

Written Testimony

Education Committee Public Hearing

February 24, 2016

Regarding Bill # SB 175: "An Act Concerning Recommendations of the Department of Education"

Unable to attend in person, I am submitting this written testimony in opposition to **SB 175 "An Act Concerning Recommendations of the Department of Education"**. As it is currently written SB 175 makes an already complicated issue even more so. The language of this bill is extremely difficult to follow because it ultimately rests on the state accountability standards which are referenced in the bill, but not explicitly stated. I believe that the confusion in the wording of the bill makes it difficult to follow the "true" intent of this request and also makes it difficult to connect the dots. As a result, legislators are left taking the word of the proponents of SB 175 on faith. Unfortunately, this proposed bill does not warrant such trust. This is, then, ultimately a dangerous piece of legislation with far-reaching implications.

Embedded within this lengthy bill is an effort by the State Department of Education to amend the original law in order to place into statute an enforcement penalty for failure by local school districts to meet the "95% test participation rate" requirement. This was not the intent of the original legislation which provided municipalities with educational spending flexibility under minimum budget requirements. This is neither the time nor place to manipulate current settled law in order to solve an anticipated crisis resulting from student and parent resistance to controversial test policies over which local school district officials have no control. Any downgrade of a school district rating resulting from failure to reach the "95% test participation rate" would have a significant and unnecessary impact on communities grappling with balancing its education needs and passing its budget. We all know how difficult a process that is already without making it even more challenging.

The continuing education controversies across the State and the Nation stem from public dissatisfaction with imposed Common Core Standards and the aligned test protocols that are associated with it. Recognizing both the intensity and seriousness of this debate, a new federal education act was overwhelmingly passed by a bipartisan Congress because both sides were dissatisfied with the "test-and-punish" legacy of the 2001 No Child Left Behind law.

The new federal legislation under the Every Student Succeeds Act which becomes law July 1, 2017 will give decision-making authority back to the states, enabling its state education leaders to determine their own course relative to assessment. The passage of this legislation will allow for a fresh start, a new look at the educational needs of our state without interference from Washington DC. In the meantime, **The CT State Department of Education could certainly find a different solution to their "95% test participation rate" dilemma rather than manipulating current laws in order to create a coercive environment designed specifically to punish parents** who - in good conscience - choose to protect their children from unproven and unfair tests:

- The CSDE could simply accept the student and parent compliance that takes place during this upcoming test administration since, by the time the SBAC test results are reported, a new negotiation with the federal government under ESSA can take place.

- The CSDE could join other states and withdraw from its agreement with SBAC.

- The CSDE could show "true" leadership in seeking a meaningful assessment system for CT through its legislature-directed Mastery Examination Task Force instead of the half-hearted effort it has displayed thus far as clearly reflected in the recent Interim Report to the Legislature's Education Committee.

- The CSDE could respect and honor the wishes of concerned parents who see the current testing practice as not only unproven, discriminatory, and unfair, but also ultimately harmful to their children.

It is my hope that as legislators representing the voters of our state that you will send a clear message and help the CSDE begin to chart a new course that will get beyond the failed past practices of imposed education policy initiatives and heal the damage that has been done to our students, their parents, and the profession of teaching in our State. The Every Student Succeeds Act will provide the opportunity to re-invigorate our educational practices if only we can break away from the rancor and distrust that has consumed this debate

since the implementation of these unproven and highly-contested "education reform" policies imposed on our schools.

Although the State Department of Education feels caught in an unenviable position between federal demands and a more sound educational policy, it must not be allowed to amend the original law to "make revisions to the exemptions from the minimum budget requirements" (quite a convoluted mouthful), thereby embedding into statute an enforcement penalty for failure by local school districts to meet the "95% test participation rate" requirement.

VOTE an emphatic NO! on SB 175 and let's move forward with new energy shedding the controversial practices of the past.

Respectfully submitted,

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