

Remarks of Heather Reed

Submitted to the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24, Sections 28, 29 and 31
(*teacher certification, evaluation and salary*)

February 21, 2012

Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee, my name is Heather Reed, and I am a teacher. I am extremely upset over *SB 24 Education Reform Bill*. My concerns are as follows:

- Certification – If a master’s degree is no longer required, then you will be hiring people who have not had a chance to deeply study effective best practices. Nor would those same people have spent time studying brain research or research-based interventions. Student performance will suffer as a result of such inadequate training. The new Common Core State Standards are rigorous. They require a level of understanding about effective teaching practices that will not be fully covered at the bachelor’s level.
 - Additionally, eliminating the special education coursework requirements will have a negative impact on student performance. Teachers must have a firm grounding in special education in order to better individualize instruction for ALL students. Further, due to No Child Left Behind, the silos of regular education and special education are being merged. Not requiring at least some basic courses will result in teachers not truly knowing how to effectively recognize a need for remediation, and not knowing how to correctly identify those students who do need some form of special services. NCLB was created to reduce the overly inflated numbers of students in special education. By eliminating the special education requirements for certification, more students will either fall farther behind, slip through the cracks, or be placed into special education.
 - Moreover, basing certification on evaluations will hurt students. Teachers will be more concerned with putting on “dog and pony shows” for administrators rather than using the evaluation process as a mode for furthering their professional development. Teachers are not going to share best practices, not going to collaborate on problem solving and on lesson planning. Instead, they will keep their best ideas to themselves, shut their doors, and not work as a team. Yet another point of NCLB is that it takes a village to educate a child. We are to supposed to be looking at creative ways to use the resources we already possess, not shut out people and ideas.

- Evaluation procedures – Basing teacher evaluation on test scores, and using those procedures to impact salary, will negatively impact student performance. First, no one will want to work with the at-risk, struggling, or special needs students. The best teachers will fight for the top of the class. The developing teacher will be given the students who need the skills of the more seasoned teacher. But since those same students, even if they show growth, do not score as well as their peers on testing, no one will want “that class.” Second, the new national testing will be even more rigorous than the current CMT testing as it will be based on the Common Core. Again, student performance will be affected because those teachers who understand best practices, who understand the CCSS, will have more effective instruction than those who lack such understanding. Student learning will not be on a level playing field.
- Salary – Making it so our salaries can go up and down every few years will result in poor student performance. The best teachers may leave the profession for a job that is more stable because they need to pay their bills. Again, seriously studying one’s field and spending time honing the craft should count for something and not be so quickly dismissed. Further, if teachers are being evaluated and paid in large part based on test scores, student learning will be impacted because school will turn into factories of “skill and drill” test prep, especially in the homerooms with at-risk, struggling, and special needs individuals. Getting a high test score is all that is going to matter rather than focusing on a depth of understanding in content areas. Lastly, I willingly seek out doctors and lawyers with better credentials and more years of experience. I also pay more for their services. Teaching should be the same as our professional counterparts.

This whole bill is upsetting, to say the least. Nationally, education has become a scapegoat for the country’s troubles. We have never truly valued teachers. Our paltry salaries, our being the butt of many jokes, our having to endure the stigma that we are nothing more than glorified babysitters who are lazy and do nothing during the summers have long proved that point. What is most troubling about this proposed bill is what it says about how our own Governor and our own elected lawmakers if they enact this bill, view teachers. They do not view us as professionals. Instead, they are targeting us to garner votes. In the process, decisions are being made that will severely adversely affect student performance. That hurts. I entered this profession to help students achieve greatness, and this bill – on so many levels – undercuts all that I do while devaluing me and my peers.

This problematic bill is being followed by a proposal to overhaul (read: hurt/damage/ruin) the State Teachers Retirement Board. If you wanted to send a message that you do not care about students, these two bills do the trick. I am disgusted by the way our state government is feigning innocuous intentions while going after teachers. We work so hard to develop

partnerships that improve our best practices and that treat parents as true partners in education (beyond bake sales and fundraisers). When best practices improve, student performance improves. And yet, removing a master's degree requirement, removing a special education requirement, determining tenure and salary on an evaluation system based in large part on test scores, will result in lower student performances. And that is just not acceptable.