

Remarks by Jennifer Migiano, Ph.D.
Chemistry teacher
In Stamford school district

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Good afternoon Senators Stillman, Fonfara, Boucher, Bye, Harp, and Len and Representative Fleischman, and the other representatives that are members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Jennifer Migiano. I have a Ph.D. in biochemistry and molecular biophysics and I'm a chemistry teacher at Westhill High School in the Stamford school district and live in Wilton. I am writing to voice my concerns pertaining to [Senate Bill 24, specifically sections 18, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 33.](#)

[Section 18: \(pages 56-77\) concerning network schools, school climate and conditions](#)

- “The commissioner shall develop criteria to identify exemplary teachers and administrators, based on performance evaluations conducted pursuant to section 10-151b, as amended by this act, and other available measures, and provide incentives, including, but not limited to, financial incentives and enhanced career ladder and career advancement opportunities to encourage such teachers and administrators to work and excel in commissioner's network schools”

So does this mean these teachers would not be reduced to initial educator certification as is being described in section 28 and resultant PAY CUT from section 31 of this bill; rather a pay raise?) upon changing districts if they went into a network school? This portion of the bill and those portions of the bill are at odds.

School climate and conditions need to be addressed. Students are constantly in the hallways during class. They are cutting class. Some minding their own business, others defacing school property, interrupting other classes and creating mischief not the least of which is fighting and drug dealing. On hall duty, I have no authority to enforce rules. School policies are enforced differently by each administrator. I have had students try to intimidate me or respond in a very disrespectful and insubordinate manner when I ask them to go to class. As teachers we are asked to perform hall duty. We have hollow authority and the students know this. Parents need to take responsibility and be held accountable for their child in these instances. This “free education” is paid for at the expense of tax payers and the value of this education is not acknowledged by either the student or parent in these circumstances. As a society we need to somehow address this issue.

In March 2010 two students were beating my student in a hallway during lunch because “he was seen walking to class with the one of their girlfriends”. When I saw the incident and called out “STOP” the two aggressors turned and beat me and the security guard who came to our aid. These two students are known drug dealers, and school troublemakers. They had been on in school and out of school suspensions all year. That day was their first day back in school from a suspension. When will schools be able to expel students like this who are known troublemakers, and create a safe environment for the faculty and students who want an education?

When I approached the police officer in the school about pressing charges, they showed me a few photos of a gun and several knives. They said they had more pressing concerns as these were confiscated in other fights the same day. That day, there were 8 fights in my school alone. I believe that it **should be legislated that when the first weapon is found in a school, and the school has a**

history of violence, metal detectors should be instituted. Superintendents do not want to do that because of the perception that their schools are not safe and property values will go down.

I would like the committee to put into place legislation that would make schools a safe place to learn and work, first and foremost by the ability to remove known problem troublemakers with maybe a 3 strike system for egregious offenses and possibly funds to help provide security that could help keep us safe. In addition we need to re-instill in children and parents that the value of their "free education" is being paid for by the community.

Section 28: (pages 85-101) *concerning certification's requirements, fees and professional development*

- Initial certification: cost to obtain is \$200 paid by the applicant. Lasts for 5 years (renewable for 3 additional on an annual basis) - required to participate in the beginning educator program
- A provisional cert \$250. - but this is going away (pg 100 lines 3045-3053)
- To obtain professional \$375
- To obtain master educator \$200.
- \$100. For each additional endorsement area.
- \$50. Duplicate copies of cert.

Under the current system, there is no fee associated with renewing the professional educator certification. Unfortunately, this is not the case with the new law. Teachers could end up paying for certifications on a very frequent basis.

In my case, once I complete the physics endorsement, I will be certified in biology, chemistry and physics. The fee I would encounter to have the professional certification would be \$375 + 2 additional endorsements or \$100. Each = \$575. This is a huge cost burden for a teacher to encounter every 5 years which would occur under the following conditions:

1. If tenure is renewed, but I change from professional to master educator (or vice-versa)
2. If tenure is not renewed then the certification becomes an initial educator (basically we are being forced to pay for poor reviews and a demotion - since under the proposed law the salary would be linked to certification level.
3. If I change districts the professional or master educator is reduced to an initial educator. And this could occur more frequently than every 5 years (if a spouse's job moves frequently).

It is also a waste of time on behalf of good teachers and districts money to have veteran teachers (master educators and/or professional educators) being forced to participate in the initial educator program when they change districts (because their certification would revert to initial certification).

