National Council on
Teacher Quality

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Comments on Governor's Bill No. 24 in Connecticut

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Connecticut's proposed education legislation, which includes proposals that will reform the state's teacher preparation, certification, tenure and dismissal requirements. The National Council on Teacher Quality, a research and policy group dedicated to increasing the accountability and transparency of the institutions, including states, school districts and teacher preparation programs, which have the greatest impact on teacher quality, applauds Connecticut's efforts to move towards using teacher effectiveness in the classroom as the basis for teacher evaluation as well as a consideration for making decisions of consequence about teacher certification, tenure and dismissal.

The Connecticut State Board of Education's approval of a new teacher evaluation system which incorporates student achievement data and classroom observations makes the state the eighteenth in the nation to include student achievement as a significant criterion in teacher evaluations (in 12 of those states, student achievement is required to be the *most significant* factor in assessments of teacher performance). NCTQ believes that good, clear, objective measures of student growth and value-added are critical to assessing a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. In addition, to be meaningful, teacher evaluations based on teacher performance and professional practice need to concentrate on measures consistent with the expectations for effective teachers – that is, focused not on peripheral issues but squarely on the quality of classroom instruction, as measured by things like student time on task, student grasp or mastery of lesson objectives and efficient use of class time.

However Connecticut ultimately designs the details of its model evaluation guidelines, based on the State Board's new regulations, the bottom line is that a teacher should not be able to receive a satisfactory evaluation rating if he/she is ineffective in the classroom. The teacher quality proposals included in Bill 24 hinge on ensuring that the newly teacher evaluation system in Connecticut yields accurate and actionable information about teacher effectiveness.

In NCTQ's view, many of the proposals in Bill 24 are strong steps in the right direction for ensuring teacher effectiveness. A number of the provisions are consistent with recommendations we recently made to the state in our *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* for Connecticut (see www.nctq.org/stpy11Home.do):

- On the teacher preparation front, NCTQ heartily endorses Connecticut's effort to help ensure that only academically capable candidates become teachers by increasing the minimum grade point average required for enrollment in a teacher preparation program from a B-minus to a B-plus.
- NCTQ applauds Connecticut's effort to end the automatic awarding of tenure by having teacher effectiveness ratings determine teacher tenure and having tenure based on effectiveness as a prerequisite to professional certification.
- The proposed legislation takes a major step by defining teacher ineffectiveness based on evaluation ratings and articulating that ineffectiveness is grounds for teacher dismissal. We also applaud the state's effort to streamline its dismissal process.
- Connecticut's decision to expand (from just two) the number of categories used to rate teacher effectiveness and the state's extension of the period within which teacher's can demonstrate effectiveness for tenure and certification purposes to five years are sound policies.
- Connecticut's provision that progression through the steps on the teacher salary schedule shall be based on effective practice, and in lieu of advanced degrees, is commendable.
- Connecticut was already one of just 10 states that requires teachers to receive feedback from their evaluations and specifies that professional development activities must be linked to teacher evaluation goals. Bill 24 has the potential to strengthen these policies by tying professional development priorities to teacher evaluation results and providing critical

professional development to the principals and administrators responsible for administering teacher performance evaluations.

As Bill 24 recognizes, evaluations of teacher effectiveness ought to inform decisions of consequence such as awarding tenure, making certification advancement decisions and dismissing teachers as a consequence of unsatisfactory evaluations. However, the proposed legislation has, by NCTQ's measure, some notable weaknesses:

1) *Tenure*. While Bill 24 commendably provides for teacher tenure based on performance – two exemplary evaluation ratings in three years or a combinations of three proficient or exemplary ratings during a five-year period earn a teacher tenure – the legislation could allow more discretion to districts for awarding (or not awarding) tenure based on the trajectory of a teacher's performance over this time period. For improving teachers, the policy is sound. For teachers who may obtain effective ratings in their first years of teaching and then fail to continue to obtain effective ratings, districts should have discretion (dismissal options aside) to withhold tenure.

2) *Renewal of Professional Certification*. Bill 24 specifies that a teacher who obtains fewer than three exemplary or proficient evaluations in a five year period under an initial certificate should not be eligible for a professional certificate. However, once a teacher obtains a professional certificate, the state appears to significantly compromise its standards for effectiveness. A teacher who fails to demonstrate effectiveness can renew his/her professional certificate by taking 30 credits in advanced coursework. Obtaining a master's degree, which research has definitively shown to have no relationship to teacher effectiveness, should neither be offered as an *alternative* to demonstrating effectiveness nor as a *remediation* to ineffectiveness. Bill 24 also appears to allow for the renewal of a professional certificate, despite poor evaluation results, for "extenuating circumstances" by written request of the district. In both this case and in the advanced coursework option above, renewing professional certification regardless of performance seems inconsistent with the basic goals of this legislation.

3) *Master Educator Certification*. Advanced certification in Connecticut should be a mark of distinction reserved for the state's most effective teachers based on evidence of teacher

effectiveness – not on the attainment of a master's degree. NCTQ recommends that Connecticut remove the expectation that teachers will obtain a master's degree or its equivalent in coursework for its advanced certificate. Research is conclusive and emphatic that master's degrees do not have any significant correlation to classroom performance.

4) *Last in-first out and policies*. Bill 24 provides Connecticut with an opportunity to articulate that layoff decisions be tied to evidence of teacher effectiveness. While Connecticut can still leave districts flexibility in determining layoff policies, it should do so within a framework that ensures that classroom performance is considered. Unlike some states, Connecticut does not require that districts consider seniority; however, the state could do more to prevent districts from making decisions solely on this basis.

Thank you for considering these comments on Connecticut's proposed legislation. NCTQ congratulates the state for taking important steps to define teacher effectiveness and tie critical teacher policies to demonstrations of teacher effectiveness. We hope that you will feel free to call on the National Council on Teacher Quality as a resource as you continue to move forward on your efforts to improve teacher quality policies in Connecticut.