

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to you as a tired and stressed woman who came back to teaching two years ago after time spent raising children. Ironically, since I have returned to teaching, I have not been focusing on my own children due to the increasing pressures and demands placed on educators today. Educators are not the only unfortunate victims of this debacle. My daughter, a high school freshman, faces more hours of homework per day than she can handle as a result of increased rigor. She barely gets enough sleep to function effectively. Because she participates in a sport, she is forced to stay up until midnight to finish her work and must get up at 6:00 in the morning in order to get to school on time. This is not healthy. I have watched a child who used to love school come to dislike it. It breaks my heart.

School produces anxiety not only for my daughter, but also for so many others. The oppressive environment created allows for very little much-needed down time. I feel for this situation because I no longer have down time myself due to the fact that I teach in a tested subject area, Language Arts. Teachers of tested subjects feel the greatest burden. Even though my required time at work is approximately 40 hours, these hours do not take into account the hours needed for preparation, curriculum revision to meet the standards, documentation to prove my worth, and hours of additional documentation to allow for required new observations to occur. If I have a set of papers to grade on top of all of this, I am looking at more than 70 hours of work in a week's time. More and more items are placed on teachers' plates yet nothing is taken away to alleviate the pressure.

In addition to workload pressures faced by both teachers and students, there is the problem of standardized testing. First of all, we are creating curriculum based on the Smarter Balanced test - a test we are supposed to prepare our students to take even though it has not yet been released. In essence, we are putting the cart before the horse. This year, students will pilot the Smarter Balanced test and this test will come to be the standard by which educators and students will be evaluated. Standardized tests are one moment in time of a student's progress. In addition to this test, we have district-wide standardized assessments in order to "help" us measure our growth as teachers. Our district is using the STAR assessment. Scary to think that I will be evaluated based on this as I have watched my own students get timed out. In fact, I watched a student press the correct answer and get timed out, thus making the answer incorrect. He was so frustrated and flustered that the results were obviously inaccurate. What happens when my evaluation is tied to his performance? It is a disaster for all involved. Standardized tests are one brief snapshot of a student's academic life. We put too much emphasis on tests. In fact, I fear that I will have to eliminate a poetry composition unit that offers students who have difficulty writing the opportunity for creative success. If it isn't tested, the message is that it is not worth teaching. How sad.

If you are still wondering why this system is not working, please consider that first of all, it assumes that a teacher's worth can be measured completely. Think back to teachers who truly inspired you, taught you to love to read and write, and motivated you to succeed. Could you effectively measure their attributes? This is a business model of evaluation that has been created by businessmen without consulting teachers. In business, you get to choose who will produce for you and fire that individual if production does not occur. I can't fire students who come into

my room and refuse to produce, and I can't control many variables which impact test performance such as what that child ate, how that child slept, what occurred at home, how much learning is supported at home, etc. It is absurd to measure my worth based on variables that are out of my control. In twenty years, a student will remember how Mrs. Blomstrann taught him/her the how to be a productive member of society. He/she will not remember how I caused a vertical scale score to rise on a standardized test. It is absurd not to take into account all of the other immeasurable but equally valuable ingredients that are the recipe for an "exemplary teacher."

While I am on the subject of ratings, specifically "exemplary", we have all been told that no one will be rated as "exemplary". Imagine if I came into my class at the beginning of the year and announced that while an A exists, no one will achieve it. What kind of motivational tool is this? Yet, this is how we are evaluating teachers.

Most teachers recognize that Governor Malloy is only postponing implementation of all components of the evaluation process until reelection. Unfortunately, all teachers recognize that this is a diversion tactic and will accomplish nothing for us in the long run. As someone who is currently involved in the full evaluation system, I can tell you that postponing is not enough.

This is a system imposed upon teachers without teacher consultation, it is a burden on administrators who are having trouble finding time to meet with students in between documenting teachers' evaluations, and it presumes that all children learn the same way and are on the same path leading directly to college. Let's fix this before it is too late. Help my daughter and so many other sons and daughters love school again. Help bring back the joy of teaching so that truly exemplary teachers will stop talking about leaving the profession. Help bring back the joy of learning for our students. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
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