

Remarks of Diane M. Walsh
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For the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24
Tenure, Collaboration, Evaluation, Training, and Experimental Programs

Members of the Education Committee: as a mathematics teacher at Coginchaug Regional High School in Durham and as a parent of students in Killingworth, I would like to provide input on Senate Bill 24.

Governor Malloy's comments that "teachers just show up" were so far off base that I felt absolutely defeated; however, it was a wake-up call to the disparity between public perception (mostly uninformed parents) and the reality of what occurs in a classroom with an experienced, educated teacher. While there are resources at our disposal such as textbooks and technology, an exemplar teacher will put in many hours after school and on weekends keeping current in their subject matter, formulating lessons, preparing classroom materials, providing quality feedback to students on previous assignments, analyzing student data, designing 21st Century projects, and collaborating with peers. This process is time-consuming and is limitless. Are there times when I just "show up?" Absolutely – to attend soccer games, dodgeball tournaments, National Honor Society inductions, school plays, chaperoning dances, graduation ceremonies, student presentations, Show Choir concerts, Jazz Band concerts . . . all on my own time. You will not find a single teacher in my building who has not given of their own free time to show support for our students.

The Governor and the adult public may have some outdated vision of a didactic teacher from the 1950s through 1970s standing at a lectern with an open textbook. A modern classroom teacher takes individual learning styles into consideration, is often offering a differentiated method of instruction or assessment, may have a hands-on activity or other student-centered activity, and probably uses some form of technology be it a SmartBoard or a computer lab. Each lesson takes experience, collaboration with colleagues, and planning time. The lesson must address school and district initiatives, follow the curriculum, answer essential questions, engage the students. While I do use lessons from previous years, they are not simply taken from the remote corners of my mind or from a dusty notebook. Each year that lesson is refined and improved and often altered based on journal notes from year to year on what worked and what didn't. Or it may be altered from a compass and straight-edge assignment to a computer lab activity as new technology becomes available. I am very fortunate to have a SmartBoard in my classroom along with a ceiling-mounted projector. In order to design effective lessons using the SmartBoard, I have spent hours of time devoted to researching available lessons, altering those lessons, or designing my own. These are hours spent at home for a single lesson. Each year I add more and more to my repertoire of lessons but these lessons do not magically show up on my computer. I create them. Some may argue that teachers have a preparatory period built into their day to accommodate this.

One period or block is simply not enough time to do everything required of a teacher in the course of a day. Again, I am in a forward-thinking district where teachers have common planning periods. For me this means that all seven math teachers in my high school get together and share strategies and have a round table discussion of things that worked and things that we would like guidance in handling. Furthermore, my department head belongs to a consortium of shoreline math teachers that get together once a month and share exciting projects from each school. One of my favorite projects came as a result of one of these meetings. I am also fortunate that I have been able to attend a consortium on differentiated instruction. There I met teachers from surrounding towns and schools with whom I share lessons and ideas. This exchange is both give and take as needed. All of these teachers either had their Master's degree or were in the process of obtaining one. All of this happens in a collaborative environment. Senate Bill 24 will cause an environment of fear and mistrust.

If teachers are competing for rankings, not only will teachers balk at the prospect of teaching those lower-level disconnected students, but you will lose any sense of collaboration between colleagues within a department let alone in consortiums of schools. One of my early teaching jobs was in a school where the members of a department rarely met together as a team and teachers of the same subject "were not on the same page." The collaborative spirit of my department at Coginchaug Regional High School is making all of us better teachers and the students are reaping those rewards. Teachers of common subjects have common formative and summative assessments, common planning time, discuss teaching strategies, develop projects together, and discuss effective teaching strategies. Your bill will have us competing with each other for high-level classes with high-performing students resulting in a cut-throat environment where teachers will hold lessons close and be reluctant to share. You want effective change? Provide more opportunities and time for these collaborative efforts between colleagues and consortiums of schools.

Teaching is a second career for me. I already had a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering with a minor in biochemical studies. I could not have walked into this job as a teacher without that additional Master's degree to prepare me about learning styles, differentiated instruction, and classroom management. There is more to teaching than delivering content knowledge. Sometimes you will lose your entire lunch or preparatory period as a student composes themselves after a breakup, or the loss of a pet, the loss of a friend or family member, a disagreement with another teacher or friend, a bad day at home, etc. New teachers need to learn how to manage time, transition between activities, and provide closure. Senate Bill 24 will introduce unprepared teachers and only weaken the quality of education. You want change? Reform the teacher *preparation* process.

In my district it is *not* easy to earn tenure and yes, it can be taken away. A long-time teacher in my district was fired after due process and the majority of us agree that it was the right decision. One new teacher was dismissed in his second year after unprofessionalism and another not offered tenure after a failure to improve. I was granted tenure last year after a rigorous set of evaluations. I was and am held to a set of expectations to which I am held accountable to uphold daily, regardless of tenure status. My administrators provided both commendations and recommendations throughout the four years and continue to do so informally. Tenured teachers in my district must be involved in an individually-designed professional growth project tied to improving student learning which is closely monitored (and

evaluated) by administration. Each department has year-long initiatives along with school-wide and district-wide initiatives.

I collect and analyze student data. I set student-learning goals. I adjust my teaching on the fly. I incorporate technology. I provide real-world situations. This year, in addition to all the school-wide, district-wide, state-driven goals, I have set a personal goal of updating projects to ensure they meet 21st Century skill objectives. Here is where I can see the need for change. For example, my students are working on plotting the path of actual rollercoasters. Students will enter the data in Microsoft Excel and create a scatterplot. Next, they will use Excel to create a series of piecewise-defined cubic splines representing the up/down hill sections. They will create a poster to include the data, the scatterplot of the data, the cubic equations modeling the rollercoasters, and the graphs showing the cubic splines. I would love to have a mechanical engineer, structural engineer, game designer, or amusement park manager come and talk to the students about this but I do not have the resources, connections, or time to make this happen. We need to get the parents or local businesses involved in projects such as this. You cannot pull anyone off the street to be a teacher. But you can give the existing teachers additional resources to enhance their lessons.

Your plan to link salary to student performance is unrealistic and will not benefit students as you intend. Teachers, parents, and students share the burden of responsibility. There are some students who receive no educational support at home; there are many disenfranchised students. Who will want to reach out to these low-level, low-performing students at the cost of their salary? What indicator will you use to measure this student performance? Who will develop this assessment? Who will be responsible for collecting this student performance data? What methods will you use for analysis? Senate Bill 24 has many topics for discussion but does not have enough facts.

Senate Bill 24 will compromise professionalism and it is our children who will pay the ultimate price.