

Hello,

I am sharing my opinion & experiences with the Connecticut legislature's Education Committee, because the process ---as it's presently being implemented -- is hurting our children's education in immeasurable ways.

I have been a public school educator in Connecticut since 1991. I am unusual, in that I have worked as a teacher & administrator in urban, suburban & rural districts. I began my career teaching AP biology to high school seniors. I have taught science, technology applications & coding, as well as Title I math and reading to students for more than 20 years. I think I did a pretty good job, because all of my AP biology students scored 4's & 5's on their AP exams during my time teaching the course. All of my urban Title I students scored "proficient" or better for 9 years on math & reading CMT's. No lie. Lately, I work with students & teachers in grades pre-K through 8 as a science specialist.

I should also add that I entered public school teaching as a mid-career change, after completing several years of teaching as an adjunct professor in Connecticut's state university & community college system. I won't list the numerous national education & teaching awards (note --I didn't say state teaching awards) that I have received over the years from NSTA, Toyota, AAAS, Samsung, ExxonMobile, NOAA and several others.

I have seen & experienced many things in Connecticut's schools. I won't get into the good, the bad, and the awful things that I've seen done to our kids and our best teachers. That history might contribute to the chapters of another true-to-life, tell-all public education-bashing book. It would join so many others that clutter Amazon's webpages.

Here's my beef about PEAC's evaluation plan: this new evaluation system is a one-size-fits-all, draconian mess that does nothing to improve the sad, frustrating state of education in Connecticut. As I mentioned above, I work as a science specialist -- this is my official title. My evaluation involves the same SLO's (student learning objectives) as regular classroom teachers -- even though I am not assigned to a classroom. Here is my job description:

This teacher will provide instruction to students in the area of science. He/She will have experience in teaching groups of students in his/her area of expertise. In addition, he/she will have experience in and sensitivity to the social issues involved in desegregation and in working with minority group students in an integrated public school setting.

This individual will...

- Serve on the School Planning and Management Team and appropriate curriculum committees;
- Identify professional development needs within Six to Six in the area of science;
- Assist in Integrating technology effectively into the science curricula and into each of the school's educational programs;
- Develop new science curricula;
- Create innovative instructional practices involving science instruction; and
- Work cooperatively with the XXXXXXXXX Museum and XXXXXXXXX Museum to provide science instruction, field experiences and hands-on activities to students; and

- Provide professional development workshops for teachers.

Why is most of my evaluation process based on teaching common core state standards in ELA & math? Why is most of my evaluative process based on the minimal amount of time when I am in a classroom, teaching various grade levels of students? I realize that part of my responsibility involves direct instruction to students – but the scope of that responsibility is with an estimated 450 students during disjointed parts of the school year. I do not know these students well enough to understand their special needs, or the specific classroom management strategies that their teachers put in place as part of their regular classroom routines.

Why is my evaluation based on a part-time responsibility that has a much greater scope and variability than any regular classroom teacher? Why is the major part of my job description-- which I included above, not part of my goals? The ProTraxx interface for goal-setting does not have a place for my kind of position.

Also, is 22.5% of my evaluation linked to the Science CMT scores earned by students in 5th & 8th grades? (I certainly hope it's not linked to the school's math & ELA scores.) I am not a classroom science teacher at any grade level. If the teachers who teach science choose not to follow my pacing guides, or suggested instructional practices, or if they fail to teach to the state science standards -- does my own professional rating go down when students score poorly, as a result?

Presently, I-- along with just about every teacher in CT -- am very stressed. I am observed randomly by the building principal. My last observation (was it formal or informal? -- I have no idea) didn't even have a post- observation conference, although there was a pre-conference. I have another observation pending – it has nothing whatsoever to do with my goals. The last one didn't either. The current PEAC requirement is one formal observation per year. Observations seem to just pop up all year, with no rhyme or reason. I have no idea how many there will be or when they will occur. I have been in my present position for 7 and a half years. I think I have tenure – if it exists. I know I'm not a newbie. Why so much scrutiny?!

It's all very random and time-consuming. I have yet to comprehend how this will make me a better educator in preparing my students for what they'll need to learn in 21st century STEM skills in order to make them college and/or career-ready.

I have one silver lining in the present nightmare of Connecticut public education: I have 2 of my Bridgeport students competing in the Connecticut Science Fair this week. They are urban-dwelling, minority students. These students are from the same demographic band as the students who are perpetually identified as having the highest priority needs in the state – the notorious group that are part of the widest achievement gap in the nation.

If betting were proper in this circumstance, I would put my money on this 7th grade girl & this 8th grade boy becoming prize winners in the 2014 state science fair. After all, every one of my competing students have been winning top Connecticut State Science Fair awards and prizes for the last 3 years in a row. But this level of student achievement doesn't count as part of my evaluation.

I would expand the program if I could, but others in more powerful positions than mine consider it to be my fringe hobby – done mostly on my own time after school, for no extra pay. It isn't considered to be mainstream educational practice. Also, it's elitist -- as only unsociable nerds do this sort of thing.

I'm just another cog in the present system. Though maybe not much longer – Connecticut's vision of excellence in public education and mine don't match. I relate very much to the West Hartford teacher who wants to quit teaching – or more accurately – she wants to quit whatever this new thing is that is replacing teaching.

I'm really tired of having a vision of excellence & success for students that no one else has – everyone says they have it – but I rarely see anything but prepping for tests – especially the high stakes kind. The trouble is, this misbegotten standards & evaluation system is all aboutactually, I'm not sure what it's all about. Somebody is making a lot of money. A lot of time is being spent on busy work. And most importantly, the kids are not learning what other kids around the world are learning so well. Mediocrity is us. □

'Nuff said.

Please look to Massachusetts. They do STEM so well it makes me cry that I am not able to give similar opportunities to our kids.

Very truly yours,

Carmen Andrews

Carmen Andrews
Science Specialist
Six to Six Magnet School
Bridgeport, CT

203-365-8250 X8253