



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly – Higher Education and Employment Advancement  
Committee

Testimony of Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor  
March 13, 2012

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Willis, Senator Boucher, Representative LeGeyst, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony before this committee regarding Raised Bill number 384: An Act Concerning Teacher Preparation.

I am here to thank the committee and Senator Boucher for raising this important issue and bringing a focus to the quality of educator preparation programs in our state.

As you know, one of the six principles in the Governor's school reform plan is to ensure that "our schools are home to the very best teachers and principals – working within a fair system that values skill and effectiveness over seniority and tenure." To meet this goal, our package includes new financial incentives to recruit top college students into teaching; to raise the bar for entry into teacher preparation programs; and to launch a new Connecticut School Leadership Academy to prepare the next generation of school leaders and teacher leaders.

We also aim to take a serious look at how we oversee and accredit our state's teacher and administrator preparation programs. For too long, our institutions of higher education have been judged by class size, course design, and teaching ratios, among other *input* measures, rather than what really matters—the quality of their graduates.

As proposed by the Governor and established last week by action of the State Board of Education, we have created an Education Preparation Advisory Council under the State Board of Education and the Board of Regents. This Council has been charged with examining our accreditation regulations and holding teacher preparation programs accountable for several new measures of the quality of their programs—such as preparation program graduates' performance in the classroom as determined by indicators such as teacher evaluations and student achievement data; program graduates' retention, turnover, and dismissal rates in their schools; new graduates' preparation for work in high-need districts; the effectiveness of the preparation program's recruitment efforts among top tier university students; and structured feedback from school districts on the readiness and effectiveness of preparation program graduates.

We believe that this Council, which includes representatives from both higher education and the K-12 system, will examine these questions in a methodical and collaborative way and generate recommendations to the State Board and legislature that significantly enhance the quality of teacher and administrator preparation programs.

The Council may, after their examination, ultimately recommend some of the actions proposed in Raised Bill #384, such as a requirement that student-teaching begin earlier in the course of study and an increase in the required grade point average of entering and graduating students. But at the same time, we do not want to invite unintended consequences, such as excluding exceptional candidates due to new GPA requirements and in the absence of alternate criteria on which to admit such candidates into the educator preparation programs.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Council be given an opportunity to study these issues and deliver their comprehensive set of recommendations, due to the State Department of Education and Board of Regents by April 2013, and that any legislative or regulatory action be taken at that time or beforehand on the basis of any interim recommendations that the Council may produce.

Thank you.