

Connecticut Commission On Educational Achievement



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Education Committee Public Hearing
2/28/11

- My name is Shana Kennedy-Salchow. I want to thank the members of the Education Committee for this opportunity to testify about Raised Bill 6432.
- 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.
- I want to start off by stating that I am very excited to see such a great focus on the Achievement Gap. Having intensively studied this issue in this Connecticut, the need to focus on the students who are being underserved by our education system cannot be understated- especially in a state where the overall averages are actually pretty good.
- While the issues around the achievement gap are complicated, and will benefit from additional input from the Task Force, there is a laundry list of things we need to get started on now and a number of ways Raised Bill 6432 can be strengthened:
- Section 3: states that the SDE shall develop model curricula in reading and mathematics for grades PK-4. I suggest including the alignment of these curricula to the Common Core Standards- we adopted them as a state as of July of this year. Furthermore, I recommend adding in language to require the bottom 5% of schools to submit their curricula for review to the SBE to ensure they align with the new curricula- with several of these schools failing for their students for more than five years, we cannot leave this to chance. Lastly, why stop at grade 4? We should go all the way to grade 12. If money is a concern, it should be noted that we do not need to do much development ourselves- because so many states have adopted them, we should be able to work with others through the consortia we belong to).
- Section 5(a). The establishment of a State Education Resource Center to promote equity and excellence sounds like a laudable goal but as written, there is no accountability included and no mention of a focus on the lowest 5% of schools which need aggressive

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turnaround strategies if we are going to get serious about closing the achievement gap. I suggest changing this resource center to more of a turnaround office within the SDE with an aggressive mandate to intervene in low-achieving schools.

- Section 5(b): again, on the outset, providing grants to districts identified as in need of improvement sounds great but we need to focus on holding them accountable to results. We also need to be sure to encourage innovation.
- Section 5(c): very encouraging to see provisions for training local board of education members and providing information on successful evaluation models. Should start tomorrow.
- Section 6: added in that a local or regional BOE for a school designated as low-achieving may increase the number of hours and days of the school year to improve student achievement. We recommend changing this to must—schools on the list of low-achieving schools have been “in need of improvement” for five years or more. How much longer are we going to allow them to languish?
- Section 7: We fully support a reciprocity program for educators and want to be clear that this should be for both teachers and school and district administrators. We also recommend replacing the word equivalent with similar- we need to make sure the certification requirements are similar. Should enter into the Interstate Agreement for administrative endorsements
- Section 8: We think all-day K in the priority districts is a must and are encouraged to see it included.

Additionally, to really close the achievement gap, we must:

1. Require school districts to institute a teacher evaluation system where significant weight is given to growth in student achievement, in addition to other factors such as classroom practice observations and lesson planning.
2. We must support effective teaching by basing the ability to gain and maintain tenure on teacher effectiveness.
 - Further, we need to create a way to remove ineffective teachers in a fair but faster way- if they are rated as ineffective, they must be given time and resources to improve by date certain and if they do not improve, the process of removal should not be more than 90 days.
 - We must include ineffective teaching as grounds for removal in the tenure statute.

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3. We must include student growth in the evaluation of principals and district leaders. If we are going to hold teachers to these measures, we must do the same for management.
 4. Must offer additional compensation to attract highly effective educators to our underperforming, schools. If the philanthropic community wants to fund this, we must make this possible.
- Last, I'd like to take this opportunity to comment on Raised Bill 6431, Section 1(f)(2)(c): As a Commission we were very supportive of shared-service models. During the course of the Commission we learned that there were \$2.5B in expenses not directly related to the classroom (plant operations, pupil transportation, benefits such as health care or insurance-not pensions, ...). Savings of just two percent could yield \$50 million. Section 1(f)(2)(c) calls for reducing the budgeted appropriation for education in an amount equal to the savings. This is a great way to incentivize districts to be more efficient. I would also encourage you to consider a concept where savings could be applied to Pre-K for low-income students and would be matched by the state. In this way, through savings we are also promoting investment in early education for our most vulnerable students.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify on these bills.

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