

March 12, 2014

To: Members of the Education Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to express my views on the proposed committee bills.

My name is Michael Galluzzo. I retired 18 months ago following a thirty one year career in school leadership, 22 years as principal and 3 years as Assistant Superintendent in Farmington. Currently I work for the Connecticut Association of Schools as Assistant Executive Director and Co-Director of the Principal Center. I am an approved and active trainer for both the new state teacher and administrator evaluation systems.

I wish to speak against the proposed committee bill No. 5078 which would make changes to the planned implementation and roll-out of the Common Core State Standards. To remain internationally competitive, we need new standards. Andreas Schleicher, the coordinator for the international assessment-PISA, worked on a review committee for the CCSS and he has attested that these standards are well aligned to the international standards which have driven student learning gains in many nations. As you know, the US has lagged in international comparisons of skills needed for college and career readiness, the skills which the Common Core State Standards were designed to remedy.

School and district leaders have been aware of the changing expectations for years now and they have had time to make adjustments to curriculum and to change the focus of professional development during this time. A transition of this magnitude is understandably stressful for teachers and school leaders. Nevertheless, the pursuit of improved student learning is critical to our economic future as a state and nation as well as providing all students with access to educational opportunities which provide options for college and career. The first steps in such a shift are the hardest, but they are necessary, and the time is now. We will never be perfectly ready for such a complex innovation. It will take a few years for teachers and leaders to fully understand the complexity of implementing these standards for all students. This was true when the Connecticut Mastery Tests and CAPT were introduced.

The CSDE has worked in several ways to support districts as they make this transition. They have helped districts to organize leadership teams, provided continuing communication on the rollout of the assessments, provided professional development sessions and they have provided resources to help teachers and leaders to unpack the standards. It is most disturbing to read that the bill would curtail funding for the important work that is underway.

When I served as Assistant Superintendent in Farmington at the time of the adoption of the CCSS, our leadership team took immediate action to begin to study our curriculum and instructional practices and their alignment to the CCSS and to make the needed adjustments to both curriculum and instructional practices. Many districts undertook this same practice. One thing is clear: the CCSS are more rigorous than the prior state standards and there is a misalignment of content between the prior and current standards. Should Bill 5078 succeed, schools and districts will be teaching to the new standards while being assessed on the previous ones. This misalignment will create issues with the content validity of the test results and otherwise create issues for teachers in planning instruction.

I also wish to address Bill 5331. The language of the bill with regard to student learning objectives is unnecessarily prescriptive in requiring that there be only one objective for a teacher. During my twenty two-years as a building principal in Farmington, we used student learning objectives as a prime driver for student learning improvement. During those years, we raised student achievement significantly because we focused on important content and student learning needs based on the analysis of student data from state and local assessments. We found that teachers were fully capable of working to address more than one set of identified learning needs.

As a trainer of teachers, principals and central office personnel in the new evaluation system, I have witnessed how some individuals, schools and districts have struggled with the development of quality student learning objectives. This is largely the result of one of two factors: prior evaluation practices lacked a student learning focus, so there was little or no experience with designing SLOs and/or there was a lack of quality assessments outside of the state testing program.

The fact that there has been some pushback on the use of student learning objectives shouldn't deter the state from moving forward on the most important component of the evaluation program. Student learning is heavily weighted in the system for good reason-it is the primary purpose for having schools. The proposed bill prescribes the number of objectives that a teacher will write in a given year. Districts need more flexibility. From my administrative experience, I have found that two objectives were not excessively burdensome for teachers. For our school, my teachers and I regularly wrote three student learning objectives for which all of the teachers were responsible for working toward; however, they personally were responsible for two.

The student learning component of the new evaluation program has created anxiety in schools, largely because there is little or no experience and history for setting target for student growth. In some cases, the infrastructure has been lacking for accessing relevant data and in others there were gaps in assessment practices. To a large extent the solution to this challenge is already in place and it will ease

this transition. Districts currently have the option not to include student performance data in teacher evaluation. There is no need to make this a requirement. Districts should have the flexibility to implement practices that are relevant to their contexts and which exist under the current guidelines.

There is no question that the number of innovations underway is creating stress for educators. The recent flexibility granted to districts with regard to the possible exemption of student performance data in evaluation should alleviate a great deal of concern with regard to state testing programs. Districts need flexibility in evaluation practices during this transition period; however, they don't need a one-size-fits-all solution which mandates one formal observation and one SLO.