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**Before the Education Committee  
On S.B. No. 24 - AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS**

**February 21, 2012**

I would like to respond in writing to the recent plan put forth by the governor to reform public education. The dramatic and disrespectful changes being called for by the governor warrant criticism and evaluation. As a member of the teaching profession for nearly 13 years, and a proud by-product of the very same school system in which I currently teach, I find it difficult to accept many of the plans proposed by the Governor.

First off, it was highly ignorant and offensive of the governor to diminish the work of teachers who have attained tenure status as simply, “showing up for four years”. I believe that, when he made that comment, he was expressing a personal agenda to attack teachers he feels did him past harm. The current state law regarding teacher tenure attainment and the evaluation process of teachers already includes one of the longest probationary periods in the country, as well as measures to ensure continued professional growth. While not a perfect system, it is a very good system that does not require a complete overhaul as suggested by the governor.

Secondly, many of his reforms lack the requisite citations of evidence to reliably support them. I have been searching over the past few days to identify the research and/or practice of these reform ideas and what results they have produced. Thus far, I cannot locate the sources independently. I would like to know which school systems currently use these policies/provisions, and have the opportunity to determine their effectiveness. I would like to presume there is evidence out there to evaluate and that this is not just an example of “recreating the wheel”.

Thirdly, in a search for the source of the Governor’s reform ideas, nearly every article/blog/editorial/etc. includes the Governor pointing out the amount of money he is putting towards education through his reforms. Residents of the state certainly will be intrigued by this “carrot”, because in the end it implies their towns will not have to increase the tax burden to pay for the inevitable increase in the cost of a quality education.

Lastly, there must be some common ground between the politician’s reform ideas and the actual professionals who do the work of education reform ideas. The CEA has put forth a comprehensive reform plan that includes input from educators (teachers, administrators) that addresses most of the issues the Governor wishes to change. This plan called, *A View from the Classroom: Proven Ideas for Student Achievement* is backed by evidence obtained through research and practice. Furthermore, it comes from the individuals that

are most familiar with the obstacles to improving success of students-- educators themselves.

Below is an itemized summary of the Governor's education bill.

**1. Disrespects the high standards that teachers meet to maintain their professional status**

The governor's bill lowers standards in a long list of ways—many are detailed in this testimony. Generally, he proposes allowing greater numbers of inexperienced individuals to teach our children, and he makes it easier for out-of-state teachers to migrate to Connecticut. He goes as far as to say that meeting National Board Certification, a universally acknowledged high standard, is no longer a reasonable hurdle to grant Connecticut certification to out-of-state educators.

**2. Introduces a new system of state teacher certification and local principal evaluation**

The governor's proposals about certification and tenure involve creating a complex system that replaces high objective state standards for teacher certification with a system that ties subjective local evaluations by principals to both teachers' certification and renewable tenure. Districts would have to base salary schedules on the governor's new certification levels, not education and experience as is done now. There would be an apparent incentive for Boards of Education to set lower salaries for teachers. Moving from one level of certification to the next would be based solely on a principal's evaluation, not taking into account experience or advanced degrees. Teachers' ability to hold a license to work in any district would be determined by one person's judgment. Administrators could demote a teacher to a lower level of certification if she or he doesn't meet specific evaluation ratings. The teacher's salary would change with demotion.

**3. Crushes the current teacher certification system and eliminates the master's degree requirement**

The governor would set three levels of certificate – initial, professional, and (optional) master educator certificate (eliminates provisional). In doing this, the proposed bill devalues advanced degrees that teachers earn to improve skills. Perhaps most dramatically, the bill eliminates the requirement for a master's degree, except for the master teacher certificate level. The lack of requirement for a master's degree for a professional certificate would suggest lower salaries for teachers.

**4. Establishes new evaluation ratings and ties evaluations to salaries**

The bill establishes four ratings to be used for teachers: below standard, developing, proficient, and exemplary. Evaluations would become the basis for salary, the level of certification a teacher could hold and retain, and tenure— all would be based on the judgment of one person in a district. Under the proposal, teachers would move up on the salary scale only if (1) teachers with an initial certificate have a rating of “developing,” “proficient” or “exemplary”; (2) teachers with the professional educator certificate or master educator certificate have a rating as “proficient” or exemplary.”

## **5. Changes tenure by weakening due process**

Under the proposal, tenure would be obtained (1) during 30 months if (a) teacher has received two exemplary ratings on his/her evaluation and the superintendent offers a contract for the following school year or (2) during 50 months if teacher has received a combination of three “proficient” or “exemplary” ratings on his/her evaluation. With this approach the 40 school months to obtain tenure is eliminated. If a teacher does not receive a combination of three “proficient” or “exemplary” ratings, then the teacher is out after 50 school months, or sooner. Two of the six reasons for termination have been changed. Reason one is changed from “inefficiency or “incompetence” to “ineffective.” The sixth reason is changed to “other due and sufficient cause such as unprofessionalism which may include violations of the code of professional responsibility for educators.” Ineffectiveness” is defined as (A) being tenured or non-tenured and rated as “below standard” based on evaluations; or (B) tenured and rated as “developing” for two or more consecutive years based on evaluations.

