



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 Bill No. 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. First let me start my testimony by supporting the concepts that are expressed in this bill and thanking the Commissioner and Governor for giving us a framework we can start from to reach everyone's goal, which is innovation and education reform being bred at the local level with teachers as meaningful partners in such innovation. 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, and their positive responses, 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 a good start at an attempt at "unleashing innovations" across Connecticut.

Without going through the proposed bill section by section, we need to continue our meaningful discussions to clearly articulate our vision.

Specifically, if we chose to allow districts to waive various statutory mandates, such as allowing a district to reduce the number of school days and/or the school year, allowing a district to eliminate courses such as physical education, music and art, and allowing a district to modify high school requirements without teachers being a meaningful partner in those discussions and agreeing to the proposed statutory waivers prior to submitting such a request to the State Department of Education, we could see a well-intended bill on innovation result in an economic discussion of how to reduce school budgets.

We also want to especially acknowledge, for the first time, the clear language in the bill that does require meaningful teacher participation in creating teacher pilot initiatives at the local level. Again, the teacher pilot examples given reflect the

continuing discussion of the teacher unions and State administration officials and must be further clarified to make sure our goal of meaningful education reform in every public school room, in every public school building, and in every public school district is successful.

We will continue to advocate for public school teachers being a meaningful partner in advancing education reform in our state. For the first time in a long time we look at this glass as "half full" rather than "half empty". We are committed to working with AFTCT and State Administration officials as partners moving forward to create a piece of legislation that can bring true education innovation to our school districts across Connecticut.

Thank You.