



Advocating for teachers
and public education

**Connecticut Education
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Governance

Sheila Cohen, President
Jeff Leake, Vice President
Pat Jordan, Secretary
Thomas Nicholas, Treasurer
John Horrigan, NEA Director
Gary Peluchette, NEA Director

Executive Office

Mark Waxenberg
Executive Director
Capitol Place, Suite 500
21 Oak Street
Hartford, CT 06106
860-525-5641 800-842-4316
Fax 860-725-6388

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National Education Association

Written Testimony of

Jeff Leake, Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association

Before the Education Committee

Re: HB 6977AN ACT ESTABLISHING QUALIFICATIONS FOR

THE COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

March 11, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Jeff Leake, Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association.

I submit these written remarks on behalf of the 43,000 members of the Connecticut Education Association in support of H.B. No. 6977, which establishes minimum qualifications for future Commissioners of Education.

Over the past few years our members have clearly indicated their desire to see a true public school educator in the position of Commissioner of Education. And by public school educator we are referring to someone who has dedicated his or her college preparation and career to serving true public schools, either in this state or another. More specifically, we are not including those who believe that there is a short cut to becoming an educational professional and certainly not those who count themselves as alumni of programs such as Teach for America or the Broad Academy. Here, for example, are the qualifications that Broad insists are important for the so-called leaders it attempts to train for educational administrative or educational policy careers: "Experience in one or more functional business areas (e.g., finance, operations, strategy, information technology, human resources, general management). For candidates with an M.B.A., M.P.P. or M.P.A., at least two years of experience in a business or management role. For candidates with other advanced degrees, at least four years of experience in a business or management role. We also value candidates with experience as generalists and project managers." Please note the lack of professional educator expectations.

In our conversations with our members the only cause for concern regarding this bill is whether or not these basic qualifications are too basic. Are we setting the bar too low for someone who “shall administer, coordinate and supervise the activities of the department”? Is a total of eight years as a teacher and administrator enough to satisfy the demands of this most important position? We are concerned that these minimum qualifications may indeed be too minimal.

Let’s just take a quick journey into “pretend”: Jeff Leake is truly concerned about public health and public health policy. He has interacted with doctors extensively during his own life. At one point, he even considered becoming a doctor. He has read extensively on the subject, and brings a true commitment to improving public health in this state. In addition to his readings, he has viewed suggested films about medicine and health, including *Angels in America* and *The Doctor*, and most importantly, has watched *Contagion* over ten times. Would anyone in this room suggest that Jeff is now ready, after eloquently expressing his background and best intentions, to replace Dr. Jewel Mullen, Board certified in internal medicine and the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Public Health, when that post becomes vacant? I think, and clearly hope, not.

As important as any minimal teaching and administrative experience but certainly not addressed in this bill, are the other qualities necessary to be a true educator and Commissioner of Education: the ability to truly collaborate with colleagues, the ability to be an important member of a team that includes true education stakeholders, and an educator with the clear understanding that the children we teach and who are in our care are more than numbers on a spreadsheet or scores on a test. We will be looking for a commissioner with an understanding that all of our students, especially those dealing with the effects of poverty and unstable community situations, require more than test preparation for the next high-stakes test and a commissioner who has the educational background and insight that not all students arrive at the desired educational destination at the same time or in the same grade as their peers.