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Bruce Morris, State Representative
Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education Public Hearing

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

Monday, March 7, 2016

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the education committee. I thank you for your leadership and dedication to ensuring our state continuously moves forward towards an education system that works for all children. I am State Representative Bruce Morris from 140th assembly district, in Norwalk, Connecticut and Chair of Black and Latino Caucus.

Working with this committee, we've made great progress in recent years - progress we should be proud of. From expanding access to quality schools in our most vulnerable communities to ensuring every child gets an education they can count on with high-academic standards, our state is moving forward.

I am here to express my vehement opposition to *SB 380: An Act Concerning the Exclusion of Student Performance Results on the Mastery Exam from Teacher Evaluations*, because of its potential negative effects on students, particularly our most vulnerable children, students of color, and those from low-income backgrounds.

We all know that a great educator has the ability to change the life of a child. Every single person in this room this evening can likely point to that one educator that inspired them to reach new heights, imagine greater, and drove them to achieve not just in the classroom, but beyond into their adulthood. When, in 2012, we passed a landmark education bill and moved forward towards a modern evaluation bill for a modern time, we took great steps to ensure every child has a teacher that can do just that.

Research has shown that an effective teacher evaluation system includes a number of indicators of success, which of course includes student achievement growth. Is that not what we're seeking when we develop any sort of system or program when it comes to education? To improve the achievement of our students?

So when Connecticut and the Performance Evaluation Advisory Committee developed this teacher evaluation system, directly alongside those who suddenly oppose the measure, we were making a necessary effort to improve the caliber of our teaching force to thus improve our student performance.

And just before we can see how our efforts translate into improved student achievement, we're hearing petulant cries to turn back on progress. Certainly, our state's leaders have understood that the development and implementation of the CT core standards, the Smarter Balanced Assessment and our improved teacher evaluation system made small delays necessary so our educators can adjust to these new developments.

Thus, the link between student assessment scores and teacher evaluation has not yet taken place, and is scheduled to begin the next school year. After a number of delays, we are on the cusp of implementing the new system we all worked so hard to develop, thus it's necessary we see this through, learn what we can from its results, and make certain our teacher evaluation system can work for both our educators and our kids.

Delaying the inclusion of student achievement into teacher evaluation has an unintended consequence of allowing opponents to proclaim or provoke an ominous warning that these assessment scores will unjustly harm our state's educators. When in fact, we know from states and districts who have already included achievement data in its measures, including the city of New Haven right here in Connecticut, that this is not in case. Thriving teachers are rewarded and struggling educators are given the supports and tools they need to succeed in the classroom.

The sky has not fallen.