

My name is Martin Walsh. I'm a Glastonbury teacher and I live in Wethersfield. First, I'd like to thank Rep. Cafero and the Republican caucus for forcing the committee to hold this hearing. As a Democrat, I am shocked and outraged that members of my party have displayed such contempt and disdain toward their constituencies whose voices they were prepared to ignore.

I am a supporter of the Common Core State Standards but I have serious concerns regarding the so-called "Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium" test and Connecticut's new teacher evaluation system. At a time when more and more questions are being raised concerning the validity of standardized tests, why are we in such a hurry to adopt this new system. Data shows that the S.A.T., the granddaddy of standardized tests, is not as accurate an indicator of college performance as a student's high school grades. Where is the data (in this brave new world which seems to worship it) that supports the value of any standardized test. Another concern with the S.A.T. is that it skews toward students who are more advantaged. Does SBAC have the same problem? What about students who have access to computers and i-pads at home versus those who don't? Many states are reconsidering the implementation of these new tests. Why are we in such a rush? Many districts across the state are receiving accolades on account of the number of their students who are taking advanced placement courses and achieving scores which entitle them to receive college credit. Is this not an important indicator of achievement? Perhaps it is time to phase out standardized tests in favor of a system that will allow schools to measure individual student growth. Such a system would be extremely useful, especially if the goal is to educate students.

Standardized tests can be very useful if the goal is to use the results as a cudgel with which to bash schools and teachers. This appears to be the Connecticut approach. The governor has made no secret of his contempt for teachers and with the aid of commissioner Pryor there appears to be a move towards "charterization" as well. Increasingly, questions are being raised about the value and fairness of these schools. Again, Connecticut should carefully evaluate our course before traveling too far down that road.

As to evaluation, Mr. Fleischmann has said, "The issue that was causing the greatest anxiety has already been addressed." That is flatly untrue. The evaluation issue has merely been conveniently postponed until after the upcoming election. That is unsatisfactory and, frankly, insulting. The time to address this onerous and demeaning program is now. No one is fooled by the delay. Under this program, teachers and administrators are taxed to the limit gathering data (almighty data) for submission to the state. Data, I might add, that no one will ever look at or evaluate. Many districts had highly successful evaluation programs prior to the implementation of this system. Why not look to them for guidance.

Why is this administration so contemptuous of public schools? The achievement gap will not be closed by a philosophy of "The beatings will continue until scores improve!" Socio-economic factors and de facto segregation are the biggest obstacles, as they have always been. Do we have the courage to address those issues? Maybe it's easier just to keep beating up teachers.