



Testimony of  
**Melodie Peters**  
President, AFT Connecticut, AFL-CIO

Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee Public Hearing  
April 28, 2015

***Resolution Confirming the Nomination of Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, of South Windsor, to be  
Commissioner of Education***

Good afternoon Senator Duff, Representative Janowski and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. My name is Melodie Peters and I am the President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 90 local unions representing more than 30,000 public and private sector employees. Our members include more than 15,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses and other school personnel across the state. It is on their behalf that I appear before you today to enthusiastically support the nomination of Dr. Dianna Wentzell to be Commissioner of Education.

AFT Connecticut and its members consider the most vital prerequisite to be Commissioner of Education is classroom teaching experience. Countless studies have shown that qualified, certified educators deliver the highest quality instruction and have the greatest positive impact on student learning. We have set high standards for teachers, administrators and superintendents in our state. It is only appropriate that we hold our Commissioner of Education to the same standards.

The Commissioner of Education, with advice and consent of the General Assembly, develops, directs and implements state education policy and public school instruction. Since a large portion of that role involves providing direction and guidance to districts, schools and educators, it makes sense that the Commissioner should have a similar professional background. Without that share experience, no Commissioner can be credible or effective.

We applaud Governor Malloy for appointing a Commissioner with a strong background in public education and classroom teaching experience. Dr. Wentzell's 26-year career as an educator in various roles in several Connecticut school districts speaks to her versatility and her direct knowledge of the challenges teachers face on a daily basis. She understands what it takes to educate a child and values collaboration with teachers and school employees.

Our union has benefitted from productive dialogue and a collaborative relationship with Dr. Wentzell since she joined the State Department of Education two years ago. She has shown herself to be a good listener, a fundamental element for any cooperation -- and one that fosters the mutual trust and respect demanded of her position. That track record has proven to be a strong foundation for the working partnership that we've developed since she was appointed Interim Commissioner. We look forward to continuing that partnership throughout her tenure as Commissioner.

Dr. Wentzell is more than qualified to be Commissioner of Education. In fact, she is exactly the right person for the job at this time. I urge you to give her your full support and act favorably upon her nomination. Thank you.