

*Remarks of Janice Cook
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For the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24, Section (28, 29, 31, and 33)
(*teacher and superintendent qualifications, salary, and tenure*)

February 21, 2012

My name is Janice Cook, and I'm a teacher in Vernon as well as a resident of that town. It seems to me that the current reform proposal has the goal of saving money by paying teachers less. What is less clear to me is how we can advocate for lowering the standards for teachers across the state and still claim that this bill reforms our educational system and addresses the concern about our current test scores and our children not being prepared to join the modern day workforce.

In my seven years in the profession, I have witnessed two instances of teachers being dismissed who genuinely deserved it, one who was tenured and one who was not. There is a process in place and it does work. Administration has very clear guidelines and timelines on what steps to take once a concern is raised about a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. I believe in this process. Before receiving tenure myself I was observed a minimum of three times each year by a variety of administrators. We met before and after the observations to talk about the lesson in detail and I received specific information regarding the expectations that the district had for me as a teacher. I used this guidance to shape my teaching and constantly improve. Now that I have tenure I still receive observations throughout the year and meet a minimum of twice a year with my administrator to formally discuss my teaching practices. This process shows that the administrators care about having high quality teaching in all classrooms every year and a good administrator will take steps through the process when concern arises. Concerns about the tenure process cannot be blamed on teachers alone. There is a process but it is up to the administration of each district to follow through to remove teachers when they become ineffective.

During these same seven years in the profession I have worked for six different building administrators. Those administrators would likely rate my teaching as exemplary but a subjective system where their perception of their visit to my classroom decides my salary, if I have a job the following year, and also my level of certification is quite unsettling. In the proposed system I could deliver the same level of dedicated teaching from one year to the next but receive a very different rating. My ability to pay my mortgage, raise my family, and the future of my career need to have some sense of fairness and stability in order for me to continue to devote my time to my students and deliver high quality instruction each day. The proposed system has teachers living in fear of what tomorrow brings. The same bill that replaces our current due process with a subjective system where all of the power lies in the hands of the administration also somehow no longer requires superintendents to be qualified

and certified. It is a puzzle to me how less qualified teachers and administrators will improve education in our state. Without grueling certification standards, mandated professional development, or highly qualified leaders how can we expect teachers to meet and maintain this exemplary rating year after year?

I want my own children to attend public schools with highly qualified teachers. I believe in the current system's ability to dismiss teachers when needed. I believe in our current pay scale because I value teachers with many years of experience, advanced degrees, and years of rich professional development experiences. I would like to urge the committee to reject the proposals in SB24 and give careful consideration to steps that truly advance the profession and the quality of education we offer to the children of Connecticut. The CEA publication: A View from the Classroom: Proven Ideas for Student Achievement addresses some of Governor Malloy's concerns but includes the feedback of educators in the development of solutions and improvements. Teachers want what is best for children and work hard to provide this each and every day within the research-based guidelines the government constantly provides our district leaders. I am proud to be a teacher, proud of the rigorous steps it took to achieve tenure, and plan to continue to work hard every day, from here until retirement, to provide the best for the children of Connecticut that I can. I teach a subject which is not included in the state mastery test but still take the time I have with my students each day seriously as it is an opportunity to shape their future. In our current system I know that the teachers of my own children are highly qualified, hardworking individuals and I plan to proudly send my children to the local public schools here in Vernon. The changes in education which this bill describes would no doubt drive me out of our state both due to the instability in my own career but also the inferior educational opportunities for my own children. Please keep CEA involved in the discussions and be certain that any reforms to education improve the educational experiences of our students rather than take away from it.

Thank you for your time on this extremely important issue.