



Advocating for teachers  
and public education

**Testimony of  
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**Before the Education Committee  
On S.B. No. 24, AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETIVENESS**

**Wednesday, February 22, 2012**

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. I am Mary Loftus Levine, Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association, proudly representing over 43,000 teachers across Connecticut.

Today, I want to share our ideas about S.B. 24, concerning collective bargaining and network schools. Connecticut has a long history of supporting the rights of public employees, and in this case teachers, to collectively bargain over working conditions as well as benefits and other salary issues. We believe a teacher's working conditions are a student's learning conditions.

This bill strips teachers and other professionals of this long honored right for no apparent reason. Section 8 sets up a new system creating local charter schools, which we favor. However, doing so without the voice of teachers dampens the opportunity for true and meaningful collaboration – the basic ingredient for all successful reform measures. In fact, some of the most successful reforms in CT and in other progressive states, all happened within the scope of collective bargaining; the New Haven teacher contract, our CommPACT schools and all the high performing districts in the state are prime examples.

Section 18 (lines 1736-1738) also further restricts collective bargaining to "the impact" of any "directive" imposed by the State Department of Education on schools designated as low performing.

While we support the creation of Network Schools, we oppose doing so with the heavy handed top down approach described in this bill. Contracts which have been negotiated in good faith between the parties are nullified, and teachers going into the network will be forced to sever their ties with their local teachers' unions, only being allowed to vote on a contract which no longer includes them in any meaningful way. Our state teachers' union are returned to the dark ages of labor history-being relegated to an advisory role.

The elimination and limitation of collective bargaining for teachers is simply unacceptable, as is the provision that the Commissioner can "waive any rule" that a local board has adopted. Loss of local control is an understatement. This bill allows the appointment of uncertified Superintendents, the issuing of "orders" on incentives, salaries, bonuses, housing, etc. while encouraging the unfettered growth and power of non-profit and private organizations to control our public schools. We must rethink these provisions.

We urge you to restore collective bargaining, create a system of true collaboration with the districts, our communities, and those who teach our children.

Thank you.

## Additional Information Regarding SB24 Commissioner's Network Schools

We support the governor's proposal to provide targeted funding to the commissioner's network schools representing the lowest-performing students. We recognize and support the realization that additional funding is necessary to continually improve the learning environment in these schools.

However, we reserve judgment regarding the specific policy proposals that would implement the commissioner's network. Specifically:

- **Collective Bargaining** – We reject the dismantling of collective bargaining that is a significant part of the governor's network schools proposal. Collective bargaining means having input in the decision making process affecting the learning environment. Experience shows that when teachers are partners in school reform, the changes are deeper, more sustainable, and better linked to student achievement.
- **Local Control** – We are concerned with the significant loss of local control and emasculation of elected boards of education in determining new options for turning around local schools that would be made possible through the availability of targeted funds. Local boards, in collaboration with teachers, parents, administrators, and the community should have the authority to choose and carry out a proven turnaround model of their choice. Shifting control of the decision to the state repeats the failed pattern of imposing reform from the top, ultimately compromising implementation.

We are also concerned with a provision in the bill that would permit the commissioner to waive any rule adopted by a board of education where a network school is located. For example, school district handbooks are often developed over time with significant community and parental input. They represent the culture of the school district community. Permitting the commissioner to throw away the handbook bestows enormous power outside of the community.

- **Fair Contracting** – The governor's proposal also exempts the commissioner from following certain state laws regarding bidding and the hiring of consultants. We believe that this is not a good precedent to set, particularly given Connecticut's scandalous experience with no-bid contracts and the lack of accountability in agency hiring practices.
- **Teacher Recruitment and Network Schools** – We support innovative ways to attract recent college graduates and retain high-quality teachers. The governor's bill proposes to recruit recent college graduates into the teaching profession and concentrate these new teachers into the states most challenging and neediest "network" schools. While this is a teacher candidate pool with great potential, we question the wisdom of expecting to significantly reduce the achievement gap and turnaround low-performing schools in our state's most impoverished and challenging areas by concentrating inexperienced recent college graduates in these schools.

We are also concerned that high concentrations of inexperienced teachers in network schools will exacerbate teacher turnover and the negative impact such lack of continuity has on learning. According to the US Department of Education, attrition in our urban schools is over 20% per year. Nearly 50 percent of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching, citing poor professional working conditions among the chief reasons. The governor's bill does not appear to increase new teacher support, mentoring, or other strategies for retaining new teachers in network schools, other than student loan forgiveness. This is a concern.

