

Since I received an email from my representative regarding this legislation only a couple of hours before the deadline, this will be brief but hopefully will convey one former teacher's perspective.

1. Early childhood education need to be a very high priority in CT. This early childhood education needs to be both high quality (not day care) and accessible to all children regardless of their parents' ability to pay. The fact that both the achievement gap and the socio-economic gap in Connecticut are the widest in the country and are continuing to expand on a daily basis should provide enough motivation to put this crucial topic on the top of the list. As a former kindergarten teacher, the curriculum has changed so dramatically over the last 5 years (we were teaching what used to be first and second grade curriculum when I left a year ago) that the children who did not have access to high quality early childhood education were at a significant disadvantage. Long-term longitudinal studies should be done to provide hard data to back up what teachers have known for many years.

2. Teacher and administrator evaluations are critical to the overall success of any educational institution. I have contributed to the writing of a very extensive teacher evaluation document that was successfully implemented in the high-performing school that I taught in. This process documented what were currently considered to be "best practices" and was important as both a reference and a process guide for teachers. It stressed the importance of continual professional development, yearly professional goals for improvement and also provided a process for teachers in need of improvement to work with a mentor to meet clearly defined professional goals and objectives and to have their progress evaluated on a monthly basis. This process gave new or struggling teachers an opportunity to improve any weak skills by being mentored by a teacher who was highly effective. The process also provided extensive documentation regarding either improvement or lack of improvement, which is important if employment is going to be terminated or if tenure is going to be denied.

3. Administrator evaluations are also essential to the effectiveness of any school system. Administrators need to be outstanding educational leaders, need to be current on the ever-changing research on "best practices" and need to serve as agents of motivation and inspiration for the teachers and students in their schools. It is important to consider who will be responsible for evaluating administrators since Board of Education members are usually community volunteers who are ill-equipped for this role. Consultants from an appropriate university may provide more effective evaluations.

4. Funding is the critical issue if CT is going to try to close the achievement gap in our state. With the quality of school systems directly related to the tax base and therefore the socio-demographics of that community, we are going to have huge discrepancies between the achievement of students in Darien and the students in Bridgeport. Obviously, there are many other contributing factors that go along with poor achievement among students in communities with high levels of poverty and there are widely divergent views on how these discrepancies should be addressed. However, this is the "elephant in the room" and until this issue is brought to the forefront in a responsible manner, our achievement gap will continue to widen. It will be easier politically to focus on the need for high quality early childhood

education programs for all students, regardless of socio-economic status, and so this is probably a good place to start the process.

Although I could certainly address all the other issues if I had time, these are a few of the priorities that I think will be good starting points in improving the overall quality of education in CT.

Thank you for soliciting input on these important issues!

Sincerely,

Judy Brown  
sunnylane@charter.net