



Testimony of Dr. John Yrchik

**Connecticut Education
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Before the Education Committee

*Regarding S.B Bill No. 1160, An Act Concerning School
Transportation, The Development of a Model Teacher Performance
Evaluation System, and Teacher Tenure Laws and Cooperative
Arrangements.*

March 17, 2011

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is John Yrchik, Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association, representing 40,000 active teachers in our strong public schools.

The Connecticut Education Association was very involved in the work which led to PA10-111, the most massive education reform legislation in Connecticut in 24 years. One cornerstone of the bill was a change in the criteria for evaluating educators, which now include "multiple indicators of student academic growth." To effect this change, a new data system was defined and is in the process of being implemented. Finally, the bill created a Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC), which has been meeting regularly since June to develop recommended new evaluation guidelines for teachers and school administrators. A detailed action plan is in place guiding the Council's work.

This process of revising the teacher evaluation guidelines is the product of broad consensus in the education community. As Representative Fleischmann said on the floor of the House when bringing out the education reform bill:

"So, what we did is we got together key stakeholders and we made sure that they worked together to come to the measure before us... And so we have the Commissioner of Education in the room along with people from the teachers' unions. We had Representative Doug McCrory from Campaign Learn in the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus. We had Alex Johnston from ConnCAN. We had Joe Cirasuolo from the Connecticut Association of Superintendents."

We are concerned with the bill before you because it changes the process the education stakeholders agreed to last year. CEA believes the process begun by legislation last year should not be truncated by legislation this year and should be allowed to continue to its conclusion. Introducing legislative mandates into the collaborative process now underway will create confusion and delay reform.

A number of specific issues trouble us:

- 1.) This bill mandates a single model system of evaluation. The Performance Evaluation Advisory Council was charged with developing guidelines, which would give districts the ability to develop multiple models that align with the guidelines. Districts would be required to submit their plans to the state to ensure that the guidelines have been followed. The committee hopes to develop samples of models for districts to use which do not have the capacity to develop their own.

The ability for multiple models to be developed is important for two reasons. First, districts have different capacities and structures. A one-size evaluation model does not fit all. Second, as both the proposed bill and current evaluation statute defines teacher, the term includes everyone under the superintendent including principals, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and school nurses. Clearly, different evaluation models would be necessary for these other teaching categories.

- 2.) Training should not just be "offered" (as it is proposed in lines 18 and 87-88) but required so everyone can properly administer and participate in the new plans. Good policy without required implementation is empty.
- 3.) The rigidity of timelines in the proposed bill for both areas of improving instruction and terminating a teacher in reality create more state mandates, which the parties involved may not find reasonable or possible to meet.
- 4.) Removing the authority of superintendents, human resource/personnel directors, and other supervisory educators from the final decision to move to a dismissal (line 48) is dangerous and short-sighted.
- 5.) There are currently 6 statutory reasons for terminating a teacher. Adding a 7th reason for failure to successfully complete the plan is clearly unnecessary and redundant when one reads the six already in place. Lines 119-121 seem also to change significantly the statutory termination notification process, causing more confusion and ambiguity.

In summary, we ask that you not support this bill. Let the work on the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council continue. Let's do it right. We need to upgrade our current regulations to ensure an even more effective educator evaluation system. A fair, equitable, and flexible system will address each district's unique needs, while providing proper guidance and high standards for all. Thank you.