



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

***HB 5551 An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools***

***SB 383 An Act Concerning the Technical High School System***

***SB 379 An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force***

***SB 378 An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force***

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Jan Hochadel. I have been a teacher in the Connecticut Technical High School System and am the President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 90 local unions representing more than 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 appear before you to today.

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

First, on behalf of educators across the state, I want to sincerely thank the Committee for raising SB 380. Hard working, dedicated teachers have been maligned and scapegoated over the last several years. They have been subjected to the “blame and shame” game for events and outcomes over which they had little or no control. Efforts to reduce everything that transpires in a classroom to a single standardized test score has had a chilling impact on teacher creativity, innovation and above all, morale. It is my hope that the introduction of SB 380 is a step on a path back towards respecting the practice of instruction and the teaching profession.

High quality instruction should arm students with the breadth and depth of knowledge they need to be truly well-educated individuals and develop their capacity to problem-solve, think critically, and approach challenges with ingenuity. Yet almost one-quarter of current teacher evaluation systems are based on student standardized test scores, which creates a disincentive for teachers to take risks, accept challenging assignments and try new things.

Numerous research studies demonstrate that the value of high stakes standardized testing is very limited in its ability to inform instruction and provide a complete picture of student achievement. Standardized tests also do not account for social, emotional and economic factors that may impact a student's ability to reach his or her greatest potential.

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) presents new opportunities for instructional shifts in the classroom. It dispenses responsibility for developing teacher accountability systems to the states and permits the use of student achievement indicators other than standardized test scores; such coursework, school or district developed tests and other diagnostic assessments to be used in teacher evaluation frameworks.

SB 380 takes full advantage of the groundwork laid by ESSA. It appropriately excludes the use of student scores on statewide mastery examinations in teacher evaluations. It places instructional emphasis on deep issue knowledge and analytical skills, rather test preparation. I urge you to send a message to Connecticut's teachers that you support their commitment to students and helping them learn. Please pass SB 380.

### **HB 5551 An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools**

With some reservation, we supported the creation of the Commissioner's Network in 2012. At the time, we were concerned that the additional funds allocated to member schools would be used to satisfy a particular agenda, rather than the needs of a particular school. While some of that transpired in the early days of the program, Commissioner Wentzell and her staff have made real efforts to collaborate and build capacity with district stakeholders to address key issues that impede student learning such as chronic absenteeism; social, emotional, and behavioral challenges; and limited resources to provide effective professional development and full day Kindergarten. For these reasons, we see the value in the Commissioner's Network.

HB 5551 however would gut the collaborative spirit and intent of the Commissioner's Network and replace it with a mechanism for the State Department of Education to directly intervene and takeover struggling schools, or worse, designate a receiver to do so. It is an effort similar to the General Assembly's 2007 offensive to replace the democratically elected Bridgeport Board of Education with one appointed by the legislature and the 1996 State takeover of the Hartford School District. Both undermined the constitutional rights of residents to have decisions made by locally elected representatives.

This bill also establishes procedures to waive existing laws deemed impediments to student learning, including collective bargaining rights for school employees. This is an overreach. Educators and school leaders have demonstrated time and time again that the collective bargaining process is an effective tool to solve problems. From improving school climate to extending the length of the school day and strengthening professional development programs, teachers and other school employees have bargained significant positive changes that benefit students. Eliminating or waiving these rights would only prove disruptive.

HB 5551 also assumes that SDE has unlimited dollars to devote to the Commissioner's Network. By removing the limit on the number of schools that can be part of the network at any one time, this bill would dilute the amount of support SDE can provide to each school, thereby limiting the likelihood of success for each member school. Given that Governor Malloy's budget proposal cuts funding for education in general, it is irresponsible to grow existing programs before current funding can be restored.

Struggling schools don't need interference from state bureaucrats, corporations, operators intent on privatizing public education, or any other entity that could be deemed a "receiver" under this bill. They need resources. They need help building capacity to best serve students' needs. They need assistance establishing and strengthening relationships and commitments with community partners. They need the technical and financial support SDE can provide.

HB 5551 is a blatant power grab for private entities to profit from public education. It ignores the real needs of challenged schools and districts. I urge you to resoundingly reject it.

**SB 383 An Act Concerning the Technical High School System**

As a former physics teacher at J.M. Wright Technical High School, I know the unique value of the Connecticut Technical High School System is. I also, unfortunately know, how it is has been systematically underfunded and neglected. In recent years, this committee and the General Assembly have taken bold steps to provide CTHSS with its own board of education and line item within the State Department of Education Budget. These moves have been very helpful, but now it's time to do more to ensure that we fulfill the system's mission.

SB 383 would provide transparency on staffing needs within the CTHSS and give the superintendent the authority to act directly with the Office of Policy of Management to refill vacant positions, rather than going through the Commissioner of Education. No other superintendent in this state has to seek permission from the Commissioner of Education to fill vacant positions. Any other community would be outraged to learn that their school district operates with so many substitutes on a daily basis or lacks basic materials to execute routine lesson plans.

Please continue the work you have done to strengthen the CTHSS. Please pass SB 383.

**SB 379 An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force**

Diversity within our schools provides students with rich opportunities to learn from peers of different racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. We should embrace diversity and the learning experiences it provides so that all children can be successful in our global society. It's not enough to have diverse student bodies. We must also work to ensure that Connecticut's educators are representative of the students they serve so that all children have positive role models from a variety of backgrounds. Although minority students account for over a third of Connecticut's public school students, only 7 percent of the state's teachers are minorities. SB 379 takes important steps to correct this problem.

We support the extension of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force and the creation of a Minority Teacher Recruitment Policy Oversight Council within SDE. We also support the annual survey required in the bill to monitor the effectiveness of minority teacher recruitment programs.

**SB 378 An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force**

AFT Connecticut had representation on the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force and though we are comfortable with much of the report that has become SB 378, there are a few of items we ask you to review.

In Section 2, we urge you to make the following changes:

- Change the name of the High School Graduation Requirements Council (lines 183-184) to the High School Graduation Requirements Advisory Council to reflect its consultative, rather than authoritative, role.

- Delete “representatives of the education reform community” (line 195). Membership of the High School Graduation Requirements Council should be restricted to active instructional practioners with significant classroom experience (teachers, administrators and superintendents), board of education representatives and parents who are concerned about the impacts of these requirements on their children. There is no logical rationale to provide representation to a group that does not play a direct role in the delivery of public secondary school instruction and is not defined in statute.
- Delete “the incorporation of mastery-based personalized learning approach in to the new set of high school graduation requirements” (lines 204-206). This concept was a controversial one within the task force membership and consensus was never reached to include it in the report.

In Section 3, we ask that you clarify that the State Board of Education (SBE) should report to this committee and the full General Assembly about developing new high school graduation requirements, rather than develop them in consultation with the High School Graduation Requirements Council. We would not like the General Assembly to cede its authority to the SBE.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on all of these bills today. I would be happy to answer any questions.