

Hello, my name is Nathan Quesnel and I am the Superintendent of East Hartford Public Schools. This morning, I would like to say a few words on the language found in SB380 which proposes that student performance data collected from our annual mastery examinations be prohibited for use in teacher evaluation plans. As the leader of a district where growth and improvement are a reality, this proposed bill is extremely concerning and should not be approved or moved forward in this legislative session. Since the Ed reform work of 2012, our Governor, General Assembly, District Leaders, Teachers, Parents and most importantly students have made tremendous progress towards improving educational experiences for Connecticut children. We have taken bold steps, learned important lessons and stand poised to refine the progress that has been made. When we step back and consider the broad lessons we have learned, the words “collaboration, balance, continuous improvement and students first” emerge from the tangle of political wrangling, emotional rhetoric and personal bias that often characterize reform movements. Unfortunately, the language and process of this proposed bill stands in direct opposition to the valuable lessons we have learned and in stark contrast to a spirit of continuous growth and improvement.

First, if there is any lesson we have learned in our continued efforts to improve our schools, it is to be sure decisions are made through the informed voices of the experts who do the work. When these voices in plural are captured in our public policies, we move forward with efficiency and speed. Regardless of any bias or opinion towards the use of student performance data in teacher evaluation plans, SB380 sidesteps this powerful process of collaboration that has been designated through the legislature in the Performance Advisory Council or PEAC. This council, charged with developing recommendations to the State Board of Education regarding the guidelines for teacher evaluation plans is composed of a wide range of stakeholders who represent the expert and democratic voices of our schools. This is the committee that is able to develop the necessary policies that guide these decisions vs. the sweeping language of the proposed bill. By approving SB380, the general assembly will effectively brush aside the work, insight and achievements of a committee that has labored throughout the past five years with success regarding a difficult and sensitive topic.

Second, the proposed language of SB380 violates another important lesson we have learned over the past few years of “one size fits all” policy which usually fits very few. By uniformly prohibiting the use of student performance data in all teacher evaluation plans, we push policy that disregards the nuances of work done across our state by local boards of education to address these issues. In Connecticut, we have learned that our best public policy work gives space for local decisions, contextual realities and the voices of those most impacted. SB380 ignores this need for local decision making and inserts another mandate in a mandate rich environment. Rather than “prohibit,” the use of student performance data, allow PEAC to develop and refine appropriate language that honors the lessons of the past and provides space for districts to design plans that work to improve teaching and learning.

Finally, as we move forward to improve the process of educating children in Connecticut, it is important that we do not “overcorrect” or “overcompensate” regarding the needs for continued improvements and refinements in the work we have started together. While we all acknowledge that we have room to grow in terms of how we ensure every educator and leader in our schools is highly competent and qualified, I ask our legislatures to resist the urge to disrupt a process that is moving forward. In the process of growth, time provides space to review, analyze and make good decisions. Let’s give CT educators the time to make these tweaks and the support they need to make them happen.