



Testimony by Dr. Michael Sampson
Southern Connecticut State University
Before the Education Committee
February 21, 2012

Good afternoon, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. For the record, I am Michael Sampson, Dean of the School of Education at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU). Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today.

I would like to comment briefly today regarding Governor's Senate Bill 24, *AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS*. I'll discuss the need to attract better candidates into teacher education and the need to train them through professional Development School partnerships. My comments will reflect the national voices calling for education reform that are being spearheaded by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Increasing Selectivity of Teacher Candidates

It is crucial that Connecticut attracts, trains and certifies the very finest teachers. We believe that teachers should be master scholars and lifelong learners. Hence, it is crucial that those that will be teachers be outstanding students themselves. I believe that the admission GPA for teacher candidates should be increased from the present state requirement of 2.7 to at least 3.0. Who among us would want our child's teacher to be a C student? However, it is also imperative that the ethnic makeup of our teaching force mirrors the face of Connecticut. Students of minority status have had unequal educational opportunities, and their GPAs show this. Teacher education programs must be given the opportunity to waive minimum GPA requirement so we may maintain and, in fact, increase the number of minority teachers we have.

Increasing Clinical Experiences

But the GPA of the student is not what is most important. Rather, it is the training of the candidate to be a teacher. Last year, a joint Blue Ribbon Panel of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education recommended that teacher education be fundamentally reformed through increased clinical experience of candidates. And that is where your help is needed. Connecticut by law falls far short of the amount of interactions teacher candidates have with public students before they are certified. In Connecticut, only one semester of student teaching is required. In my programs in Texas, we required a full year of student teaching, beginning as an intern and completing as a resident. In Florida, a year and half of student teaching is required. It is a major fallacy to think that teachers can be trained in university classrooms, absent public school students. Academic courses must be interwoven with clinical experiences, so teacher candidates can apply knowledge and pedagogy as they acquire it. I believe that the greatest impact you can have is requiring more clinical hours of all teacher candidates in the state before you certify them as educators. My experience is that a teacher that is licensed through a clinical program is a stronger teacher and a teacher who stays in the profession. Why is this? It is because public school students and school culture test the clinical candidate as they learn, with a mentor teacher and university cooperating teacher by their side to help them as challenges arise.

Require Professional Partnerships

Teachers must be collaboratively trained through partnerships of universities and public schools. And in fact, each partner must have an equal voice. At Southern Connecticut State University, we have entered into a new professional development school partnership with the New Haven Schools termed The Southern New Haven Academy for Professional Development, or SNAP. Last summer we brought 100 New Haven teachers on our campus for a three day literacy institute. This semester, ten of our Southern faculty and 30 of our student teachers are infused into five New Haven elementary schools. In addition to mentoring student teachers, Southern faculty and New Haven teachers are writing new curriculum that will better meet the needs of urban learners. Furthermore, Yale's Dr. James Comer is working with SNAP to develop a pre-service psychology course to help beginning teachers better understand urban learners. The Blue Ribbon panel I mentioned recommends that all teacher training be delivered through the professional development school model. I agree.

Revise Teacher Certification

Another key aspect of the Governor's Bill involves changes to teacher certification. It is not true that "once a teacher, always a teacher." I'm surprised and disappointed when a promising and successful new teacher becomes stagnant and ineffective after years of service.

Teachers must constantly receive professional development and demonstrate their competence through an evaluation system like PEAC, which the state is proposing. Teachers should not only be evaluated by principal evaluations, but through the successful academic growth of their students and through community and peer feedback.

These exciting topics should help to broaden and enrich the state wide discussion on teacher training reform, and the growing call for education reforms being spearheaded by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.

What Really Matters

On my flight back to Hartford from Chicago Sunday night, the passenger next to me asked what I did. When he heard my profession, he immediately started talking about good and bad school districts, as ranked by test scores. I gently shared with him that success in education is really not about test scores. Good teachers develop the whole student, serving them not only academically, but also operating as a counselor, supporter and guide as they create a nurturing environment.

As you discuss this legislation, I hope you will keep in mind that teaching, and developing teachers, is a complex paradigm that involves much more than GPA or student scores. Our best teachers teach with heart and soul, and not just their intellect.

I hope that this information is helpful to your deliberations on the proposed bill before you. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.