

TESTIMONY ON SB 1097

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Let me first state that I support the move by the state to implement a new teacher and administrator evaluation system. In Milford we have piloted with all of our teachers a portion of the new plan and are seeing the impact in classroom teaching and in discourse between and among teachers and administrators.

I am concerned, however, about two provisions of SB 1097. One of those provisions in essence makes the evaluation system for teachers and principals a mandatory topic of bargaining with the bargaining agents for both groups. The other provision substitutes an ineffective implementation plan for the one that was developed by the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC).

Under present statute, the local board of education has final authority over the teacher and principal evaluation system as long as representatives of the bargaining unit involved are consulted prior to a decision being made. Section 1 (b) of the proposed bill, however, removes from the Board of Education this 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 plan.

Members of professional development and evaluation committee members, however, have no responsibility for the results achieved by a school system. Only boards of education and the superintendents whom they hire have this responsibility. The bill, then, would give authority over a school system function that is directly related to the results achieved by a school system to a body that has no responsibility for those results.

The bill would also constitute a significant departure from over thirty years of history by making moot the 1986 Wethersfield case that holds that teacher evaluation systems are not a mandatory subject of bargaining.

I am also concerned about Section 1(a) of the bill which would require every district to implement the new evaluation system with every certified professional in the district in 2014-15. There would be no phase in and no resultant opportunity to learn from that experience before we go to full implementation. As indicated in my opening, Milford has piloted with every teacher a portion of its new teacher evaluation plan (goal setting, observations against a rubric and rating, mid-year review, and end year evaluation). Next year we will involve 100% of our teachers in the same portion of the plan we did this year, and will have 1/3 of our teachers participate in the student performance growth part of the plan. I cannot imagine moving to implementing the full plan to 100% of our teachers in 2014-15 if we had not had two years to take the necessary time to do it right. We happen to be ahead of where most districts are, but I can attest to the need for more time to phase in the full plan with every teacher. PEAC recognized this as well when it reached consensus on a process whereby 2013-14 would be a bridge year during which districts could choose among acceptable phase in options. This consensus, while it does not necessarily represent all of the phase in options that I would like to have seen offered, at least recognizes the fact that going to full implementation in every district in the state in any one year with no bridge year before that is a recipe for failure.

I urge you, therefore, not to 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 is best equipped to make recommendations regarding implementation schedules, phase in options and decision making processes.