

Thank you to the Chairs and the Committee for an opportunity to share my thoughts and experiences working with Erin Benham—an exceptional educator and an effective leader.

My name is Mark Benigni and I am proud to be the Superintendent of the Meriden Public Schools. I am a former teacher, administrator, and mayor; and my focus has been to assure that all students have a chance for a better life.

Erin Benham is honest, hard working and passionate about student learning. She is an outstanding teacher who brings out the best in her students and colleagues. She has helped numerous Meriden children learn how to read and develop that essential love of reading.

Her classroom is one of respect—a place of exploration where creativity is fostered and valued. As a union leader, Erin is a great partner and teammate. She only wants what is best for our students and always makes decisions with students at the center of her thoughts.

She has no patience for lazy teachers— and superintendents too . . . she will not tolerate any staff member that does not make students feel valued and appreciated.

As with any union – our teachers have a contract that needs to be followed. On countless occasions, Erin has advocated for side letters to assure that contractual language does not get in the way of new initiatives or student progress. In essence, Erin makes the contract work for our students and families.

With Erin at the helm of the Meriden Federation of Teachers, Meriden launched:

- Weekly PLC/Data Team Time while increasing student instructional time. This was accomplished by having teachers teach during their wrap-around time—the time they were required to be on campus without direct student instruction occurring.
- Full-day kindergarten for all students.

- A 1 to 1 mobile device program, with BYOD guidelines, was initiated at our high schools. And we recently secured a highly competitive 3.5 million dollar grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation.
- Three neighborhood public elementary schools where students attend 100 minutes more per day. This equals over 40 days of additional school per year. This was supported by an AFT Innovation Grant.

Our collaborative efforts led to a feature article in *American Educator* and the recent publication, *It's About Time: Lessons from Expanded Learning Time in Meriden, Conn.*

We have had visitors come to the Meriden Public Schools from across the country, as well as reporters from local and national media outlets; and we were proud to welcome the following dignitaries:

- Governor Malloy and Commissioner Pryor numerous times;
- Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education Deb Delisle;
- Region III, Northeast HUB Leader Elizabeth Williamson;
- Ford Foundation President Darren Walker; and
- National Center on Time and Learning President Jennifer Davis.

In closing, Erin Benham is an outstanding choice for the State Board of Education. She will bring a vast array of quality experiences, a firm commitment to public education, and a strong belief in the potential of all students. I applaud Governor Malloy for his thoughtful choice of Erin Benham.