \$5.3 billion of competitive education grants have been awarded to states as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The grants were split into six different efforts:

⁴ <http://www.nctq.org/stpy09/updates/connecticut.jsp>

⁵ http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/arra/sfsf_required_activities.pdf

1. Race to the Top (76.75%)
2. Investing in Innovation (12.01%)
3. Teacher Incentive Fund (3.62%)
4. Data Systems (4.65%)
5. Teacher Quality Partnerships (1.86%)
6. Impact Aid (1.11%)

Connecticut ranked **38th out of all states** in overall dollars won with a total of \$4,473,481. This amounts to \$7.89 per pupil.⁶ Meanwhile, our neighboring states won billions in federal funding. For example, Rhode Island received over 65 times the funding per pupil that Connecticut won.

Table 1. Connecticut Competitive Federal Funds Won Compared to Neighboring States

State	Total	Rank	Per Pupil	Rank
Rhode Island	\$75,000,000	13 th	\$516.02	4 th
Massachusetts	\$310,588,393	8 th	\$323.90	8 th
New York	\$845,659,232	2 nd	\$308.54	9 th
Connecticut	\$4,473,481	38th	\$7.89	38th

What set these states apart from Connecticut? Strong data and teacher evaluation systems that:

- Use student achievement growth as a significant factor
- Help teachers identify areas of excellence and areas that need improvement, and center professional development around those results
- Can be used to inform critical staffing decisions: hiring, tenure, promotion, termination, and compensation.⁷

Oppose House Bill 6498

Connecticut is home to the largest achievement gap in the nation, and even our top performing students are falling behind.⁸ In the meantime, states like Massachusetts and Florida are making significant progress to close achievement gaps and raise overall achievement.⁹ These states are also winning billions in federal funding while Connecticut gets left in a state of perpetual mediocrity. We can reverse this course, but we must prioritize essential reforms, rather than delay them as proposed in House Bill 6498.

⁶ Education Week, Competitive Stimulus Grants: Winners and Losers

http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/infographics/stimulus_competitive.html

⁷ NY Summary - <http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/application/summary.html>, MA Summary -

http://www.mass.gov/Eeoe/docs/arra/race2top_phase2_exec_summary.pdf, RI Summary -

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/commissioner/RaceToTheTop/docs/1-pager.pdf>

⁸ National Center for Education Statistics; Hanushek, Petersen, and Woessmann. "U.S. Math Performance in Global Perspective." <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/PEPG10->

⁹ National Center for Education Statistics