## **6. Creates experimental programs that will necessitate new employment rules, while squashing proven programs like CALI**

One of these new programs is Network Schools, which would aim to turn around the state’s lowest performing schools and districts, according to the governor. Network Schools would require new turnaround agreements with the State Department of Education (SDE) regarding all aspects of school operation with management “without limitation”. A second new school approach in the governor’s bill is called a Focus School created in the name of accountability and based on the federal need to classify schools. Senate Bill #24 also says it is necessary to be consistent with federal regulations for the state to begin classifying schools into five categories based on measures of student achievement and growth in individual schools. The schools that the SDE designates as low achieving would be “subject to intensified supervision and direction by the State Board of Education”. The new school programs give rise to new funding mechanisms and terms such as conditional funding and competitive funding. For example, nearly \$40 million will go to new programs in the state’s 30 lowest-performing school districts – conditioned upon the districts’ implementation of education reform strategies required by the SDE and state commissioner. An additional \$4.5 million in competitive funding will be offered to all districts—with a preference to the 30 low-performing districts—to enable even more innovations and so-called deeper reforms. Finally, at least one successful program is deleted in the bill, the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI). CEA considers the elimination of CALI a giant step backwards. CALI elimination lays to waste years of teachers’ hard work, professional development, and commitment to use student data to close the achievement gap.

## **7. Minimizes the scope of collective bargaining**

The bill requires movement through the salary schedule to be based on a teacher’s evaluation. It constricts the dismissal hearing to the “process, not the content” involved in a teacher’s evaluation, and restricts the tenure teacher dismissal hearing to only eight hours. The proposal also essentially nullifies the collective bargaining agreements in schools and districts that become Network Schools and disregards the seniority or tenure

status of a teacher. Additionally, the SDE, not local unions and boards of education, would determine incentives for teachers in new Network Schools. Furthermore, the SDE would have power to identify everything from salary bonuses to signing bonuses to housing subsidies for teachers in new Network Schools.

**8. Concentrates enormous authority in the hands of the state commissioner of education and the local superintendent of schools**

This theme is found throughout the proposed legislation. The state commissioner of education would have the authority to terminate an existing local or regional board of education and appoint new board members. The state commissioner of education would have the power to waive “any rule” that inhibits or hinders the ability of the department to implement new school initiatives. Local superintendents would no longer be required to be certified. The commissioner would have the sole authority to appoint whomever he deems to be “exceptionally qualified” with no established criteria and regardless of his or her background or qualifications.

**9. Relegates teachers’ voices to an advisory role in critical decision making**

The bill eliminates the requirement that districts have Professional Development (PD) committees with teachers. Districts may use the advice and assistance of teachers in planning PD. The proposal takes away the statutory right of teachers to be on PD committees and gives complete control of PD to the district. The bill sets specific requirements that PD must meet—a good thing. However, teachers wouldn’t have a voice in planning and implementing PD, as the law now requires. When it comes to new Network Schools, teachers would only advise the SDE on the development and implementation of new incentives for teachers.

**10. Changes the basic rights of beginning teachers**

Appeals of non-renewal for non-tenured teachers would be eliminated under the governor’s bill. The bill also changes the definition of teacher so that individuals would have to work for an entire year as an at-will employee, rather than the current 90 days, to gain status as a certified professional employee.

**11. Expands the role of private and non-profit corporations in public education**

The state traditionally has depended on state funds to provide for state and local school programs. The governor’s bill carves a new private pathway to funding, thus increasing the influence of private organizations. In the bill, private donations are invited to fund state competitive grants, and the capacity of nonprofit and private organizations are expanded to stimulate teacher advancement and career advancement opportunities in schools. The new private pathway also extends rewards for exemplary schools coming from private donations.

**12. Falls short relative to funding and charter school changes**

Unlike traditional public schools, which have to take all students, charter schools can continue to exclude some groups of students. The governor’s bill only requires new charters to serve ONE or more of the following groups: (i) students with a history of low academic performance, (ii) students who receive free or reduced price lunches pursuant

to federal law and regulations, (iii) students with a history of behavioral and social difficulties, (iv) students identified as requiring special education, or (v) students who are English language learners. Already approved charter schools will not have to be accountable for the success of their documented recruitment and retention practices for priority student populations UNTIL their charter school status is up for renewal before the Seethe governor's bill calls for increasing the state contribution for charter schools from \$9,400 to \$11,000 per pupil, with an additional \$1,000 per pupil from the local districts, while transferring charter funding to the Education Cost Sharing section of education statutes. In addition, the governor wants to create new incentives for the creation of local charter schools and wants these schools to be eligible for state funding of \$3,000 per pupil and a \$500,000 start-up grant. The bill raises a concern that the governor may be retreating on the state's commitment to send the greatest resources to the local districts with the greatest need.

CEA has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the potential consequences of proposed funding changes. CEA members have called for, and will continue to advocate for, legislators increasing state funding of local education expenses equitably, and targeting a portion of additional resources toward meeting and sustaining smaller class sizes.

I would like for you to consider the critical elements of the Governor's reform initiatives as highlighted above, and take appropriate action in making changes to SB24.