

TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS

Re: Senate Bill 24 An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness

Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Karissa Niehoff. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Schools ("CAS"). CAS is a non-profit association; our focus is school leadership. We provide an extensive range of professional development experiences and on-going support for school administrator aspirants, and those who are currently working as principals and assistant principals. Our association also includes the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference ("CIAC"), which governs interscholastic athletics and student activities. CAS membership includes approximately 900 public, parochial, charter and magnet schools serving students Pre-K-12. Today I am speaking on behalf of the nearly 1000 principals and assistant principals from across the state that represent our member schools regarding SB-24 which proposes significant educational reform.

CAS is keenly aware of the challenges that schools face and is deeply committed to being in the forefront of efforts to improve the comprehensive educational experience for all of Connecticut's students. As evidence of this, I have submitted electronic and hard-copy documents which are contained in your packets. The documents include results of statewide surveys of principals and focus groups which had the privilege of meeting with Commissioner Pryor and his staff, legislators and various public officials. Each document represents the opinions and specific ideas of school principals regarding current educational policy and what is needed for meaningful educational reform.

What you will find in reading them is collective support for reform, but also a degree of frustration that the resources to implement the much-needed reform efforts are scarce, and that current educational policies limit growth.

We have profound respect for our state boards of education, superintendents, and our teachers. At the same time, principals are in a unique position. We are the ones in the buildings each day, responsible for implementing the policy decisions made by you as legislators, the State Board of Education, the Boards of Education and the Superintendents of Schools. Quite properly, we are held accountable for our schools' performance. Our most important responsibilities, next to keeping kids safe, are instructional leadership and evaluation. Yet our days are often spent dealing with what is most urgent as opposed to what is most important. Building management responsibilities often compromise instructional leadership efforts and educational policies often undermine effective educational practice.

Reform efforts that are focused on improving the teaching and learning process for the 21st century need to occur. At the same time, you must realize that the traditional school schedule, both the day and the year, as well as the current provision of resources- human and fiscal- are finite. Within the myriad of policy expectations and fluctuating needs within individual schools, our attentions and allocation of resources must constantly shift- we simply can't do all we need to do well enough to impact appropriate change. Consequently, principals feel like their hands are tied, just as teachers, superintendents, and boards of education do- and that feeling, for all of us, is both professionally and personally heartbreaking.

The traditional education system, traditional school model, and traditional evaluation practices must change. Every decision we make and every action taken should be driven by performance of students, staff and schools relative to rigorous standards of learning and practice, with focus on growth over time. We fully support the proposed changes to teacher and principal evaluation systems developed by the PEAC group.

Principals embrace educational reforms. We are not afraid of change and we stand ready, in support of the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Commissioner of Education, to commit the resources of the Connecticut Association of Schools and the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference and help bring about positive change.

That concludes my testimony. Thank you for your consideration.