

**Connecticut General Assembly Education Committee**

Friday, March 15, 2013

**Jeri Powell, State Director, Great New England Public Schools Alliance (GNEPSA)  
Testifies Before the Connecticut General Assembly Education Committee**

**Re: SB 1097 An Act Concerning Revisions to the Education Reform Act of 2012**

**Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann** and members of the committee:

My name is Jeri Powell, State Director of the Great New England Public Schools Alliance. I thank you for this opportunity to offer comments regarding S.B. 1097.

I first want to acknowledge the difficult task you have before you in working to ensure that the reforms from last session are thoughtfully constructed and properly implemented. With that in mind, we respectfully note several points we hope you will consider as you move forward with your important work this year.

**Delayed Implementation of the New Evaluation System**

- The Act delays implementation of the evaluation system until 2014. UConn Neag School of Education researchers found, in an interim report to the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council, that teachers and administrators needed more training and support regarding evaluations guidelines. While we advocate for effective training and communications about the new evaluation system, we encourage the Committee to continue to prioritize the adoption and implementation of the evaluation system created last year by adhering to the original September 1, 2013 deadline for adoption and development.

**“Not Rated” Designation**

- We encourage the Committee to take this opportunity to reevaluate the “not rated” designation for a teacher who does not receive a summative evaluation during the school year. While we understand that extenuating circumstances may require such a designation, without further clarity, this label may run afoul of the intent of last year’s legislation. Teacher evaluations are important tools used in the assessment and support of our educators and school systems and should be administered annually with minimum exceptions.

**Developing and Imposing a Model Evaluation System**

- We applaud the amendment imposing a model evaluation system and support program where a local or regional board of education is unable to establish an evaluation system and support program through mutual agreement. This will

ensure that failed negotiations will not frustrate the implementation of an approved evaluation system.

### **Commissioner's Discretion when Forming the Commissioner's Network**

- This Act expands the pool of schools that the Commissioner may give a preference to in the selection of Commissioner's Network schools. Notably, the Commissioner may prioritize schools in districts that have experienced in-school turnaround reform and schools that have previously received a school improvement grant. We applaud this amendment as further prioritizing low-performing schools in the reform efforts of the Commissioner.

Additionally, we hope the Committee will consider further amending this Act to improve the '**uniform system of accounting**' by:

- Calling for an analysis of how wisely schools and districts are using their resources; and
- Allowing the State Board of Education the ability to manage and support fiscally unstable school districts.

In 2012, Connecticut established a new model of state-level intervention that enables the turnaround of schools that are underperforming academically - significantly increasing the state's ability to hold school administrators and teachers accountable for student success. Connecticut has also moved forward with issuing Annual Performance Reports for each school district. However, the state currently lacks the ability to determine whether these funds are being used in a manner that contributes to high academic achievement and cost-effective operations. The Fiscal State Tracking and Accountability Report (STAR) system we propose would ensure that all components of operating a public education program – instruction, student achievement, accountability, leadership, facilities and resource management – are looked at in a comprehensive and meaningful way.

Finally, we encourage the Committee to consider a **parental notification component** to the teacher evaluation system. As each superintendent will already be required to report aggregate evaluation ratings to the Commissioner of Education, there is an opportunity to make *school level* data available to parents.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that the important reforms from last year are meaningfully implemented.

Thank you for your time.