

Remarks of Dagny Forrester
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Before the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24, Section 30
Teacher evaluation and salary

February 21, 2012

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

My name is Dagny Forrester, and I'm an art teacher in the Stamford Public Schools. I am here today to comment on Senate Bill 24, Section 30, regarding teacher evaluation.

Like many teachers, I have concerns about the link in the proposed legislation between teacher evaluation, certification, and salary. Evaluations must be valid, reliable, fair, and useful. My concern is that there is no apparent structure outlined in Senate Bill 24 that will prevent abuse or misuse of the evaluation system. With the amount of time that will be required of evaluators to conduct evaluations, there will be even more pressure on them to 'game the system.' I've already been a victim of that.

In my district there is a process in place for the teacher and administrator to collaborate, a process for the evaluation of teachers, and a process for providing feedback to ensure quality teaching. In this same evaluation process are means to remove an ineffective teacher if necessary. This process works, but only when it's used. Administrators have been given the autonomy to run their schools as they see fit; unfortunately, with all of the responsibilities required of them, evaluations have fallen by the wayside. In Stamford our teachers association has been pushing for years to ensure evaluations are done on every teacher; however, we have been ignored. It wasn't until the Association filed a grievance against the district that the Superintendent in Stamford finally supported the need for the evaluations. This occurred over the summer of 2011. The following is what resulted in my school:

Upon returning to school in August of 2011, the tenured teachers in my school each found an envelope with an evaluation waiting in their mailboxes.

When I opened mine, the first thing I noticed was my name at the top and the date of the summary evaluation. It was back-dated to the previous school year. As I read through this evaluation I found that one of my colleague's names was referred to in each of the detailed observations. The descriptions of what had been observed in *my* class were not applicable to *my* classes but would have been applicable to the classes taught by my colleague that was referenced. I went to this colleague and asked about *her* evaluation.

My evaluation was word-for-word identical, except for where the administrator had replaced her name with mine at the top.

I went to another colleague in the Physical Education department and shared what I had discovered. He then asked his department colleague about *his* evaluation and found that the wording of their evaluations was identical, even though the names in their evaluation reports were correct. At that time my colleague went to the administrator and suggested that all of the evaluations needed to be recalled, disposed of, and real observations needed to be conducted. This never happened.

I understand the need for improving our system of education and for updating the evaluation process; however autonomy for administrators already exists. Leaving the evaluations of teachers the full responsibility of a building administrator will not solve the problem.

What we need is an evaluation system that promotes collaboration and trust between teachers and their evaluators; however the bottom line cannot be an administrator. There must be multiple indicators that are free from subjectivity or reliance on administrators. Unfortunately, Senate Bill 24 will work directly against that by encouraging districts that are cash-strapped to use the evaluation system to keep teachers at a certification level that will be less costly to the district. That will *not* be beneficial for students. I urge you to reject this use of teacher evaluation in Senate Bill 24. Thank you for your time.