

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education Public Hearing

Senate Bill 380: An Act Concerning the Exclusion of Student Performance Results on the Mastery Examination from Teacher Evaluations

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

Senate Bill 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force

Monday, March 7, 2016

Good Evening, Chairman Fleischmann, Chairwoman Slossberg and members the Education Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide this testimony on very important issues affecting the state of education in not only my city of Stamford, but in the entire state of Connecticut.

My name is Valarie Shultz-Wilson and I am the president and chief executive officer of the Urban League of Southern Connecticut. We describe our mission at the Urban League with four short but powerful words: "Empowering Communities. Changing Lives." As I come before you today, I note how easily our mission jives with what we expect from our education system in Connecticut. While we pride ourselves in empowering those in the communities with serve to start businesses and positively impact those around them, our jobs become more difficult if our children are not receiving a high-quality education. The future of our economy depends upon having pipeline of talent from kids who graduate ready for careers or college.

It is with that progress in mind and for many others reasons that I come before you in support of **Senate Bill 379: An Act Concerning The Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force**, and ask you consider doing even more to move toward real, tangible actions to improve our ability to recruit and retain highly-effective educators of color.

National studies have projected the need to hire new teachers for many years. The demand for Special Education, Science and Math teachers has shown that the current distribution of teachers across Connecticut is uneven with critical shortages in urban and rural districts. Coupled with the teacher shortage in critical areas, the lack of diversity among the teaching workforce throughout Connecticut is substantial. It is important for all students to have access to positive role models from different cultures to learn acceptance, tolerance and to work collaboratively in order to enrich their lives and become successful in our society.

As it now stands, nearly half of our students are students of color, while fewer than 10 percent of our educators are educators of color. It is imperative that we review and adjust our policies to make teaching in Connecticut more attractive to minority educators and revise the teacher reciprocity policy to hire highly-qualified minority teachers. So while this proposal includes the extension of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force, which shows the General Assembly is committed to these efforts, I encourage you to continue to push forward to hire more minority teachers in our state. Please consider amending this legislation by considering the recommendations of the Task Force itself.

I also want to take a moment to state my opposition to **Senate Bill 380: An Act Concerning the Exclusion of Student Performance Results on the Mastery Examination from Teacher Evaluations**. We all depend on effective teachers to prepare students for college and for the work force. That preparation has become even more important in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Ongoing and effective evaluations are an essential tool to help both teachers and principals to identify their strengths, areas of growth and professional development.

Research shows that teacher evaluations tied to multiple measures, including student achievement growth, can dramatically improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Research has also suggested that student achievement growth has a real place in a modern and effective teacher evaluation system.

I can point to a successful evaluation system in our own state in New Haven, CT that includes student achievement results and has been in place since 2009. We can learn from the experience in New Haven where the Board of Education, the administration and the bargaining agent for teachers are collaborating for the benefit of the children being served by that school system. In Connecticut, we must provide our our teachers and leaders with feedback and support just as we do in the business community. Just as we coach prospective entrepreneurs to measure progress, set goals and grown stay ahead of the competition, similarly we should hold our teachers and leaders accountable for their own performance. By doing so, we keep our promise to parents that their children, regardless of where they live or how much money they make, that they will get the world-class education they need and deserve.

Finally, I would like to comment on our state's efforts to turnaround Connecticut's lowest-performing schools. Today, I testify in support of **HB 5551, An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools**.

One of the most critical issues we face today is the pervasive achievement gap in our state. We must improve our efforts to turn around our lowest-performing schools and help is critical to narrowing and ultimately closing that achievement gap that is negatively impacting a whole segment of our children. When the Commissioner's Network was established in 2012, it marked an ambitious beginning, but we also must ensure we remain committed to continuously improving the system to ensure the hard work and efforts of educators, policymakers and school leaders come into fruition with increased student achievement.

States and districts like Philadelphia and Lawrence, Massachusetts show us that we can do better. Bolder turnaround models in these districts clearly display what is possible when schools are given the right amount of resources, flexibility and autonomy necessary to turning around our lowest-performing schools.

By showing your support for House Bill 5551, you will send a signal to students and families in some our most high-needs communities that you are working for them. And, most importantly, by ensuring that children in our most challenged communities have access to great schools, you will undoubtedly inspire the next generation of job creators and civic leaders in Connecticut.

Thank you.