How is it logical that under the system proposed here [where certification is the measure of the quality of the teacher] that I become less of a good teacher when I change districts? You may argue that the evaluation was done in a different district, but the certification is from the state. This is also becoming a money making scheme for the State government. To my knowledge, there are no real world examples where a certified professional takes a job in a different town within the same state and is reduced in certification and now must reprove their capabilities.

Section 29: (pages 101-111) *teacher tenure*

- Tenure now means 3 proficient or exemplary reviews in 30-50 months. (professional or master educator)
- Tenure is renewable every 5 years with the same reviews & 90 hours of professional development
- Upon the change of district tenure can not be obtain earlier than 3 years of working (even though only 2 proficient or exemplary reviews are required)
- Removal of hearing due for non-tenured teachers
- One ineffective review can negate tenure or 2 developing reviews in consecutive school years... despite the fact we have 3-4 reviews per year. (pg 109)

I can foresee districts that are financially strapped for cash in providing poor reviews to force teachers who make more money into a lower salary bracket and/or fire them once they are reduced to an initial educator level. This seems to be the intent of the law since the law is also significantly reducing the time for the hearing and the reduction in numbers for a panel for review of the case when the teacher has tenure. Tenure is quite simply "fair dismissal" process. This came into place when good teachers were being fired during the depression. It seems we may make the same mistakes from the past during this recession. In light of my concerns of the evaluation process in the next section, I can see this leading to a significant number of legal issues in districts.

Section 30: (pages 111-112) *the 4 ratings to be used for teacher evaluation and the PEAC document (as far as I know it)*

- Multiple indicators of student learning will count as 45% of the evaluation. Half of that 45% weight, **specifically 22.5%**, will come from a standardized test, which would be either the CMT, CAPT, or another valid, reliable test that measures student learning.
- Observation of teacher performance and professional practice (process yet to be determined by PEAC) will be weighted at 40%.
- Other peer, student, and parent feedback will be weighted at 5% with professional activities counting for 10%.

For my specific position, since the CAPT exam is in place and students take this exam in science, 22.5% of my evaluation is based on an exam prior to my ever teaching those children (as the exam occurs in the middle of their sophomore year and I teach juniors).

Until social promotion ends and course prerequisites are adhered to, teachers will not be able to perform and instruct/educate to the best of our ability. I typically have between 25-50% of my student population without the necessary foundation prerequisites (as determined by the district) to pass college preparatory chemistry. An extreme, but true case was last year. I had a "junior" with a zero GPA (yes she had not passed a single class in high school) placed into my college preparatory class (not general level). This was due to social promotion and a guidance counselor (and many do this) who felt they needed to take chemistry to achieve their goal of entrance into college and their dream of becoming a doctor. This may be true, but it will not help them when they have no foundation for my class, and now huge obstacles have been created that need to be overcome... I then must teach the foundation basics of addition, subtraction, algebraic equations, logarithms, and all the chemistry content... plus scientific method and how to write up lab reports. This scenario places a dual problem on the teacher. How do I instruct those ready (proper foundation) to learn without becoming bored while not losing those who are lacking the proper foundation?

This scenario is unfair to the child, overwhelming them with their amount of diverse content they need to learn and master to keep up with their peers. In addition, the child is typically ill equipped to have the study skills and discipline in place to do their homework to help close the gap. Even with my staying after school daily to help these students, most fall too far behind. These children frequently tell me I am one of the only teachers who gives them homework daily.

I must now worry about my student's performance on district exams - despite the fact they were knowingly misplaced (or parents overrode the recommendation for placement). And I now must be concerned with my performance reviews because when students are misplaced like this they become overwhelmed and eventually these students become disenchanted, don't like science anymore and either drop to a lower level, drop out of the class or fail. Now I am told that 22.5% of my evaluation will be based on multiple indicators of student learning. I am concerned... When I teach honors, the students have the necessary skill sets ... and all my honors students who take the SAT II in Chemistry (about 50%) have achieved a 700 or better. However, my lower level students (college prep and general) achieve mastery of the content only if they come into my classroom with a proper foundation (or close to a proper foundation). So how is this comparison made... within a level, between levels? How is this accomplished? This is where statistics will come into play.

