

174 Maskel Road
South Windsor, CT 06074

March 11, 2014

Re: SEED Teacher Evaluation System

Dear Education Committee Members:

I am a veteran high school teacher who would like to share my experiences with SEED from the pilot program last year as well as those from the current school year.

The most urgent issue I have encountered with the new teacher evaluation system is the inordinate amount of time that this new process takes. Last year I spent over 20 hours devoted solely to SEED: selecting assessments, gathering data, assessing data, analyzing data, gathering teaching artifacts, meeting with my administrator, preparing for meetings with my administrator, and writing reflections. This year I am well on my way to a similar outcome. The midyear reflection alone took approximately seven hours to prepare, which does not include the time spent discussing it with my administrator. It should be apparent that this was time that could have been spent on improving instruction that would have had a direct impact on my students.

Since teachers are required to gather data to document progress toward our Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) this means that we must administer assessments to students in order to gather that data. These assessments may or may not have anything to do with the curriculum. Since I am a science teacher and have required content I *must* teach (currently CAPT standards), taking 15 minutes or more out of many classes throughout the year hinders my ability to effectively teach the curriculum.

Another issue is that there are inconsistencies in how teachers are being evaluated during observations as well as the application of the rubrics to do so. In speaking with colleagues within and outside my district, the scoring rubric is sometimes interpreted very literally and it is sometimes used merely as a guide. It is being implemented differently by different administrators within the same building, within the same district, and across districts within the state. If the purpose was to have a method of consistently and similarly evaluating all Connecticut teachers, I can assure you that this is not happening. In addition, the student-centered rubric does not accurately reflect a teacher's performance. For example, last year the least favorable comments I received were for a formal observation of my Advanced Placement class. Yet 100% of my students passed the AP exam (the global average for this test was a 48% pass rate). Clearly the instructional strategies I used throughout the year allowed my students to master the content and succeed yet the process did not capture this.

Student feedback/surveys constitute 5% of my evaluation score so the opinions of 14-15 year-old children can influence my rating. Again, this requires another assessment I am required to administer several times a year that has nothing to do with teaching and learning. Students may or may not take these seriously yet they contribute to my final score. For example, during my mid-year survey this year a student said, "I checked all 'Strongly Agree' because I like Mrs. Gregory." Another student then said, "Did you read them? Not all of them should be 'Strongly Agree'!" (For some questions "Strongly Disagree" is the favorable response, for example "A lot of time is wasted in this class.") Regarding parent feedback/surveys: An effective teacher will

always communicate with parents about their child. Any issues with teacher-parent relations are easily determined by school administrators and can be incorporated into Domain 6: Professional Responsibilities and Teacher Leadership. It need not require extensive data gathering by teachers throughout the year.

My understanding of the SEED process was that teachers would individually develop their Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) with their administrator based upon the teacher's determination of what would serve their own, particular group of students best. However, again, there are sometimes predetermined SLOs and in some cases even predetermined assessments for those SLOs, that teachers have been required to adopt without any conversation about their students' needs.

My final concern has to do with professional development. The new law removed the requirement for continuing education (CEUs) with the provision that school districts provide professional development based on teacher needs. This is not happening. I have commented on every SEED document, where appropriate, what I need for professional development yet I have yet to receive that training. There has been no attempt to provide teachers professional development in areas that *teachers* believe they need. The decision has been exclusively district-based with no options being offered, no questions being asked.

While the intent of a new teacher evaluation system was undoubtedly good, the implementation of SEED has many weaknesses. Most importantly it takes a tremendous amount of time away from teaching and learning. I am certain that this was not deliberate, yet it is most certainly a consequence of the new process. As a veteran teacher, I have never been more discouraged, frustrated, disillusioned or stressed. I hope that you will consider my comments as you review the teacher evaluation process.

Sincerely,

Irma A. Gregory

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