

Public Hearing
Education Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

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Testimony of
Beverly Zell
Parent – Annie Fisher STEM Magnet School, Hartford

Good morning Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, and members of the committee.

My name is Beverly Zell. I reside in Simsbury with my family, and I am the parent of a XX-grade student at Hartford's Annie Fisher STEM Magnet School. I appear before you to address Senate Bill 24, Section 24, regarding teacher professional development.

As the parent of a child who lives in a Connecticut school district that is widely considered to be among the best, I have been asked why we chose to enroll our child in a magnet school in Hartford. As you consider various proposals to improve our schools around the state, much of the focus is on the schools in our cities. This is, unfortunately, where our students often struggle the most.

There are, however, incredibly important examples of progress being made in some of those very communities. I am here because our family has been very close to the exciting story of the Annie Fisher STEM Magnet School turnaround in Hartford. As you decide what can be done to turn around other struggling schools, I hope you will consider what we have observed at Annie Fisher.

Here's how it happened: a results-oriented superintendent and his team provided a special leader, principal Melony Brady. They gave her the mandate, the resources and the authority to make change, and she did. She attracted great teachers and made them greater. To make them greater, Miss Brady looked for a truly innovative partner. She looked for an organization that deeply understands what makes children tick, and how to prepare teachers to turn them on in a school dedicated to the hardest topics - Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). For all this, she forged a multi-year partnership with the Connecticut Science Center, also in Hartford.

Miss Brady recently presented her story to a workshop hosted by Lt. Governor Wyman. There she reported that the Science Center's inspiring brand of professional development, paired with Science Center learning experiences for their students, have had an amazing effect: the experience was the core of a cultural turnaround for the whole school; not only did the professional development program help the teachers teach science; it helped them teach everything.

In one year, the Hartford students made 20% increases in Mastery Test scores for reading, math, and yes, science. My own child is enjoying learning in a whole new way, and his achievement is better than ever.

As parents, my husband and I have now become devoted supporters both of Annie Fisher and the Connecticut Science Center. This is an example of a truly exciting partnership among a school and non-school educational organization that really made a difference.

Let's do that everywhere.