

**Scott Sugarman**  
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**Testimony on S.B. 24**  
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Good afternoon Chairs Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann. My name is Scott Sugarman. I am Director of Education Initiatives at Our Piece of the Pie, Inc., a statewide youth development organization dedicated to ensuring that every at-risk urban youth has the same opportunities as their suburban and rural counterparts.

I am here today as concerned citizen and an experienced educational advocate for several years. **Now is the time for true education reform focused on training, hiring, evaluating, and retaining the best teachers and administrators, not only in the region, but in the country.** Based on my experience as a teacher, principal, and now director of educational initiatives at a nonprofit serving at-risk youth in Hartford, I believe that Senate Bill 24 is a very strong piece of legislation that will help set Connecticut's students up for success, and I strongly urge the Committee to adopt it, with a few possible improvements.

I was a principal in DC, and every day I saw that teachers made an impact – but that the best teachers were the ones who rose to the occasion under a new evaluation system based on student achievement, who leapt at the opportunity to educate higher-needs students, who understood that their profession was not only about 1+1, but a life altering profession whose impact can change lives and open doors to more opportunities.

I have experienced a large portion of the Governor's bill first hand: first as a Teach for America corps member and then as a New Leaders for New School principal in Washington DC. In DC I served on several leadership committees focused on the development and revamping of several systematic changes within the DC school system. First, I worked on the development of the new evaluation system for DC teachers called IMPACT, and was a part of the rollout and implementation of this system from an administrator perspective. Second, I helped develop the new hiring protocols for DC teachers, using my experience as a school principal and as a member of the hiring committee for DC public schools. This ensured that every individual who came in contact with students in a school setting had the highest of expectations for their job performance and ensured that these expectations were objective and clear for everyone.

Connecticut should strive to have the most rigorous and highest achieving certification and hiring processes in the nation because the research is clear: **high quality teachers and administrators are the number one factor to a student's long term success, both inside and beyond the classroom.** S.B. 24 reaches this goal with its new guidelines on certification and training process, but it needs to ensure that we increase rigor not only in the certification and training process, but also in the hiring process for educators.

When I was a principal I found that **the more rigorous I made the hiring process, the more attractive my school became to high-quality teachers.** Great teachers will not run from a difficult hiring process, they will be attracted and want to work for a state, district, school that holds the teaching profession to a higher standard. There are ways to further strengthen S.B. 24. I knew that all decisions needed to be student-centered, and more importantly needed to involve students in the actual planning and implementation of larger school plans. When I hired teachers, they would not be teaching me in the classroom, they would be teaching students, so in order to obtain the clearest picture of highest quality teacher; I put potential hires in front of students, for both a mock lesson, and part of the interview process. The student population has a voice and it needs to be heard. I would recommend creating a place for students in the hiring and evaluation processes for teachers, particularly at the upper middle school and high school levels.

Connecticut should also strive to raise the bar and expectations for all educators that work in schools, establishing a rigorous set of standards and core professional values that educators and administrators need to meet in order to receive tenure and additional benefits within the school setting. Being an educator is the most important job one could have. We should never lower our expectations, and allow for mediocrity to educate our students. We need to expect the best out of the adults in order to get the best out of our youth. S.B.24 reaches these expectations but needs to ensure that the training of new and current teachers reaches the same high expectations. This is why we need to ensure all teachers have specific courses and professional development that address the whole child. Great teaching is much like rocket science, one has to constantly understand much unique pedagogy, learning styles, and be consistently analyzing data to inform instruction on a daily basis, but also great teachers need to understand the cultural implications of who their students are and what they need. This is why the standards of teaching need to include a in depth cultural competency training to ensure all aspect of the child and the job are address.

Connecticut cannot afford to have a system that does not quickly and efficiently provide assistance for teachers who need it, but also remove teachers who cannot perform at an acceptable level. We cannot continue to tell parents, “Your son or daughter is struggling because they have an ineffective teacher...but let’s give that teacher another chance to perform.” Because we know that just one year of having an ineffective teacher can impact a child for many years to come.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I urge you to pass S.B. 24 and do what is needed to bring about a new era in Connecticut’s public schools.