

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 piloting SEED. We are implementing each component with 100% participation throughout our district—*all administrators, all teachers.*

On Wednesday, March 13th, 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 that provided full implementation of SEED over a two-year period.

The administrators and teachers were stunned by the proposed bill which ignores the recommendations of the pilot district to implement SEED—to implement it well—so that it truly impacts teaching practice and student learning. I was hit by: “What happened?” I couldn’t answer that 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 said on Wednesday, “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, our school district, and teachers and administrators across Connecticut today to come here before you and testify in opposition to SB 1097 Section 1(a).

My remarks today 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 24 teachers; and full implementation of SEED would have been 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 necessary 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 to this process demands time to adapt to; meanwhile, the rest of the responsibilities that any building administrator has, 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 teachers as well as between teachers and administrators is different. There is a focused conversation on student learning, and that dialogue is elevated to a more rigorous level. The various options that are provided to districts as recommended by PEAC really allow each district to have a thoughtful roll-out plan 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 over 30 years of history by making 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.