

To: The Education Committee of the General Assembly

Testimony Concerning Bill 24: An Act Concerning Education Competitiveness

Submitted by: Susan Harris

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Good afternoon members of the General Assembly. I am Susan Harris, a parent, and former teacher in Connecticut where I taught history for four years. Bill 24: An Act Concerning Education Competitiveness has the support of our Governor, bipartisan support in the legislature and the support of a coalition representing 6 reform groups in Connecticut. As a member of ConnCAN we have waited a long time for legislation that focuses attention on the classroom and student achievement. Specifically, I support this bill including accountability in low performing districts, readiness assessments for college students, and the need to expand charter schools and their funding because it is the right thing to do for our students.

As a high school teacher in an urban area I was prepared to meet the academic and achievement needs of my students. I am a graduate of the ARC program and had tutored 2 years prior to teaching. Many of my students came to high school struggling with basic skills like literacy along with a void of knowledge in general. I knew this was not their fault they simply had not been taught. I also knew that my task as their teacher was to work with them where they were. Yet I was frustrated at every turn not because of the kids or their environment but rather the system. It lacked accountability.

At some point I realized that there was a disconnect between wanting to help my students achieve an understanding of history and what the districts goals were: CAPT, BEST, CEUs and teacher evaluations- none of which addressed accountability as it related to student achievement. Obviously the district where I taught was not alone in these priorities. It was a statewide slip-up because here we are addressing the net result of such a slight: the achievement gap, the drop- out rate, the lack of college preparedness.

It's time for all of us to wake up. A teacher should never have to apologize to her history students who plan to attend college that practicing for the CAPT will always take precedence over teaching history. No teacher should be told during BEST evaluations that while literacy for low performing students is a nice idea it is not a worthy goal compared to goals of an autocratic nature.

The last time I addressed this body was in the mid-90s. I came to offer testimony against a major education bill that experts said would transform education. It later became law. At the time I said that while I hoped I would be wrong there would be a good chance that an entire generation of students would be lost due to misguided public policy: Policy that focused on everything except student achievement and accountability.

It's time to raise the bar for all students in Connecticut. As I learned from being a parent and teaching one-size-does not fit all in education. Therefore there must be plenty of options for parents to choose from. Charter schools are to low performing districts what private schools are to the suburbs. There must be choice, accountability and transparency in the system.

Act 24: An Act Concerning Education Competitiveness reverses the downward spiral of the past 20 years with a bold statement focusing attention on the classroom student achievement and accountability. It deserves the support of the full legislature. Thank you for your attention.