When you were in school, did you ever consider some subjects more difficult? Why is that not being taken into account here? Most students have great difficulty with the abstract and analytical components of science and math - yet as teachers our pay and tenure status hangs in the balance on this. How is this fair in comparison with say a gym teacher or art, or even English, history and foreign language while most children find easier to master?

You are looking at how well a student does in a class as an absolute number, to truly identify how well a student performs, their entire knowledge base and effort must be taken into account and view this in light of all their prior academic endeavors and current life events that are occurring for that student.

Finally, what do students and parents know about teacher evaluation? The parent is not in the classroom. They only know what their child tells them. How can they provide unbiased evaluation when the child's grade is dependent on it? If you are a demanding teacher who holds the bar high, you will not always be a favorite with parents or students. This should be replaced with the peer evaluations (within the department and similar department) For example: math and science can provide peer reviews for each other, as can English and history.

What should be in place before this is:

1. a law ending social promotion
2. grade level subject (elementary) and course content exams like the regents
 - a. (for chemistry this could be the ACS (American Chemical Society) high school final exam that they publish. This is viewed by colleges what students need to achieve to be college ready for chemistry.
3. Enforcement of mandated prerequisites for student placement into classes so they can have the proper foundation

This section is greatly concerning to me since these evaluations will determine "tenure" and our salaries.

Section 31: (pages 112-115) salaries based on certification

- No longer based on experience or education
- Based on certification level - possible "bonus" for master educator
- A master educator that changes districts (since salary and tenure are now being linked) would be forced to take a pay cut as well

This notion that salary can decrease based upon poor performance evaluations is unheard of. If this was occurring in a company - employees would be leaving in droves and no new employees would be found. Unfortunately, with this law, teachers are not having an option to find a "new company" where this practice does not occur unless they choose to leave the state. How can you obtain a mortgage with uncertain salary. I know of NO JOB that does routine pay cuts... salary freezes - occasionally.

Think about this... As a master educator, I move to a different district - I now must take a pay cut AND no longer have tenure since in the new district I would be an initial educator, And I would need to participate in the initial educator program again, and it would take a minimum of three years to reestablish my previous pay.

No valued employee would ever leave to go to a new district within Connecticut... and when districts realize this some will begin offering provisional rather than exemplary reviews (at least in down economies)... to save money - the good teacher would still have tenure without the district having to pay for exemplary (master educator).

As for recruiting good teachers, this bill is aimed at trying to make it easier to do so. However with this legislation on salaries and tenure, if I was a new teacher, I would look at teaching in another state.

If this bill passes as it currently reads in this section of the bill, I would seriously consider and probably begin teaching in a district in New York. I can foresee other teachers following suit and working in New York, Massachusetts or Rhode Island.

This is simply a device to rid the current system of a logical established pay system for teachers, eliminate the entire tenure "fair dismissal" process and in this recession, have districts find a way to reduce pay for employees.

The 4 tier evaluation system can be made to work and linked with tenure... but should not be linked to certification. I believe the salary schedule should remain as it currently is... and if you want to link it under the 4 tier system, this could work:

1. Ineffective = salary freeze
2. Developing = advance a step (=x%)
3. Proficient = advance a step and small bonus (x + y%)
4. Exemplary = advance a step and larger bonus of (x+y+z %)

In summation of sections 28, 29 30 and 31 I do not see any changes that are targeted at the root problem of improving the education system in Connecticut. The main issues of social promotion and no course mastery exam in place by the state are not addressed to ensure students are obtaining the proper foundation. Nowhere in this bill are students and parents being held accountable in attendance and effort (performing homework). There are four parts to a child's education: the child, parents, the teacher and administration. You are trying to address the last two without any substance on the first two. All I see is the misguided notion that the educational system is broken due to poor teachers that have tenure. There may be a few bad apples, but most teachers with tenure are very dedicated, hard working and effective teachers. I would like to strongly urge the committee to reject these portions of the bill and address the concerns that are at the heart of the problem in the educational system - Social promotion by requiring passing subject and or course content exams prior to moving onto the next grade and a small percentage of students not valuing a free education and causing an unsafe environment for those who do want the free education. Schools primary mission is to teach and instruct children and this foremost goal should not be manipulated under the guise of the social and emotional development of a child.

[Section 33: \(pages 116-117\) superintendent certificate waiver](#)

- [The commissioner can approve a person for the role of superintendent without any educational degree or experience](#)

This is a perturbing thought as previous places that tried this failed miserably. Look what happened in New York with Cathie Black.