

Testimony of Wendy Lecker regarding:
H.B. No. 5331, "An Act Concerning the
Implementation of the Revisions to the PEAC Guidelines"
March 12, 2014

Dear Chairs Stillman and Fleischmann and members of the Committee.

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony today. I am a Stamford resident, taxpayer and parent of three children. My oldest is a graduate of Stamford public schools. I also have a senior in high school and an 8th grader, also in Stamford public schools.

Connecticut's new teacher evaluation model is fatally flawed and no amount of delay will cure it. It must be scrapped and replaced by a valid system that will actually work to improve teaching and learning.

The reliance on standardized test scores for 22.5 percent of a teacher's evaluation renders the entire system unreliable

Research has demonstrated conclusively that using standardized test to rate teachers is invalid because scores vary widely based on the test, year, class and statistical model used. This overwhelming evidence prompted Tennessee's State Board of Education, one of the first adopters of the so-called Value Added Model ("VAM"), to now abandon the use of VAM in any decisions to license or fire teachers. A bill is pending in Tennessee to prohibit the use of student standardized test scores in teacher evaluations.

Connecticut uses an even more inaccurate method called Student Growth Percentiles ("SGP"). While VAM tries but fails to isolate a teacher's small effect on student test scores, SGP does not even attempt to measure a teacher's effect.

SGP tells us nothing about a teacher. Yet that is what Connecticut uses for 22.5 percent of a teacher's evaluation. Though SGP is a portion of a teacher's evaluation, it will likely be the determining factor because its volatility will make it the tipping point in a rating.

Delay will not cure the use of SGP. Time cannot magically make unreliable data more reliable -- it just gives us more consistently unreliable data.

Delay will also not cure the other fatal flaws in the evaluation system.

The goal of Connecticut's evaluation system should be to improve teaching and learning. Because they teach human beings, teachers work in a dynamic environment and must be able to adjust their lessons

and behavior to each class. A successful teacher evaluation model captures authentic teaching and learning.

Kim Marshall's admired mini-observation model employs this approach. Since not every aspect of teaching occurs in every class, several mini-observations are required, with conversations after each one. In order not to disrupt teaching, supervision should occur throughout the year, and evaluation at the end.

However, Connecticut's teacher evaluation program emphasizes so-called measurement, not teaching practice. It is so focused on measurement that it detracts from teaching and learning.

Connecticut's system is not geared toward improving teaching or learning because it did not emanate from the classroom or classroom practice. Teachers are asked to respond to externally generated jargon-filled questions that have little relationship to their classroom or students. Where they used to use staff meetings to review student work and share ideas for improving lessons, they now spend hours in meetings discussing how to answer these artificial questions and enter them into the computer.

In classroom observations, administrators write down every word a teacher says. One teacher reports having the evaluator interrupt her interactions with students so she could repeat verbatim what she had just said. An experienced counselor described an observed family meeting in which the administrator's transcribing was so distracting that she focused on every word she said rather than the toxic dynamic developing between the parent and child. A 40-year veteran first-grade teacher recounted how she no longer reads books aloud to her students because she fears an evaluator will say she is off-script.

Waiting a year will not help. As one teacher said "We can all figure out how to fill out the forms more quickly and accurately and nothing will have improved for the student."

He continued. "A teacher's most valuable resource is time. I used to spend this time trying to think of ways to make my lessons more engaging, or how to scaffold better." Now, the teacher reports spending that time answering questions that seem to exist merely to justify an outside consultant's fee.

The majority of Connecticut teachers agree. UConn's study of the evaluation pilot found that only 42 percent of teachers believe that with sufficient resources -- time and staffing- SEED will improve teacher practice.

The time has come to repeal this education "reform" and develop proposals that will actually improve our schools.

Thank you.

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