

Sen. Toni Boucher
Deputy Minority Leader
District 26
3400 Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

February 21, 2012

Dear Sen. Boucher,

As the Education Committee considers the range of topics included in the Governor's Bill No. 24 "*An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness*," I would respectfully ask you and your colleagues to consider the following ideas concerning teacher evaluation.

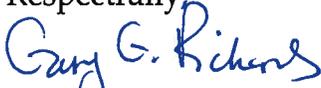
I support many of the guidelines that have been recommended by the State Board of Education's Performance Evaluation Advisory Committee. Specifically, I believe that the four levels of performance ("developing", "proficient", "exemplary" and "below standard") are most appropriate and I also believe that most educators agree that the focus of teacher evaluation should be on multiple indicators of student growth. A major concern that many of us share is that the Connecticut General Assembly will push through massive legislative changes on teacher evaluation without sufficient deliberation and discussion of the potential unintended consequences of such changes. Having said this, I would raise the following questions:

1. *Will the teacher evaluation guidelines be part of a larger state framework that is driven by meaningful national standards but specific to the needs of individual school systems?* As you know, districts have unique cultures and needs and we fear that a "one size fits all" approach will not take this into consideration.
2. *What weight will standardized-test based measures have in measuring student achievement?* Many are not aware of research that indicates that the teacher's effect on value-added scores, based on standardized tests, accounts for only 3-4 percent of student variance. While many of us believe that student test scores should be considered in evaluation, we would caution against assigning a significant weight to this one evaluative criterion. This is not to discount the importance of the teacher variable, but suggests that student learning can and should be measured in a variety of ways beyond standardized testing.
3. *Does the proposed evaluation system reflect all domains of professional practice?* There should be a broad set of qualitative and quantitative measure that are used to gauge teacher performance including but not limited to portfolios and other authentic examples of student work, results on district-developed common assessments, supervisor observation/feedback, peer review, and student evaluations that are appropriate to the developmental level of students.

4. *Will the legislation preserve the school district administration's prerogative in creating teacher improvement plans?* In cases where teacher performance is not proficient or exemplary, districts routinely implement improvement plans that include supports for teachers and specific recommendations for improvement. While teacher leader input may be sought, such plans should not become a subject of negotiation between the administration and the teacher unions.
5. *Will the Committee recognize the unintended consequences of establishing arbitrary, unrealistic/overly aggressive timelines for the implementation of whatever legislation emerges.* We understand that some change is needed and also appreciate that this must occur in a timely fashion. However, in light of the magnitude of change that has been proposed, I would urge you to provide some time for districts to plan for the changes and to revamp our teacher evaluation systems in a manner that will recognize both the complexity of the task and the responsibilities of districts to implement those changes in a way that truly benefits the students we serve.

On behalf of the administration of the Wilton Public Schools, I thank you and your colleagues for your support of education and urge you to carry out your work in a manner that balances our collective interest in accountability with the school districts' mission of providing quality educational opportunities, programs and services to the students of Connecticut. We need to do so in a way that provides us with the ability to provide fair, high quality and actionable feedback to our teachers that this will inform administrative determinations about teacher performance and continued employment. More importantly, it will lead to improved student performance.

Respectfully,



Gary G. Richards
Superintendent