

Hi John,

This is Adam Dunsby. I am on the Easton Board of Education and on the Representative Council for CES (the main RESC for Fairfield county).

I have not read the bill, but I've followed it in the press and read the powerpoint.

The single most important thing that can be done anywhere to improve education is to put in place a fair process to evaluate teachers and remove the bad ones. The problem is not that you can't get good teachers--you can, or that you can't pay good ones more--though that would be nice; the problem is you can't get rid of bad ones. Technically, it may be possible, but as a practical matter it's very hard. So this part of the bill looks okay (or at least this concept--I've not gone through the details). Districts will need help in setting up evaluation systems. One way in which the public sector lags the private sector is in evaluating employees. The public sector really has no idea what to do, and a law that says "okay, go evaluate" without more direction will be messy. I don't know if there is money in the bill for helping set up the system.

There is no shortage of good teachers, at least at the lower grades. If Easton advertised for a kindergarten teacher, we'd get 300 applications. I would only allow recruitment money for "in need" subjects. (e.g. physics, math, chinese). There is no reason to spend money to recruit better kindergarten teachers.

Allowing out-of-state certification (from some states) is good.

I don't see why would we should spend more on Ag sciences. Let's be realistic, no kids from Easton or Bridgeport are going to become farmers. It's expensive nostalgia.

One thing that doesn't appear to be in there, but would be nice is an evidence-based initiative. For instance, Easton's teacher contract provides for big pay increases if, say, a masters degree is earned. To my knowledge, there is no evidence that it has any effect on educational outcomes. It's really just a way to pay teachers more. (Nothing wrong with that, but there are better ways to do it.) In the bill, there seems to be some reference to bad teachers having to work on masters. Is there any evidence that would do anything? If you speak on the bill, I'd suggest you use the phrase "evidence-based" as often as possible.

The 2 million for Talent development nonprofits sounds like pure waste.

I think we can do without a food corps (sounds a bit like the SS, doesn't it?)

We should focus on "achievement" not an "achievement gap."

I don't know if there is anything in the bill about special education. As a board member and the parent of an autistic child I know a lot about this. One thing the state can do is put some of this money back into the excess cost sharing which has been flat funded for a few years now. (Many more schools in the state are concerned about this than teacher recruitment). Evaluation is a good thing and it is needed. All schools in CT have outplaced special needs students, this is right and proper, but these special needs schools (which are effectively publicly funded) are not evaluated

in any rigorous way. (As an aside, one of the main problems with special education is the lack of good evaluation. There are no CMTs for special ed students. It's a tough problem)

I'll be away next week, but those are my thoughts.

Thanks,

Adam