



Testimony of
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Education Committee Hearing
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SB 1054 AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

SB 1055 AN ACT CONCERNING GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

***HB 6980 AN ACT CONCERNING THE TIMING OF TEACHER PERFORMANCE
EVALUATIONS***

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Patti Fusco. I am a teacher of Gifted and Talented 5th and 6th graders in the West Haven Public Schools and I am the Jurisdictional Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 90 local unions representing nearly 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 have prepared this testimony on two bills before you today, as well as on behalf of the state's gifted students, who are not able to address you themselves.

SB 1054 AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

I am writing in opposition to SB 1054. I believe that the intent of this bill is commendable—to help students who have dyslexia learn to read, but there are some flaws in the plan. Only a licensed neuropsychologist can make a professional diagnosis of dyslexia. Most school districts do not have a neuropsychologist on staff as they are very specialized. Districts consult with neuropsychologists for diagnoses when the district staff cannot pinpoint the problem that a child is having. They are highly trained and I do not believe that even a full semester course on dyslexia will provide a teacher with the expertise to make a positive diagnosis of dyslexia. I believe that teacher preparation courses should focus on teaching children how to read and how to recognize and remediate all types of learning problems. This will better prepare them for ALL the reading issues that they will encounter in their classes, not just dyslexia.

SB 1055 AN ACT CONCERNING GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

I wish to speak in support of SB 1055. Students who are gifted and talented are underserved in our public school system. By law, we must identify students who are gifted, but are not required to provide services to them. These students need to be educated in a way that causes them to use all the talents they have and teaches them how to use their gifts to excel. In an austere economy, the Gifted programs have been cut from many districts, and classroom teachers have been given the directive to “differentiate” and challenge students who are above average. I do agree that these students need to be challenged, and that they should receive instruction that does so. Unfortunately, in many places this means giving them busy work or putting them on a computer to fill their time. This is not the best way to teach these students. In fact, this isn't

teaching these students at all. Students who are not challenged academically can go one of two ways; they can succeed in spite of their education or, and I have seen all too often, they can become behavior problems and end up dropping out even if they attend school every day. These students deserve a quality education. These are the kids who will one day find the cure for cancer or invent something amazing. These are our best and brightest, and we should treat them as such. They are our future.

HB 6980 AN ACT CONCERNING THE TIMING OF TEACHER PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

HB 6980 changes the timing of the teacher evaluation process. It gives the administration the right to not finish a teacher's evaluation until June 30, rather than June 1 as it is currently. I am opposed to this because I fear that it will mean that teachers could leave for summer break without receiving their summative evaluations. It could mean teachers will be observed and evaluated during the last days of school, instead of during peak instructional times which is when we want to be ensured they are doing a great job.

Principals have from late August until the end of May to get their observations and evaluations of teachers done. By being organized and efficient, this can be accomplished. It is being done, and done well, in my district. Our observations are spaced out so that our teaching is evaluated continually. We will know by the end of May how we stand, and what areas we need to improve upon. This enables teachers to plan their professional development so that they can address any deficiencies over the summer and help them come up with a plan for improvement going forward into the next school year. Teachers who are evaluated while school is still in session will have access to the experts who can help them, such as reading and math specialists and peers who are exemplars, so that they can consult with them and seek assistance. This is not easily done once people have left for summer break.

I also am not in favor of districts being given until October 15 to decide how they are going to evaluate teachers. Professional Development and Evaluation committees are set up in each district and should decide before the school year starts how the teachers in their district are evaluated. This will help districts better plan their professional development and also help teachers develop their own personal plans to help improve their instruction. It also lets teachers know how they will be evaluated before the school year begins, not six weeks later.

Improving instruction is the ultimate goal of the evaluation system. Teachers teach from the first day of school until the last day of school. Having a plan in place before school starts, and getting feedback in the form of their summative evaluation before the year ends, will help all teachers and administrators to meet that goal.

Thank you for all you do. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.