

Dear Representative Fleischmann,

I am writing to you to share numerous concerns I have with the Governor's proposed education reform bill. I reside in Bethany, and have been teaching in the North Haven Public Schools for 20 years. In 2010, I was selected as "Teacher of the Year" for the North Haven Public School system. I currently teach 6th Grade Social Studies at the North Haven Middle School.

First, I want to say that I welcome any changes or reform in public education that elevates the status of the teaching profession, and encourages us to perform at very high levels. Our students deserve nothing less than the most well-trained, dedicated staff in our schools. Although the spirit of bill #24 seems to align with my beliefs, I believe there are serious flaws in the design and implementation in two specific sections: 30 (Teacher Ratings), and 31. (Salaries based on Certification)

I would compare the governor's attempt to reform public education to Congresses attempt at campaign finance reform (McCain-Feingold). In that case, legislation was created by lawmakers who are familiar with a topic: Campaign Finance. The legislation was considered to be in the public's best interest, and had bi-partisan support. The creation of Super PACs are an unforeseen bi-product of this legislation, and resulting litigation.

Now, both parties are acknowledging that further reform will be needed to handle issues surrounding the influence of Super PACS in our current presidential campaigns. In the Governor's 163 page bill, I believe there are areas that could be exploited, and lead to unforeseen ripple effects which could end up negatively impacting the students of CT. In each of the areas, the CEA has offered an alternative that keeps student's best interest in mind in their comprehensive plan "[A View from The Classroom](#)"

In section 30, the legislation proposes a four-tiered teacher rating system. The rating tiers go from "Below Standard to Exemplary". In my reading of the bill, I cannot find a concrete example of what I would need to do to be considered "Exemplary", or by the same token "Below Standard" I understand the standards are required to be developed, but to pass this bill without knowing exactly what the standards are, and being able to see the evaluation tools used to assign a rating to a teacher is "Putting the cart before the horse". Using standardized test scores, and parent and student input presents a myriad of new issues which can crop up. For example: I challenge my students, and hold them to a high standard. This can in some circumstances be unpopular with parents. Do I now just relax my standards to keep my job? I do not want to have make that choice. It is not good for kids. I teach Social Studies. There is currently no standardized test for Social Studies. How will my performance be tied to standardized test scores, if there is no test for my subject area? Until these key questions can be answered, there will be too many loose ends in this bill in it's current form.

Especially troubling to me is the that these ratings mentioned above will be tied into placement on the local district salary schedule. (Section 31) I ask you, would you approve a bill that paid your legislator salary based on a tiered system - especially, a system in which you had no prior knowledge of what it meant to make the grade at the

highest tier? Re-assurances that the system will be fair and balanced are not enough. Show me the details and as a qualified professional educator of twenty years and two advanced degrees, I will decide for myself if it is fair and balanced.

Here is where I believe the bill in its current form has the greatest potential for exploitation of our public school system. Included in the bill are provisions to relax the certification requirements of SuperIntendents. Conceivably, a Superintendent could be less versed in educational philosophy (Read: what's best for kids) and more well versed in managing the local school budget. Now consider the following scenario which plays out in districts all across the state: Due to unfunded state mandates, the town needs to make up a 4 million dollar discrepancy between the cost of these unfunded mandates, and the ECS grant money the town receives to help defray these costs. Local government has a choice: Assuming the current climate of slow economic growth, they must find ways to trim the budget by 4 million dollars, to not increase taxes. Or, they can try to trim and increase the taxes slightly. Or, they can ask the taxpayers to foot the bill and fully fund the education side of the budget. Let's say they try the middle approach: Trim budget by 2 million, and increase taxes slightly. The Financial officer of the town instructs the Superintendent to find 2 million dollars in cuts to the budget. In analyzing the current placement of teachers on the local pay-scale approximately 100 are on maximum step, with a salary of \$80,000. I am one of them. Under the new system, building administrators can be instructed that to save the district money, there must be less teachers making the 80,000 salary, therefore the standards to be rated exemplary come into play. Based on the subjective opinion of those administrators, 10 teachers are given rating of exemplary. Cost savings = 0 Dollars. Then, 75 teachers are given a rating of proficient, and dropped on the salary scale to \$70,000. Cost savings = \$750,000. Next 10 teachers are rated as "developing" and are dropped to \$60,000 on the pay scale. Cost savings = \$200,000. Finally, five teachers are rated "Below Standard" and through due process, four are found to be incompetent, and replaced with first year teachers with a starting salary of \$40,000. Cost Savings = 160,000. The one teacher who was rated below standard and found through due process to actually be rated exemplary was me. My new administrator and I had clashed several times during the year over what was best for kids in a Middle School model, and so was trying to get rid of me and my 80,000 salary. You know, to kill two birds with one stone. Regardless, the district would see a cost savings of over \$1,000,000 in this scenario. In theory, this seems to work. However, as opposed to the current system, this method allows the need to conform to a budget take priority over influencing the rating of the actual teacher. The teachers targeted when trying to balance a budget is the top priority are the most experienced, and are the backbone of every public school system. To target them would have a crippling effect.

The example above may seem extreme. However from where I stand as one of those educators who has the expertise, and experience to deserve to be compensated at the highest level, I see it as a very real possibility. Under the governor's bill, I believe the most experienced educators now are exposed as a financial liability that can be managed to fit the needs of the towns balance sheet. The majority of these experienced teachers are providing the students of our state with the highest quality education possible. They

also mentor younger teachers daily. For those veteran teachers that are no longer effective, even CEA recognizes they need to be removed from their positions, and that the current process is cumbersome and should be streamlined. The CEA plan takes into account what is good for kids without enabling political or financial pressures to influence the process. The Governor's bill allows too much extraneous influence to creep into the equation, at the expense of what is truly good for kids, and the teaching profession.

I encourage you to not support the Governor's Bill #24 in its current form. Rather, I would suggest more time is needed to further analyze and amend this sweeping reform plan. Keep in mind what happened with campaign finance reform. Sometimes, legislation passed with the best intentions has unforeseen consequences. What a shame if those consequences come back to hurt the students of our state because of the fast-track nature of this bill during the current short session, and trendiness of the topic of education reform. The Governor reasons that other states have enacted this type of legislation, so we should too. In this case, I would prefer that Connecticut continue to lead, not follow.

Respectfully yours,
Don Johnson
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Bethany, CT