



Testimony of
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Education Committee Hearing
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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 Patti Fusco and I am a teacher of talented and gifted students in 5th and 6th 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.