

To the Education Committee of the CT General Assembly:

As a veteran high school English teacher in his ninth year and as a doctoral student of Teachers College, Columbia University, I'm writing to urge Connecticut lawmakers to drastically change or repeal current legislation concerning the evaluation of public school teachers and adopt policies based in solid education research to improve the academic success of students in Connecticut, especially students who have historically been disenfranchised from success in public schools.

The current teacher evaluation legislation has put me in a position as a teacher where I must perform pervers actions upon my students and among my colleagues as part of an unproven, ideological mandate. I have been asked to give students a "baseline" assessment in their first days of school. This is essentially a test given before I even teach anything to my students, and this demoralizes my students the moment the step into my classroom. I have been asked to set so called "attainable" academic goals for "all students," when I know such goals are beyond my power of attainability, due primarily to the inequities of our education system and our larger societal structures. I have forfeited the time I usually spend planning instruction and delivering instruction to students in order to prepare documents for the teacher evaluation system and cull data for my evaluation. With the data presented in a mid-year conference, I was allotted only 10 minutes to review this data with an administrators. How can 10 minutes reveal any thoughtful analysis of data, or yield a discussion about how to help students? Not only is this mandate a tremendous waste of time and resources, this teacher evaluation system won't help students.

Writing in a special issue of Teachers College Record focused on new teacher evaluation systems across the U.S. in 2014, Alyson Leah Lavigne asserts, "There is no evidence that high-stakes teacher evaluation can produce a more effective teacher workforce and improve student achievement." Even, the research sponsored by billionaire Bill Gates, research that the Connecticut's education department website touts as supporting evidence for their initiatives, does not study the effects of a teacher evaluation system like the one in place in Connecticut. Furthermore, the UConn study of last year's pilot didn't even look at student achievement.

There is little support to suggest that this evaluation system helps students.

To make an analogy, this evaluation system is equivalent to telling a doctor that unless she cures cancer, she will be labeled a "developing" doctor, or worse yet, she will lose her job. The challenges facing public education that cause our achievement gaps go beyond what any one teacher can do. Like cancer, the obstacles to student success are complex and have been studied for decades with no definitive solutions in existence anywhere. But today teachers are forced to bear the burden of finding a cure at all costs with no support from anyone.

What legislators should do is scrap this law and craft policy based on education research. Specifically, address the larger issue of inequity in our schools in our society. Offer high quality universal pre-K. Revise the funding formula of public schools so that less affluent students receive more resources, not less. Also, provide professional development for teachers that work and is consistent, always. These are just a few basic foundational starting point. Much, much more must be done. But this current teacher evaluation system takes us far away from changing anything in a positive direction for students.

To be clear, I will not vote for any legislature or governor who does not change or repeal the current teacher evaluation legislation.

Thank you,

Rich Novack