

Shana Hurley

Appropriations Education Budget Public Hearing 2/21

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Shana Hurley and I am speaking today in support of Governor Dannel P. Malloy's education budget proposals, specifically his plan to develop teachers as classroom leaders through Connecticut's revamped teacher evaluation framework.

Until this academic year, I was a sixth grade teacher, leading a bilingual classroom at a Title I school in a low-income district.

I became a teacher because I was raised with the narrative that education could be transformative. When I was too young to remember, my parents packed up our house in New Jersey and left behind what they knew so I could attend one of the country's best public school systems. In Weston, I grew up without sidewalks, without streetlights and without municipal trash pickup – but my family and I have never doubted that we got our tax dollars' worth.

I was fortunate to grow up in Weston, but it should not take fortune – neither finance nor luck – to guarantee a child the kind education that prepares them for success in college, career and life.

I became a teacher because I knew at a visceral level how the zip code in which I was raised had paved the way for my academic success. I became a teacher because I knew what kind of teacher I wanted to be; one like my high school world history teacher, Mr. Kaufman, who volunteered to teach a college seminar-style class on political philosophy on Wednesday nights until 9 PM.

I became a teacher because I wanted to have an immediate impact on closing the achievement gap I witnessed growing up and study after study shows that the teacher in the front of the classroom is the most important variable for a student's success.

As a teacher, I worked very hard to realize that vision for my students. Every day I was the first to arrive at school at 7 AM and the last to leave at 7 PM. I planned and graded into the wee hours of the morning, tutored before and after school, worked during my lunch break and spent many sleepless nights thinking about my students with special academic or behavioral needs. I fit work and worry into hours that just don't exist in a day.

And despite the hard work, the long hours and the profound love I had for my students, I struggled. Alone.

In my under-resourced school, my classroom was an island. My principal came in twice all year, for a formal evaluation that consisted of copying and pasting text from another teacher's evaluation. My excellent evaluation told a very different story from what I saw in my classroom every day. My students' assessment scores showed me that working harder did not necessarily mean that I was getting the job done.

I didn't need to work harder, I needed to work smarter. However, there was no system or structure in place to get me the help that I needed. What counted most – the success of my students – did not fit into my evaluation framework.

I share my story to say thank you for the teacher evaluation system in last year's education reform law, Public Act 12-116. It is a dramatic step in the right direction. Our new evaluation system will help struggling teachers like me – professionals with the best intentions whose students need them to get better *faster* – receive the feedback they need to improve. And it will guide the teachers who were not like me – the ones in my district who read the newspaper instead of teaching their students – to new professions.

This comprehensive evaluation system will help ensure that all of our teacher-leaders work smarter, rather than harder, so our students' outcomes improve.

If we are serious as a state about investing in our future, we cannot afford to scale back our efforts to ensure great teachers, principals, and public schools for every child. We need your support of the Governor's proposed budget for educator evaluations.

Thank you.