



Advocating for teachers  
and public education

**Connecticut Education  
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***Testimony of Sheila Cohen  
President, Connecticut Education Association***

***Before the Education Committee***

***Regarding HB #6358 'An Act Unleashing Innovation in Connecticut Schools'***

***February 15, 2013***

Chairman Fleischmann, Chairman Stillman, and members of the Education Committee: My name is Sheila Cohen and I am the President of the Connecticut Education Association. I am here to comment on House Bill 6358, An Act Unleashing Innovation in Connecticut Schools. The Connecticut Education Association has always believed that unless teachers are meaningful partners in the education reform debate little will be accomplished and the reform we seek to find in public education in Connecticut will elude us. Carrying this strong belief into discussions with administration officials, we are hopeful that meaningful innovations that are in the best interest of children, teachers and public education can be realized. The bill before you is an attempt at "unleashing innovations" but has areas of such concern for us that we cannot support it at this time.

Without going through the proposed bill section by section, it falls short in two crucial areas, areas that we are hopeful we can resolve as we move forward.

Specifically, it does not create the partnership that we believe is necessary and allows a district to reduce the number of school days and/or the school year. It allows a district to eliminate courses such as physical education, music and art, and allows a district to modify high school requirements. It would allow a district to waive the state mandates for professional teaching certification – definitive and systemic conditions that all of us have battled long and hard for in order to insure that there is a qualified professional in each and every one of Connecticut's classrooms. And all these changes are in the name of innovation? The harsh reality is that districts may consider such alternatives, but for economic rather than for innovative reasons – regardless of the possible impact on our students and on public education.

The waiver of certification language is extremely disturbing and is language that is interwoven throughout the entire proposal. As we strive towards strengthening our undergraduate requirements to ensure the most effective instruction, and as we move to finally distinguish teachers as professionals and what we do on a daily basis as professional, this proposal ignores such distinction. This proposal

implies that anyone can teach if they are smart enough and ignores the art of the profession, diluting it by offering certification upon request.

In summation, we are and will remain committed to teachers advancing education reform in our state. We are and will remain committed to innovation that is in the best interest of our students in Connecticut. This proposed legislation falls short of these best interest.