



BCAC Testimony SB: 24  
Submitted by Mary Pat C. Healy, Executive Director

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in reference to Governor Malloy's education proposal, SB 24: An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness.

We are speaking for the 95% of students who are attending traditional Bridgeport public schools.

First, we applaud the Governor for his interest and investment in education. He is taking a crisis situation and creating an opportunity to move us all forward. Specifically, we support his desire to:

- Invest in early childhood education,
- Recruit quality teachers and administrators for high-need school districts,
- Provide scholarships for highly-qualified students who want to become teachers,
- Use loan forgiveness and other incentives to provide the highest need schools with the highest quality teachers,
- Strengthen professional development programs for teachers and school leaders, and
- Provide additional funds to struggling school districts that need it the most.

We do, however, have some questions regarding this bill:

- Is it reasonable to ask school districts that have the fewest resources to pay \$1,000 per student to attend charter schools? For a city like Bridgeport, that means \$1.6 million -- 38% of the new ECS aid -- when charter school students make up only 7 percent of school enrollment. We need to preserve resources for the majority of students who do not attend charter schools, not only in Bridgeport, but in other large cities in Connecticut.
- What is the role of teachers in designing and implementing professional development programs and evaluation systems? Teachers have a profound impact on student learning and should be an integral part of education reform efforts.

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- As the 25 lowest-performing school districts are destined for the Commissioner’s Network with no local control, what checks and balances will be put into place to ensure that there is accountability and transparency in the oversight of these districts?
- What mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that the improvements made by schools in the Commissioner’s Network are sustainable in the long term?
- What mechanisms are being put in place to ensure and measure strong and meaningful parent engagement in Connecticut’s schools, including those schools in the Commissioner’s Network? Parent engagement in education is critical to improve academic outcomes. Will School Governance Councils be required in all schools in the Commissioner’s Network, regardless of the turnaround model used?
- Will there be minimum requirements in the percent of English language learners and students with special needs in charter schools so that they truly reflect the student population of the public school system?
- While the current gubernatorial administration has education as a key priority, what are the assurances that the changes put in place will continue with a new administration? Might a set of checks and balances outside the Governor’s office ensure that continuity?

We would also like to comment on the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula proposed in the Governor’s budget:

- We urge the State to use a more accurate determinant of poverty – such as disaggregating the number of students eligible for free school lunch (130% of federal poverty) and reduced price lunch (130-185% of poverty) – rather than the proposed determinant, which is enrollment in the HUSKY A program. Enrollment in HUSKY A is as much a factor of community outreach as it is need. HUSKY A enrollment does not reflect every low-income child, for example, children who are covered on their parents’ health insurance plan and not enrolled in HUSKY A.
- In addition, while we are pleased that students in bilingual education would be included when determining the ECS formula, we urge the State to give more than 15% weight to children with limited English proficiency.

Again, while we support the positive proposals in the Governor’s bill, past history with complicated bills such as this has shown that it takes much time and research to truly understand all implications (refer to the February 15 editorial in the *Connecticut Post* included with this testimony). Because this bill will have such an impact on students, teachers, administrators, and parents (to name but a few of the many stakeholders), we urge you to engage the public more and encourage increased commentary from all parties affected by this monumental legislation. The last thing we all want is to create a two-tiered system of the haves and have-nots in our public education system.

Connecticut Post Editorial: February 15, 2012

## **No need to rush school reforms**

**Published 04:39 p.m., Wednesday, February 15, 2012**

Gov. [Dannel Malloy](#)'s education reform bill, titled "Educational Competitiveness," is a massive piece of legislation whose size is equaled only by its ambition. It aims to overhaul public education in the state, and tackles everything from issues previous governors were afraid to touch -- teacher tenure, the educational cost-sharing formula -- to newer, equally controversial measures -- teacher evaluations and charter school funding.

Because of the bill's breadth and length -- 160-plus pages -- the [General Assembly's Education Committee](#) has decided to break the public hearing for the bill into two sessions over two days. Each hearing will focus on specific facets of the bill.

That's the good news.

The bad news is the hearings are set for Tuesday and Wednesday, Feb. 21 and 22.

That's an awfully short period for people to read the bill and then research, organize and write arguments on topics that are varied, important and complicated.

Additionally, the committee is asking that those who want to comment on subjects included in the first day of the hearings to email their testimony by Friday. Those subjects include teacher certification, tenure and performance evaluations; collective bargaining; vocational-technical school governance; and early childhood education.

Those who want to comment on Wednesday's subjects (cost-sharing formula; charter school funding; competitive grants to districts; special education; regional cooperation grants; accountability and low performing schools; and many others) are asked to submit testimony by Tuesday.

We wonder how many legislators on the Education Committee will properly digest this bill before the hearings begin, let alone members of the public.

It is not fair to parents, parent-teacher organizations, even school boards, all of whom have vital interests in this reform package, to handicap them with such an abbreviated opportunity to participate. Parents are further restricted in that the hearings are scheduled during a week when many public schools are off, so they will not be able to spend the day in Hartford. The short notice also means legislators will not hear arguments that they should hear before voting on matters of this importance. The governor has made it known that this legislation is a top priority of his. He will fight legislators who drag their feet on considering it. That is his style, and often it is a valuable one. Problems can languish under hands-off executives. But there is a difference between pushing for reform and ramming legislation through without proper vetting.

The public should be given more time to consider and comment on this bill.

The committee chairs' move to schedule separate hearings on different aspects of the bill suggests legislators are serious about listening to what the public has to say. Establishing such an abbreviated time frame suggests legislators are merely going through the motions of providing public input.

Which is it?