

**Testimony On SB 1097**

**Jerome R. Belair**  
**Superintendent of Schools**  
**Waterford Public Schools**

My name is Jerry Belair. I serve as Superintendent of Schools in the Town of Waterford. Waterford is one of the District's piloting SEED. We are implementing each component with 100% participation throughout our district—*all administrators, all teachers.*

On Wednesday, March 13<sup>th</sup>, I brought together the entire administrative team and the teacher representative from each school who is partnering with our school administrators on the implementation of SEED to share the proposed revision to the **Education Reform Act of 2012—Bill #1097**. This was just one week after we met to share the PEAC recommendations that would have created a bridge year with a number of options for Districts which insured full implementation of SEED over a two-year period.

Waterford administrators and teachers were stunned by the proposed bill which ignores the recommendations of the pilot districts for statewide SEED implementation. Top of the list: implement it well, and over time—so that it truly impacts teaching practice and student learning.

Teachers and administrators asked: “What happened?” Why were the recent PEAC recommendations ignored?” I couldn't answer either question. They felt that their feedback throughout the course of the year and their dedicated implementation of SEED had fallen on deaf ears. They had volunteered to partner in the pilot with the understanding that they would implement SEED with fidelity and have the opportunity to provide feedback to improve the process. They felt their risk-taking and tremendous dedication of time was all for naught. As one teacher, the Federation's President said, “When you're teaching someone to swim, you don't start in the deep end first. You wade into the pool and you support the heck out of the beginner.” I asked them if they wanted me to represent them and our school district and testify in opposition to SB 1097 Section 1(a). Their voice was unanimous.

My remarks are representative of 11 Waterford administrators and the 5 teacher representatives and our union leadership. Based on our experience, it's not doable to implement the SEED standard all at once. If Waterford started over, based on what we know today, and had two years to implement, in Year 1, one-third of our teachers or approximately 12 teachers per administrator would be engaged in the SEED process. In Year 2, each administrator would evaluate the remainder of the professional staff; and full implementation of SEED would be accomplished in two years. Administrators need to build capacity to do the SEED model well. There is a learning curve for everyone; in fact, quality time with timely feedback is absolutely essential if SEED is to work.

I work with a very talented team of administrators who have dedicated themselves to the training throughout the course of the year. It is their very strong recommendation that next year be a bridge year with full implementation in 2014-15. We have experienced that full implementation first hand. The commitment of time and quality time with this process demands time to adapt to the SEED components; meanwhile, the rest of the administrator's responsibilities do not go away.

Many aspects of the pilot in Waterford have been well-received and have made a difference in our school system. The dialogue among, between teachers and administrators is different. It has been elevated to a deeper level around instructional practice and meeting the needs of all learners. There is a focused conversation on student learning. The various options that are provided to districts as

recommended by PEAC really allow each district to have a thoughtful roll-out plan meeting their needs rather than experiencing what Waterford experienced with all-in—all at once.

Perhaps the best lesson that we learned by fully implementing SEED is that every district needs to be prepared to put everything else on pause in order to do it well and do it right in Year 1 with 100% of the staff, it's all-in; otherwise, it will turn out to be a checklist and never realize its goals of improving teaching and learning.

Bottom line, for Waterford, the full implementation with 100% of the staff in a single year is not doable. It's important to listen to those districts that participated in the pilot. That is the purpose of a pilot. So therefore, I **strongly** urge you **to not support** SB 1097 as it is presently written; and instead to refer to the PEAC the issues which the bill attempts to address. That body has been assembled for a while and is best equipped to make any recommendations regarding implementation schedules, phase-in options, and decision-making processes. I am here today because the staff and administrators in the Waterford Public Schools have urged me to share their voice and their dismay with the proposed SB 1097.

I also wish to comment on Section 1(b) of the proposed bill. Currently, per Statute, local Boards of Education have the final authority over the teacher and principal evaluation system. Districts across Connecticut include representatives of the bargaining unit before any decision is made on the district evaluation plan. Section 1(b) however removes from the Board of Education the final authority regarding the system that will be used to evaluate teachers in every school system in the state. The authority would rest with the Professional Development and Evaluation Committee unless the Committee and the Board could not agree. If that is the case, the district would be obligated to implement the State model. The responsibility should lie with the Board of Education. This would be a significant departure from the 30+ years of history and make mute the 1986 Wethersfield case that holds that teacher evaluation systems are not a mandatory subject of bargaining. I urge you to **reject** this part of SB 1097; and if this current concern needs to be addressed, I believe it should go back to PEAC with recommendations coming forward.

Thank you for your time today.