

Remarks of Geraldine Carley
Ridgefield School District

Before the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24, Section 30
Teacher Evaluation

February 21, 2012

Good afternoon Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Geraldine Carley, and I'm a teacher in Ridgefield. I wish to comment on Senate Bill 24, specifically on teacher evaluation.

After 30 years of teaching, both in the classroom and as a teacher librarian, I have seen waves of new ideas come and go. We once were all rushing to emulate the Japanese school model because that nation's students scored at the top of international tests in the 1980's and 90's. Now we are rushing with this bill.

It seems that many today want to emulate the success that Finland has had. If, indeed, this is a model that will finally work for the United States, then we must also adopt their policy positions of : (1) Small class size; (2) Highly-paid teachers; (3) Providing ample play time to students; (4) Social promotion; (5) Detracking; and (6) the SPARE use of standardized tests. (*The New Republic, January 28, 2011*)

Pasi Sahlberg argues that the American trend for evaluating teacher performance would be met with opposition in Finland. The Finns do not believe in external measurement of learning. (Hechinger Report)

So, here we are looking at sweeping "reforms". Why don't we just agree much of what we're talking about involves dollars and cents? Perhaps because Connecticut never was awarded any Race to the Top money, we now have to prove we have what it takes to get in on the deal. Perhaps it's the media slant or the national discourse on eliminating government agencies. Even the Education Department has been suggested by some to be worth scrapping.

At any rate, I have a few thoughts on how teacher evaluation can be more meaningful.

1. Let us be evaluated by principals and administrators who KNOW the subject area that we teach. My son teaches chemistry and his principal was a science teacher. He knows exactly what needs to be taught, be it vocabulary, big ideas, labs, etc. If a principal doesn't know the subject area and pedagogy, it's already an unfair assessment. Worse than that, if an administrator is a personal friend or is biased toward or against a teacher, there will never be a level playing field.

2. Send in the experts in the field to observe our classrooms and then make sure there is quick turnaround of the evaluation so teachers have time to discuss where improvement is needed. Too many administrators achieve their 092 certification, but it doesn't always translate into expertise in assessing teacher performance.
3. State representatives, board members, superintendents, even governors, need to **come into** our schools and observe the climate, the classrooms, the involvement of students in their daily learning. See firsthand what exactly is going on and then offer up ideas for improvement and true, meaningful reform.
4. Make sure there is a commitment to a fair distribution of students and their educational needs. The public schools are open to all. Charter schools have the ability to exclude students; this has a huge impact on teaching and learning.

Thank you for listening.