

Testimony in support of Senate Bill 24

Across the nation, hundreds of thousands of students – who are disproportionately minority and low-income – are trapped in persistently low-performing schools. To dramatically and systemically improve our nation’s failing schools, comprehensive state turnaround initiatives, like the Commissioner’s Network included in Senate Bill 24, must be pursued as part of a spectrum of interventions. As the President of the School Turnaround Group at Mass Insight Education, I applaud the Connecticut State Senate for its consideration of Senate Bill 24 and strongly support its passage.

The School Turnaround Group (STG) is a division of Mass Insight Education, a national nonprofit dedicated to closing the achievement gap by turning around our country’s lowest performing schools. The STG partners with school districts and state education agencies to redesign the way they support their lowest-performing schools. Our mission is to dramatically improve, at scale, student achievement in our country’s lowest-performing schools by fundamentally transforming state and local education systems and policies that manage and serve these schools.

Our experience in the field and research on high-performing, high-poverty schools that have beat the odds shows that successful school turnaround requires:

- Securing flexible operating **conditions** to allow innovation and control staffing;
- Building **capacity** for turnaround by providing support and building partnerships; and
- **Clustering** the lowest-performing schools to scale successful models and create communities of practice.

Senate Bill 24 creates part of the structure and authority necessary for the state to perform this work and hold districts accountable, and reflects promising practices from other states that have pursued turnaround initiatives. The Commissioner’s Network and other aspects of SB 24 have the potential for success by:

- placing governance in the hands of school operators with track records of success;
- holding school operators accountable for results;
- funneling funding on a conditional basis for commitment to innovation and change;
- providing intervention and support to schools that need it most;
- granting autonomy over staffing;
- putting energy and funding into recruiting and retaining highly effective educators to the most struggling schools; and
- creating a credible sanction that ultimately should compel districts and schools to pursue reforms before being subject to the Commissioner’s Network.

School turnaround is extremely challenging work, and success will ultimately depend on implementation of effective strategies for teaching and learning in the classroom. Moreover, while

the Commissioner’s Network is an important component of a statewide system to support school turnaround, the state will need to create additional interventions that deal with the large number of

schools that are only slightly less troubled than the schools Identified for the Network. That said, this bill is an important first step in putting the right structures in place to give the students of Connecticut in the state’s lowest-performing schools the opportunities they deserve.

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