



Testimony of  
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Education Committee Hearing  
March 7, 2016

***SB 380 An Act Concerning the Exclusion of Student Performance Results on the Mastery Examination from Teacher Evaluations***

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Patti Fusco and I am a teacher of talented and gifted students in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Carrigan Intermediate School in West Haven. I am also the Divisional Vice President for AFT CT. Our members include more than 15,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses and other school personnel across the state. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of SB 380 An Act Concerning the Exclusion of Student Performance Results on the Mastery Examination from Teacher Evaluations.

I come before you today to ask you to drop standardized test scores as a requirement for teacher evaluation. Teachers are being graded on subjects that they do not teach using an instrument that was not designed to be used to evaluate teachers.

I teach talented and gifted children. In years past, I focused my teaching on helping them to grow in their love of learning, and teaching them how to learn and how to think. We did lots of critical thinking activities, construction and building projects, and I taught them how to learn what THEY wanted to learn about. Now, although I do still try to do a lot of that, I need to focus on getting them to raise their scores on the standardized tests, so a good portion of my class is spent on root words and vocabulary each week. I do try to do it in a fun way, but it really isn't as much fun as building a structure that is twice as tall as it is wide and can sustain weight given just toothpicks and marshmallows or some of the other challenging lessons I have come up with over the years. They are being taught how to find answers, but not how to think and solve problems. They are not being taught how to be creative and passionate about what they learn.

Teachers agree that they should be accountable for making sure that their students are learning. Teachers agree that students need to be making growth in mastery of the curriculum standards that they will need to become productive members of society. It makes no sense to grade us on a test that we have no control over. Grade us on what we teach.

Most districts have district common assessments that go with each unit in each subject that is taught. These reflect what students should know after being taught the material in each unit. Grade us on whether our students master that material. Let us use our education, experience and professional judgment to determine how best to teach that material.

Teachers are being forced to teach all children the same material in the same way so that they can do well on the SBAC test. First of all, not all children learn the same way, and most importantly, they are not robots that you can program. The way the current system is set up, in order to pass your evaluation, you have to forge ahead whether the students have mastered the material or not. In other words, every single fourth grader in the state is expected to be in the exact same place at pretty much the same exact time. This is killing the joy of teaching and learning. You can't stop for that teachable moment if it isn't in the curriculum. You can't adjust for when they just didn't get it—and take the time to teach it a different way to the kids who need to see it a different way. Our current system is failing everyone.

Teachers who do not teach numeracy or literacy are being graded on numeracy or literacy. If you teach Art, or Spanish, or Physical Education, is it really appropriate for you to be graded on your student's literacy or numeracy skills? That makes no sense to me. Grade teachers on what they teach.

Standardized tests give us just a snapshot in time. We see how much someone was able to respond on that day and at that time. Maybe they had a rough morning—maybe they didn't get enough sleep. Maybe they aren't feeling well. We all have experienced days like that, when we just aren't on top of our game. One test does not give us a true picture of how much a student has grown and learned. How can one test then tell us whether their teacher is proficient or not?

I urge you to support teachers and help us to help all students reach their full potential. Please support SB 380.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.



Testimony of  
Tom Kuroski, President  
Newtown Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1727, AFL-CIO

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***SB 380 An Act Concerning the Exclusion of Student Performance Results on the Mastery Examination from Teacher Evaluations***

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Tom Kuroski and I am presently serving in my sixth year as President of the Newtown Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1727 and I have been a teacher in the Newtown Public Schools for the past 31 years. I am currently teaching Anatomy and Physiology. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of SB 380, An Act Concerning the Exclusion of Student Performance Results on the Mastery Examination from Teacher Evaluations.

I think I understand why non-educators thought that it was a good idea to use student standardized test scores as a means of evaluating teachers. They didn't know any better because they are not in the classroom. They felt it would make sense that student scores on these tests would be a valid reflection of a teacher's performance in the classroom. As we have learned from this ill-advised initiative in teacher evaluation, this could not be further from the truth. What I don't understand is why the legislators didn't listen to the teachers in the first place? Before this federal mandate was enacted, the voices of educators across the country made it loud and clear why this system and the rationale used to support it would be an inaccurate and unfair way to evaluate teachers. What you are going to hear during today's testimony supporting this bill will be originating from the same voices who communicated all the reasons why this system of evaluation would never produce valid data necessary to determine a teacher's skills as an educator or a barometer of what their students are learning in their classrooms.

I could go on for hours about why this was an ill-conceived way to evaluate teachers, but I only have three minutes. So may I share with you what I consider the top three reasons why SB 380 should be supported by this committee?

1. Standardized test scores do not apply or are not available to use for the evaluation of all teachers in the system. How can these scores accurately reflect the performance of a non-academic teacher or an academic teacher working in a grade level that doesn't administer a standardized test for that given year?
2. The student ability levels and classroom dynamics within a grade level that are taking a test can be vastly different. The classrooms are not homogenous and the test scores do not take this into account. Some of the best teachers in the country take on the most difficult classes because of their unique skill set and ability to get the most out of the students they are working with. Often times these more challenging educational settings have students who

do not do well on standardized tests. Their scores are not an accurate representation of the performance of the teachers in these classrooms or how much those teachers are helping their students to become better learners.

3. Economic inequities between different communities in the same state create an unfair playing field where teacher evaluations can and will be negatively affected by this type of system. Teacher scores become more of a reflection of the lack of support needed to create learning environments where students can thrive. Teachers working in impoverished districts where resources are scarce cannot be evaluated using the same tool as teachers working in affluent communities where education is a top priority and prohibitive spending doesn't exist.

I can find examples of the second reason occurring in all grade levels in my district, but I will focus on the middle school and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes. There are three clusters in the middle school that have students assigned to them based on scheduling and ability levels in math. High School Algebra is taught in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Students recommended for this accelerated math class have to meet strict academic guidelines in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade as well as take an entrance exam. Only one of the three 8<sup>th</sup> grade clusters teaches Algebra so all the qualifying students end up in the same cluster. It could be up to 50% of the total students in the cluster. The same ability level scheduling is also used for students requiring special education services. The combination of these two necessary scheduling initiatives is needed to accommodate the individual education plans for all students. This results in one cluster having high achieving math students and the other two clusters having students with IEP's or 504's. When the 8<sup>th</sup> grade mastery test is given, the cluster with the algebra students has always had higher averages than the clusters with the mainstreamed students. This has nothing to do with the ability of the math teachers in those clusters. In fact, the stronger teachers are often the ones assigned to the clusters with mainstreamed students because of the skill set and experience they bring to the classroom. These scheduling accommodations have carry over to all of the academic areas being tested, not just math.

As you can see, this type of teacher evaluation system cannot adequately assess the strengths or weaknesses of the teacher. It is ridiculous to believe that student standardized test scores are an accurate and fair way to evaluate a teacher. This type of evaluation will lead to teachers requesting to teach only the most gifted students and will make teachers feel that they have to teach to the test in order to receive a good evaluation. Most importantly, this evaluation system does not, and cannot, produce legitimate evidence of teacher performance and is not a true reflection of what that teacher brings to the classroom each and every day.

The SBAC and SAT exams are just snapshots in time and are not able to quantify student growth. In addition, these exams were designed to assess students, not evaluate teacher practice or effectiveness. It is inappropriate to have student scores linked to our teacher evaluation systems.

I urge you to support teachers in their efforts to help all students learn and reach their full potential. Please support SB 380.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.