

WESTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO BOTH:
HB 5556 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGIONAL UNIFORM SCHOOL CALENDAR
SB 380 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE EXCLUSION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE RESULTS ON
THE MASTERY EXAMINATION FROM TEACHER EVALUATIONS

I oppose the implementation of penalties for failure to comply with a requirement for a regional calendar based on the following:

- The implementation of the unified calendar has not yielded the fiscal or regionalized services goals as intended;
- The calendar prohibits districts from designing optimal annual learning calendars for the year that integrate the placement of student time and teacher professional development in a manner that is most effective;
- Students in CT compete with students nationally on Advanced Placement (AP) exams and are disadvantaged when the school year in CT is forced to begin much later than districts in other states;
- Districts cannot differentiate the school year by age/needs of student, special programs, or special needs of the district;
- The ability of districts to innovate in their approach in creating learning pathways that permit extended-year schedules or all-year instructional models is severely limited;
- Districts that encounter more weather-related cancellations are more severely negatively impacted by a strict regional calendar that incorporates the diverse needs of a large region of differentiated weather patterns; and
- The flexibility to schedule professional development at the most impactful points in a school year and the ability to access high quality professional development providers are both negatively impacted by forcing “one-size-fits-all” approach to the design of the school year for districts with different needs.

I oppose the exclusion of using the mastery testing from teacher evaluation based on the following:

- These assessments are created by psychometricians ensuring high levels of reliability and validity for the results that area aligned to CT State Standards;

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- These assessments do not replace district-developed assessments, but serve to add an additional data set to be incorporated as one of the multiple measures of student progress and teacher effectiveness;
- The CT SDE has permitted Weston and other districts to have waivers for their Teacher Evaluation Plans that do not tie the hands of the district to the strict use of the mastery assessments for 22.5% of the teacher evaluation, allowing the lens of professional judgement of an administrator (utilizing articulated decision rules) to interpret those results within a teacher's evaluation;
- Student performance data are essential for informed decision-making of our certified staff and prohibiting the use of these data could create disadvantages for districts with more limited resources that could not independently purchase other assessments of student learning to be used to inform teacher evaluation, e.g. NWEA;
- High-stakes decisions on teacher evaluation are not made solely on these data, but these data contribute to the overall holistic determination of a teacher's performance within the entire helicopter view of how well that teacher's students are progressing;
- It is important to be able to view the progress of all students in CT and the prohibition of this assessment for teacher evaluation may result in the unintended consequence of minimalizing the value of these assessments to the point that their administration is counterproductive in various ways;
- It is expected that the Smarter Balanced Assessment will continue to experience the natural progression of refinement and improvement over the coming years, in a manner similar to the previous assessment development pathway of the former CT Mastery Tests; and
- The fact that there is a process in place with the Performance Evaluation Advisory Committee (PEAC) with representation of all stakeholder groups to address this issue.

It would be detrimental to our State, districts, professionals, and students to permanently eliminate the option to use these critical assessments in the process of teacher evaluation. If decisions of teacher evaluation were made solely on these assessments, the process of evaluation would need to be addressed, not the inclusion of these assessments in some meaningful way as an integral part of that evaluation process.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this feedback regarding these issues that greatly impact the quality of Connecticut schools and the success of each of our students.

Sincerely,

Colleen A. Palmer