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*Testimony of*

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*Before the Education Committee*

**SB 380 AAC THE EXCLUSION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE RESULTS ON  
THE MASTERY EXAMINATION FROM TEACHER EVALUATIONS**

**HB 5551 AAC THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK OF SCHOOLS**

**HB 5550 AAC VARIOUS REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE  
EDUCATION STATUTES**

*March 7, 2016*

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Donald Williams, Director of Policy, Research and Reform with the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 active and retired teachers throughout Connecticut.

**SB 380:**

The CEA strongly supports SB 380. It corrects bad policy that hurts teachers and students.

This bill addresses a critical failing of teacher evaluation since 2012—the linking of almost one quarter of a teacher's evaluation to the mastery examination scores. This linkage was done without any scientific or research-based evidence that such a link was valid, reliable or fair for the purpose of teacher evaluation. It turns out there is no such evidence. No vendors of mastery examination tests claim their test is a valid measure of teacher performance. The testing companies have a difficult enough time demonstrating that their tests are a valid measure of *student* knowledge.

Student achievement on mastery examinations is not even primarily influenced by the teacher, but is instead influenced by many other factors beyond a teacher's control, such as parental involvement and resources, outside enrichment during the school year and the summer, class size, school resources, curriculum, access in and out of school to books and computers, and prior educational experiences.

Countries where students do best on standardized tests—such as Finland, China and Singapore—have never used the results of such tests for teacher evaluation.

Research shows that the best way to evaluate teachers is through observation by administrators and monitoring the growth and development of students in the classroom. Teacher evaluation should reinforce the goal of respecting the potential of every student, recognizing a teacher's desire for continuous improvement, and avoiding unintended consequences, such as discouraging the recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers in schools that serve high poverty communities.

Standardized test scores typically reveal inequities based on income and lack of access to computers—the higher the family income, the higher the test score. The same tests fail, however, to provide an accurate measure of student growth in the classroom.

Recent research in Maryland, Illinois, and at the National Center for Education Statistics, has shown that standardized tests create a significant technology gap for students in high poverty schools—students receive lower scores on computer-based tests than they would using pencil and paper. Linking unreliable and discriminatory test scores to evaluations is not valid, and punishes dedicated teachers in the schools where they are needed most.

Christopher Emdin, the associate director of the Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Columbia University, said that using standardized test scores to evaluate teachers is “dangerous” and deters teachers who want to make a difference in schools that serve students in high poverty communities.

Tying a teacher's evaluation to a test score hurts all students. Entire schools are pressured to teach to the test, resulting in less time for activities that engage students in critical thinking and creative problem solving. More time on test prep means less on debates, science labs, interdisciplinary projects, and entire subjects like social studies, history, art and music. Studies show these subjects

and activities increase student engagement in school, improve cognitive functioning, and increase overall academic achievement.

The requirement to use the test scores for teacher evaluation in Connecticut has been waived for the past two years. It is time to make that waiver permanent, and for the legislature to act and take credit for preventing bad policy and unintended consequences that are harmful to teachers and students.

**HB 5551:**

The CEA strongly opposes this bill. It is frankly a blunt instrument that imposes a hostile state takeover of Commissioner's Network schools. It undermines elected boards of education, removes transparency, curtails responsiveness to the community, repeals collective bargaining, and creates a czar—who may be a charter school vendor—to oversee those public schools that are network schools. It is a top-down model that is designed to benefit those who want corporate control over our schools. It eliminates meaningful partnerships with parents, teachers, and administrators. It is similar to legislation that in other states has been promoted by private charter school vendors.

This bill would dramatically increase the number of network schools, allow the commissioner or his or her designee to run the schools for an undefined amount of time, strip the local board of education of its authority, hand over control of local public schools to private vendors, and allow the commissioner to close schools without oversight.

The current model for network schools embraces transparency and local partnerships—and this is critical—it emphasizes the need for first class resources and services in schools located in high poverty communities. The goal must be to meet the needs of the students—not the needs of vendors who would profit from those students who need our help the most.

At a time when public education policy in the United States is moving away from privatization and corporate models for public schools, this bill would move Connecticut dramatically in the wrong direction.

**HB 5550:**

In my testimony on SB 380 I addressed some of the problems with standardized testing, particularly as to the mastery exam—the SBAC test. I would request that HB 5550 be amended to require that the current Mastery Examination Committee—which the legislature created last year—pursue a request for proposals process for a different mastery examination for grades 3 through 8. This would not require the state to switch tests, but would allow Connecticut to catch up with most other states.

The majority of states have abandoned the SBAC test and PARCC tests, and substituted other mastery exams. Connecticut wisely abandoned SBAC for high school students. We should not forget our elementary and middle school students. At minimum, we should follow the lead of other states and include a provision in this bill to examine what other tests exist that would be better for our grade 3 through 8 students.

I am attaching the CEA's report regarding the SBAC test as part of my testimony. This report was recently presented to the Mastery Examination Committee and contains detailed information as to the problems and discriminatory nature of the SBAC test.

Thank you.