



**GRADUATE EDUCATION**

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February 14, 2013

To the Higher Education & Workforce Advancement Committee Members:

My name is Nancy Niemi and I thank you for allowing me to address this committee today. As a former public school teacher, an elected school board member, and now as the Chairperson of a Teacher Preparation Department at the University of New Haven and the Vice-President of the AACTE-CT, I am here as a life-long advocate for excellent public schools.

As the Committee knows, the State Education Department is nearing the end of a year-long study of the ways in which Connecticut teacher preparation can be improved. Through EPAC – the Educator Preparation Advisory Council – representatives of universities, school districts, and state education officials have been discussing the various and complex aspects that make up teacher preparation. It has been a year of robust discussion about issues such as new teachers' grade point averages, length of student teaching, and ultimately, how the best practices of educating new teachers fits together with the realities of working school districts, and the teachers and students who live in them.

We are almost ready to make recommendations to the State Board of Education and therefore we respectfully ask that you allow the EPAC committee to complete its work before making more legislative changes relating to certification. Specifically, the:

Proposed H.B. No. 5911 AN ACT CONCERNING THE TEACHING OF GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN.

and

Proposed H.B. No. 5499 AN ACT ENCOURAGING STUDENTS IN TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS TO TUTOR CHILDREN FROM POORLY PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS.

contain conditions that, if enacted, could work in opposition to what the EPAC Committee is trying to accomplish and may also repeat or weaken what is already being done in Connecticut. Specifically,

1. There are two statutes that already include the needs of Connecticut's Gifted & Talented students, one of which is reflected in the recent 2010 CCT. While Gifted & Talented children surely need more attention in schools, having new teachers specialize in this area specifically will likely deplete an already small number of excellent teachers. Further, school districts are currently cutting programs like music and art for all students because their budgets are so thin; they are not likely to be able to afford teachers who are certified only in Gifted & Talented areas.
2. H.B. 5499, the tutoring bill, is particularly troubling. Teacher preparation programs already require their students to become the teacher of record for a minimum of 10 weeks as part of

their student teaching experience. Student teachers not only tutor all students, but they teach them daily.

Further, every teacher preparation program in this state requires that students complete field work prior to their required student teaching; the University of New Haven pre-service teachers, for example, already have 1500 hours of field experience working with children directly in schools – over one-third of which are high-need. Tuition reimbursement for tutoring, work that is already occurring at multiple levels, will use higher education institution money for something that does not need to be incentivized.

We who care so much about public school students and the teachers in them share your respect and concern for schools and hope that you will allow us to finish our study so that we can make recommendations that support all children, and particularly children who need help the most.