

*Remarks of Rich Baez  
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Before the Education Committee  
On Senate Bill 24  
Section 29, Teacher Tenure  
Section 30, Teacher Evaluation  
Section 31, Teacher Salaries based on Certification  
Section 33, Superintendent Certificate Waiver

February 21, 2012

Good afternoon Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Richard Baéz, and I am a fifth grade teacher in New London, CT. I am here today to comment on Senate Bill 24, Section 29, 30, 31, and 33.

I will begin with Section 29, which relates to teacher tenure. I do understand that it has become increasingly popular to see teacher tenure as one of the primary reasons that students are not succeeding on standardized tests. I would like to start off by addressing this. Administrators have always had the ability to remove teachers who do not meet standards. Many administrators seem to hide behind the curtain of, "It is too much work!". If administrators are held to the same standards as teachers, the amount of work needed to improve and/or remove a teacher would not be an issue.

Next, in Section 30, the requirements to move teachers from one certification level to another are not clear. This lack of clarity leaves the process open to interpretation, subjectivity and potential misuse. In New London, the union and administration have been working in concert to create a teacher evaluation plan that is transparent, consistent, and effective at improving teacher performance. Both administrators and the union have agreed that this will lead us to the ultimate goal of improving student achievement. In our model, peer support is provided by mentors, teachers who are identified as meeting or exceeding standards and who can model excellent teaching. Support from administrators is centered on a series of classroom observations followed by timely and constructive feedback, and targeted support. Our ultimate goal is to improve student achievement. We seek to do this by improving teacher performance.

Linking teacher pay to student achievement will make finding and keeping teachers in a low performing priority school district close to impossible. These schools need the support of quality teachers willing to face the challenges of working in the inner city. I have worked in a suburban school district and now teach in an urban school district. I can tell you that I work harder and longer to get similar results. I challenge my students to achieve every day. In a recent district math assessment, 85% of my students increased their scores from September. 59% improved in reading. Some students have made a year and a half growth at this point, but this does not mean that they are all on grade level. By this bill's standards, I would not be considered an effective teacher. It is difficult to hire teachers willing to work in these school districts now. This bill, as it stands, will only make it more difficult.

Section 31 addresses teacher salaries. I wonder how addressing salary schedules that are already in place, and which have been working, will help to improve student achievement. This will only take time and effort away from addressing student needs and will require districts to create new salary schedules. There is also the question of fairness in the salary schedules. I have come to teaching as a second career, having been a police officer for 20 years. I know that on average I work harder and longer as a teacher than I ever did as a police officer.

My last topic to discuss is Section 33, which concerns the certification waiver for superintendents. Everything in this bill seems aimed at making it harder for teachers to get certification, to keep their jobs, and to earn a livable salary. However, when it comes to the highest position in a school district, it seems that accountability and credentials are forgotten. This bill would grant superintendents an indefinite waiver to certification. Surely those charged with the ultimate responsibility for student learning should be subject to the same level of preparedness and scrutiny as teachers. We need more, not less, requirements and accountability for the administrators of our schools and leaders of our districts.

I urge the committee to reconsider the passage of Senate Bill 24. Thank you very much.