

Remarks of Brian Calhoun  
Grade 7 Language Arts Teacher  
Cromwell Public Schools

Before the Education Committee  
On Senate Bill 24, Section 31  
Teacher Salaries and Certification

February 21, 2012

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

My name is Brian Calhoun, and I'm a grade 7 language arts teacher in Cromwell, CT. My travels have allowed me to gain teaching experience in four states over the last seven years. I am here today to comment on Senate Bill 24, Section 31; teacher salaries based on certifications.

2012 the year for education reform's fifth principal is listed as developing the very best teachers and principals. Although we can all agree this is a noble aspiration, I'm concerned there will be unintended consequences to this legislation that will negatively impact Connecticut's education system.

I'm concerned that tying teacher observations to certifications and salaries could create a highly competitive school environment and inhibit collaboration among colleagues. Under Governor Malloy's proposal teachers will inevitably have to create and implement superior lessons than their colleagues to earn top ratings from building administrators and top pay from school districts. This may sound like a natural positive outcome, but in reality the fierce competition may lead to a hoarding of unique lessons, best practices and effective teaching strategies as teachers focus on becoming comparatively better. The unintended consequence may be hundreds of salaried teachers wasting time "reinventing the wheel" or implementing ineffective strategies to the detriment of student achievement.

It is important to be careful not to create a system that encourages people to act in ways that will be detrimental to the development of students. Rewarding selfish behavior will diminish the quality of instruction and the climate of schools across the state.

I saw this situation in practice first hand while teaching at a Charter School in Massachusetts. Salaries and raises for teachers were based on test scores and the result was excessively high educator turnover in the school system, lowered faculty moral, and a lack of creative collaboration and lesson planning.

I'll never forget the phone call I received from my former collaborating teacher the summer I resigned my post from this charter school. Rather than the sentimental well wishes I had planned on exchanging, the conversation was an inquisition. The first question was had I violated the non-compete clause in my contract by taking a higher paid position at a nearby school. When I affirmed that indeed I had not, I was presented with a demand for all of the materials I had been given and even all of the material I had created myself as a function of my position at the school. I couldn't understand how any of these demands could help increase student achievement.

There was an unintended consequence for the extreme focus on academic competition at this school. A misguided desire to increase the achievement gap between their school and all other schools resulted in attempts not only to educate their own students well, but also to limit the ability of other schools educate students.

Tying teacher salaries to observations could create the very same effect with schools right here in Connecticut as teachers are forced to compete with one another rather than being encouraged to work collaboratively. I urge you do fail to consider that the unintended consequences of these proposals could very well cause an overall negative impact student achievement.