

Jennifer M. Anderson, LMFT

17 Carman Rd.

Manchester, CT 06042

jmorelanderson@cox.net

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Governor Dan Malloy

210 Capitol Avenue

Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Governor Malloy,

I am writing in regards to the proposed education reforms you discussed last week. I am new to the education profession, changing careers from a youth counselor two years ago. I went into the profession to inspire students to value their education and to learn critical skills which will help them become productive citizens of their town, state and nation. I have met and worked with a variety of teachers, both new and tenured. To make sweeping generalizations about either group is detrimental to constructive reform. New teachers need veteran teachers in order to help them grow as professionals. Without the veteran teachers mentoring me, giving classroom management strategies, sharing successful lessons; I would not be the developing teacher I am. Both my children's best teacher has been teaching in our district for over twenty years. She is the first one in the building and the last one to leave. She understands students and how they learn. New doesn't necessarily equal best and neither does old. It is more than this simple idea.

I believe education does need to be reformed. What I take issue with is the targeting of teachers as the scapegoat of all the problems in education. I was trained as a marriage and family therapist (MFT). MFT's are trained systemically which means they view relationships as interconnected. Not one person is to blame for a family's problems. Everyone has a part to play. This theory can be applied to education. Children are more than students. They enter classrooms with a myriad of other factors affecting their performances in the classroom. Two of the most mitigating factors affecting student performance outside of the school are economic status and family support. Rather than just blaming teachers for low test scores, we need to remedy

outside factors. Are students going home to houses where mom or dad are working multiple jobs and don't have time to check homework? Are students watching younger siblings while mom and dad work? Do certain families not value education? I recall one story I heard where a teacher was excited to meet with the parents of a kindergarten student to show them how much progress their child had made only to be told by the father, "I don't want my son to be too smart, he'll be a nerd." I can repeatedly practice reading and writing in my classroom, provide review sheets, practice tests etc but if a student never takes it out of his or her back pack once they get home, this will affect his or her learning.

Until government recognizes that teachers are only one part of the puzzle, reforms will be quick fixes. Teachers and schools need to be supported with funding, rather than one of the first on the budget chopping block. More resources need to be allocated to reach out to communities to support the jobs schools are trying to achieve. Reducing staff and creating larger student/teacher ratios only worsens the problem.

I am a parent of two high achieving students in South Windsor. Even before my children entered public school, their father and I were enforcing the value of education. We read to them every night, limited TV, and exposed them to museums and parks. When they entered school we sent the message that school came first, went to every Open House, kept the lines of communication open between home and school, and supported our children's teachers. This positively affected their academic success. If we had done the opposite our bright, capable children would not have reached their full potential even with the best teachers. To completely hold teachers solely accountable is viewing the problem with blinders on.

When I asked my children if teachers should be the only ones to blame for poor grades both my 8th and 5th grader responded with a resounding no. Other factors they stated ranged from students choosing not to study, to not listening in the classroom to no time to study after school. Has anyone asked students in our state what affects their education? They have valuable opinions to share. Everyday my students can tell me what teachers they respect and don't respect. Even if they like a teacher, they recognize whether they are learning or not.

As this new legislative session begins, I urge you to support education reform that focuses on more than just scapegoating teachers. A building full of new

teachers does not necessarily equal success. There needs to be a balance where new teachers can learn from veteran teachers. Families and communities need to share accountability and budgets need to support schools rather than take away from them. Finally, I encourage you to ask teachers and students what they see as barriers to student success.

Sincerely,

Jennifer M. Anderson, LMFT

Social Studies teacher

Parent of two students

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