

**Remarks of Melinda Violante
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**For the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24
Sections 26 and 31, *Master Teacher Certification and Additional Compensation for Master Teachers or Any Certificate***

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My name is Melinda Violante, and I'm a teacher librarian in Ridgefield.

Having worked for the last sixteen years as a teaching professional in the state, it has been my honor and privilege to work as a Technology Teacher, Technology Coordinator, a Fifth Grade Teacher and now a Teacher Librarian. In each teaching capacity I have had the experience of working with **Master Educators** at every level. Whether they are a 30-year veteran, a first year teacher with a Bachelor's Degree or a Principal, each provides a vital service to the care, nurturing, and success of our children. We work together as a team across grade levels and buildings to meet the needs of every child in our district. We share ideas; experience, theory and hands-on knowledge to ensure the success of those students we are fortunate enough to meet and whose lives we become a part of over the course of their years in our schools. I reiterate that those involved in the teaching profession in any capacity are working towards the success and fulfillment of the **whole** child, not just one who performs well on standardized tests.

Unfortunately, it is quite obvious to anyone who has worked in both a business and educational capacity that all of the collaboration and teamwork that makes education a unique and distinctive profession will change with the passage of Senate Bill 24.

Section 24 [8] (5) lines 2537 – 2551 creates a new certification known as a **MASTER EDUCATOR CERTIFICATE** to be issued on or after July 1, 2013. There does not appear to be a designation in this bill as to how a Professional Educator applies for or is eligible for this new certificate based on meeting all of the criteria listed *on or prior to* the issue date of July 1, 2013. Or if, with the elimination of the Provisional Educator Certificate, Professional Educators automatically become Master Educators as long as districts prove these educators have met the criteria in the *preceding five years through a teacher evaluation program* (lines 2546-2547). This new teacher evaluation process classifies an individual teacher as developing, proficient, exemplary or below standard based on three factors, one of which would be individual student test scores on state-wide testing (SEC. 30 (c) (d) Lines 3425 – 3448). I mention all of these items and unanswered questions because it appears they will affect a teacher's salary based on the new salary schedule requirements for Initial, Professional and Master Certificate Levels through negotiations effective July 1, 2014. (SEC. 31 (d) Lines 3537 – 3551).

The new certificate levels also appear to affect the amount of compensation from "merit pay," as Senate Bill 24 specifically singles out *'additional compensation for teachers holding a master*

educator certificate’ versus ‘*additional compensation for teachers holding any certificate*’ based on performance ratings (Sec. 31 (b) lines 3466 – 3472). Why else would this Bill differentiate between certificate levels in this section; if not for more compensation to be given to different certificate holders?

Therein ladies and gentlemen lays the end of collegiality, collaboration and teamwork among peers in education as we know it today. For as in any business model, the bottom line becomes the lure of the annual bonus. A mid-line manager does not reach the corner office by telling all the other mid-line managers in the corporation the secret to his or her success, unless it’s in their business novel. Those looking to gain additional salary remuneration in the business world make sure they bring into their department the brightest and best at what they do, thereby helping the manager look very successful, i.e. exemplary. Thus not only is this manager generously compensated, every employee wishes to ‘transfer in’ to the *exemplary department* instead of staying in the below standard one they perceive themselves to be working in. Even a former President of the United States is quoted as having said his job was not to “out think his administration” but to assemble an administration of “very capable and bright people.”

A teacher’s “administration” or “department” is the students in his or her classroom. Therefore, if we are to follow current business models and those of a former President, we need to assemble in our department only very capable and bright children thereby ensuring our bonus each year. Just as in business we should be allowed to eliminate or *downsize* the people within our department who are not up to standards regulated by state statutes, nor ever will be through any form of modification or evaluation.

When looked at from this perspective, you can *obviously* see why a business model and merit pay have **NO** place in education. We are in the business of helping children become successful citizens, people and young adults. We work **as a team** to help them succeed beyond their socio-economic, emotional, physical and intellectual abilities. We have yet to raise a generation of graduates who all excel on standardized tests, but are incapable of thinking outside the box. That would be an easy task for even the poorest districts to obtain. However, if and when we do, what country’s corporate secrets and new ideas would we steal from?

Be careful what you wish for and whose advice you listen to, for you may indeed get what you wish for to the detriment of our children and our society as a whole.

I urge the Committee to strongly consider not passing any bill which would give additional compensation to teachers based on test scores or evaluate teachers based on standardized tests. Our children, our society and our nation have prospered and succeeded on the resourcefulness, ingenuity and creativity of our citizens. Not because, as in a business model, we *massaged* the data to come up with the right numbers. That is why today, Apple shares opened at over \$500 per share, while Microsoft opened at a little over \$31. Who are you listening to? And what do they really know about education?

The failure of our educational system in this state and this country is **NOT** about the numbers on standardized test scores, but about the havoc poverty, malnutrition, teen pregnancy, and drugs

wreaks on our children. Until these issues and Sheff vs. O'Neill are truly addressed there will be little movement forward for the next generation.