

Madames and Sirs:

I will try to keep this simple and short, and I emphasize that, although I am a BOE chair, I am speaking only for myself.

U.S. school districts with less than 20% of students in poverty score at the top of all industrialized countries. Please read that again!

Our problem is not public education; public education is simply the first place that the horrible effects of poverty get measured and thus become apparent.

Formalized and mandated teacher evaluation methods will not overcome poverty in districts with high incidences of poverty and will almost certainly waste money, administrators' time, and teachers' time on task in schools where poverty is not a large issue. If you must require teacher evaluation please provide GREAT flexibility to districts without a significant achievement gap; let us create our own system. Our problems are NOT about knowing which teachers are weak; already students know that, parents know that, and administrators know that.

Extending the time required to tenure would be helpful, but what is the difference (in the current proposal) in a teacher's status after the first year (they are only "at will" for the first year) until they are tenured. Is it just as hard to dismiss a teacher after the first year under the current proposal as it is to dismiss a tenured teacher? The details here are very important.

Of course access to early childhood learning is important but it can not be expected to "fix" poverty without integration of and funding for a wide variety of social services. Do not confuse the symptom, the achievement gap, with the cause, poverty!

Throwing money at charter schools is taking away money from the other public schools. Charters do not have a record of better performance than do regular public schools. In both categories some are outstanding and some are not. The original rationale for Charter schools in Ct. was to allow innovation, that has not occurred. Stop wasting money on them.

Do you want to increase efficiency? SDE should be able to get real-time reports of data from any district at anytime instead of having to wait days or weeks for individual districts to compile data and create reports and send them back to SDE. This takes a large amount of administrative time. Create a data system at SDE that actually interfaces with the two or three systems most in use by districts. (Ideally create or license a single system to be maintained by SDE and used by all districts.)

I notice that one proposal, while promising no ECS cuts this coming year, promises to provide "wealthy" districts with a 0% minimum funding rate in years to come. This is terrible. If such funding were cut it will close the achievement gap, not by raising the underachieving districts but by lowering the well achieving districts.

A closing thought. In almost all ways, we all usually expect to get what we pay for. We assume that a \$10 watch will not be as accurate or as long lasting as a \$100 watch and that almost always holds true. We make that assumption about almost everything that we purchase. You need to make that same assumption about public education in all its aspects, teacher quality, administrative quality, buildings, equipment, etc; you get what you pay for. You will not improve Connecticut's standing by simply redistributing the same (or a very similar) pot of money to the various districts. If you are serious about improving public education you must find ways to significantly increase its funding. Absent that, all of your proposals will simply result in less focus on students and more focus on red tape.

Oh, one more thing. SDE is currently understaffed. Increasing the requirements upon it will make that problem even worse.

Thank You,
Kim Hanson
Chair, New Fairfield Board of Education
203 746 8492