



Committee on Education

Testimony of The Connecticut Council for Education Reform (CCER)

Senate Bill 24 An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness

Good afternoon. My name is Rae Ann Knopf and I am the Executive Director for the Connecticut Council for Education Reform (CCER). The Council represents the business and civic voice in advocating for comprehensive education reform efforts to close Connecticut's achievement gap, while raising academic achievement for all students in our state. I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 24, An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness.

Governor Malloy has taken an important step towards comprehensive and meaningful education reform with the measures proposed in this legislation. The time for action is now upon us. Stakeholders are coming together, in some cases for the first time, in acknowledging that Connecticut can no longer afford to have the largest achievement gap in the country between low income and non-low income students. There is recognition that improving Connecticut's public education system is not only a moral, but also an economic, imperative. Because Connecticut's economy depends on an educated workforce, if we are to maintain competitiveness on a national and international scale, we must educate and retain the best and the brightest. The efforts put forward this session by the Malloy Administration are a key component in ensuring that every student in Connecticut receives a high-quality education.

In light of the fact that teacher quality is the single greatest determinant in student learning, we believe that the proposed changes to how Connecticut recruits, evaluates, develops, compensates and retains effective teachers are of the utmost importance.

As such, CCER strongly supports the proposed four-tiered evaluation system with the ratings of Developing, Proficient, Exemplary, and Below Standard and the establishment of a salary schedule based upon effective practice. We applaud the work of the Performance Evaluation Advisory Committee (PEAC) and look forward to their implementation and creation of the model system in the near future. However, we propose that Section 30 of the proposed bill read "An evaluation pursuant to this subsection shall include, but need not be limited to, strengths, areas needing improvement, and strategies for improvement, and shall be preponderantly informed by multiple indicators of student academic growth." The most important element of an evaluation should be a teacher's demonstrated ability to help his or her students learn, and we therefore believe that indicators of student academic growth should be the main component of a teacher's evaluation.

Further, we believe that principals and superintendents should also be evaluated on a similar four-tiered effectiveness scale that is preponderantly based on student academic growth. School leaders, not just teachers, should be held equally responsible for demonstrating their effectiveness and impact on student learning.

We recognize that a strong evaluation system alone will not ensure that there is an effective teacher in every classroom in Connecticut. Current policies of conferring tenure to teachers who have been in the profession for four years, regardless of whether they have demonstrated effectiveness at helping their students learn, must be reformed. As such, CCER strongly supports the amendments in the proposed bill that make the award of tenure performance-based, as opposed to being based upon time served. If principals and superintendents are to be accountable for the learning outcomes in their schools, they must have the authority to make decisions on retaining and promoting teachers based on effectiveness and performance.

CCER also strongly supports the Governor's efforts to reform the methods by which a tenured teacher may be dismissed. Toward that end, we support the inclusion of "ineffectiveness" as a justification for dismissal of a tenured teacher, as well as the mention of "unprofessionalism" based on a code of professional responsibility as a potential justification for dismissal. In addition, CCER strongly supports the clear definition of "ineffectiveness" as being based upon evaluation results. With regards to the timeline for the dismissal process, CCER proposes shortening the timeline further than has been done in the proposed bill – to ten days, rather than 30. The shortening of these proceedings will make it easier for schools and districts to remove ineffective teachers by making the process more time- and cost-effective.

We believe that the proposed changes to the teacher certification process will significantly enhance teachers' prospects for professional and career development. The removal of the "Provisional Educator Certificate" will allow for a more clearly delineated hierarchy in teacher certifications, as well as provide a career development path for teachers. We agree with the requirement that maintaining the Professional Educator certificate be contingent upon a showing of effectiveness through the new performance based teacher evaluation system. Additionally, we believe that recruiting and providing incentives to our most effective teachers to work in our lowest achieving school districts is essential. Therefore, we support the proposed changes to teacher reciprocity, the establishment of recruitment grants and, in the scope of collective bargaining, additional compensation for teachers with particular certificates or evaluation results and requiring such salary schedules in conditional funding districts.

With respect to empowering and developing effective district and school leaders, CCER supports providing superintendents with the authority over hiring decisions within his or her district. As district level senior-management, Superintendents must have the authority to hire the best and most qualified individuals for a position within the district that he or she will ultimately oversee and be accountable for. However, we request that the committee consider providing principals with the authority over school-level hiring or placement decisions. As the manager of the school, principals should also be afforded the authority to select and hire the best and most effective individuals. We also believe that the creation of district-based school leadership academies will provide current and aspiring school and district leaders with the tools that will allow them to advance and excel in their field.

Finally, with regards to Pre-K, the incorporation of a quality rating and improvement system that is developed by the Department of Education will provide the state and parents with information on the quality of the state's early childhood education programs, which Connecticut is currently lacking.

If the moral implications are not compelling enough to act on these issues, then I urge you to consider the economic benefit. On an annual basis, approximately 9,000 students drop out of high school in

Connecticut. In addition to the higher unemployment and incarceration rates these students will face, Connecticut loses over \$4 billion dollars in economic benefit over the course of these students lifetime.

We cannot wait one more day, much less one more year, to act on this issue. We must be bold and not waver from making the necessary changes that will ensure that every student in Connecticut receives a high-quality education.

Please support these proposals. A bright future for Connecticut's students and the state depends on it.

Thank you.

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