



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly – Program Review & Investigations Committee
Testimony of Associate Commissioner Marion Martinez
March 13, 2012

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Rowe, and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony before this committee regarding Senate Bill 108, An Act Concerning the Creation of an Educator Professional Standards Board Task Force.

I appear before you in order to express serious reservations with this bill, which seeks to establish a task force to make recommendations regarding the creation, design and implementation of an autonomous or semi-autonomous educator professional standards board. On behalf of the Commissioner of Education, I am registering concern regarding this proposal and to oppose its enactment.

In December, Governor Malloy sent a letter to the leadership of the General Assembly outlining six principles that would guide his education reform efforts. One of these principles reads:

“Ensure that our schools are home to the very best teachers and principals—working within a fair system that values their skill and effectiveness over seniority and tenure.”

There exists a growing body of research which has shown that effective teachers and administrators are the two most influential factors for ensuring that every child learns and achieves. Effective teachers and administrators are the most critical requirements for closing Connecticut’s achievement gap. In order to fulfill this responsibility, the Department must work to ensure that all teachers and administrators are effectively prepared to serve in every school within our state. If the approval of educator preparation institutions, the certification of educators, the development of educator standards and the induction of beginning educators is transferred to a new Professional Standards Board (PSB) that is independent of the Department and State Board of Education, the Department will be accountable for the education of all Connecticut children – but would lack the authority and oversight to ensure that systems of educator preparation, certification, testing, induction and related areas are sufficient to achieve this all-important task.

There are significant fiscal considerations involved in organizing and implementing a professional standards board. The Governor and his administration have worked diligently to make state government smaller by consolidating agencies so that fiscal, legal, administrative, and information technology staffs are shared. Currently, the Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification utilizes the fiscal, legal and IT resources of the State Department of Education. Creating a new autonomous or semi-autonomous professional standards board is contradictory to consolidating and reducing the number of state agencies and, if implemented, would require

additional personnel resources for staff attorneys, information technology and fiscal staff, all at significant cost. For example, the states of Oregon and Kentucky have independent autonomous standards boards. Oregon's public schools employ approximately 36,000 certified staff and the 17-member standards board employs 26 staff members, plus a team of investigators, within a \$6 million budget. In 2010, Kentucky, which employs approximately 44,000 certified educators, required a \$10.5 million standards board budget to pay the costs for a 17 member board and a staff of 40. Connecticut employs approximately 51,000 certified educators in our public schools, and thus the budget for a professional standards board would likely fall within a similar monetary range. In today's difficult economic times, it is more prudent to direct our limited fiscal resources directly to educating children, rather than to creating another agency that would continue the work that is already being done effectively in my Department.

Despite the downsizing of the Education Department over time, the Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification has continued to function at a high level. In a survey conducted last summer of new certificate holders, 86.7% of the 2,188 respondents were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied regarding the efficiency and responsiveness of the services provided. The fact that individuals are sometimes personally disappointed by the Bureau's application of statute and regulation should not be used as evidence that the Bureau is lacking in its degree of competence, efficiency, or effectiveness.

Another important consideration is that there is no research demonstrating that states having adopted a professional standards board attain higher student achievement than those that have not. For example, Massachusetts has not adopted the professional standards board model and they lead the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Kentucky and Oregon have adopted professional standards boards, but their student performance is not exemplary – Kentucky achieves slightly above the national average in grade 4 reading on NAEP, while Oregon is below the national average. There is no reliable evidence that student achievement will be improved by the adoption of an external standards board.

In most professions that have adopted a standards board model for oversight of the profession, the client or customer has the freedom to choose service providers. However, in the case of public education, parents and students typically have very limited choice about which schools students will attend, and do not have the choice about which teacher students will have. This lack of choice speaks to the greater protections needed for publicly funded professions such as education. To ensure this type and level of protection, it is important that the development and implementation of teacher and school leader standards, certification regulations, teacher induction programs, and processes for approving teacher preparation institutions be overseen by a public agency.

Finally, in terms of the proposed Board's purview over teacher preparation programs, a new initiative is just getting underway to address this issue. This month, the State Board of Education authorized the Commissioner of Education and President of the Board of Regents for Higher Education to establish a new Educator Preparation Advisory Council, or "EPAC." EPAC will work collaboratively and methodically with a broad group of stakeholders to advise the State Board of Education in developing a system for the approval, quality, regulation, oversight, and accreditation of Connecticut educator preparation programs—including, but not limited to, 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; and other factors.

Thank you.