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Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education

SB 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force; SB 380: An Act Concerning the Exclusion of Student Performance Results on the Mastery Examination From Teacher Evaluations; HB 5550: An Act Concerning Various Revisions and Additions to the Education Statutes; HB 5551: An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools

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Good day, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your leadership on improving public education in the State of Connecticut. My name is Yam Menon and I serve as the Director of Research and Policy at the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, better known as ConnCAN.

For over a decade, ConnCAN has advocated for student-focused policies that ensure every child, regardless of, race, wealth, or zip code, can get the great education they need and deserve. We know that great schools can transform children's lives and ensure the long-term economic prosperity of Connecticut. That's why we must deliver on the promise of an excellent public education for all children, now.

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

Senate Bill 380 proposes to exclude student performance data on the Smarter Balanced Assessment from teacher performance evaluations. We oppose this legislation and urge you to do the same.

When the state passed legislation in recent years and the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council unanimously approved a framework for the teacher and administrator evaluation system, we made a commitment to accountability for results, to providing a great education to all students and to providing teachers and leaders with the information and support they need to develop and master their profession. This legislation would deny the critical information needed to know how our teachers and leaders are doing.

The educator evaluation program -- which is designed to provide feedback and support to further empower high-performing teachers and principals, to make certain that low-performing teachers get the help they need, and to allow for swift dismissal of those who consistently fail to improve -- was codified as part of the 2012 legislation, and was designed and unanimously agreed to by a wide range of stakeholders as part of the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC).

Decades of research have shown that the most important thing schools can do for their students is to put an effective teacher in every classroom. Creating better evaluations is a critical step toward that goal. We need a rigorous, fair and accurate teacher evaluation system in place in every school—one that will give teachers the honest, useful feedback they need to do their best

work, help schools recognize and retain their best teachers, and allow districts to remove teachers who consistently fail to meet expectations.

Research has consistently showed that teacher evaluation systems based on multiple measures, including how well and how much students are learning, give teachers, schools, and districts the information they need to put great teachers and leaders in every classroom and school building. Places like New Haven, DC, Cincinnati, and Chicago show that the full, consistent, and robust implementation of such programs can dramatically impact student achievement and growth.

For example, a new study of DC Public Schools' IMPACT evaluation system shows that the system helped the district replace low-performing teachers with better ones—which helped students gain at least four months of learning in reading and math. Similar results were found in Cincinnati and Chicago. There is clear research and evidence to show that multi-measure evaluation systems, including student achievement growth, help students get access to great teachers, and therefore, access to a great education.

Timely and full implementation of a statewide educator evaluator program is a fundamental step toward ensuring that children across the Constitution State have access to the best teachers and school leaders. It is important to note that we have not yet fully implemented our teacher evaluation system and we need to see it through. We must not step back from the progress we have made. We must hold firm to this commitment, so that students and teachers can benefit from this multi-measured evaluation system, including student achievement growth data.

We urge you to oppose this legislation. We cannot dial back our efforts to ensure great teachers, principals, and public schools for every child.

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

Research and experience prove that a great teacher can change the life of a student. Since an effective educator is the most important factor on student achievement that a school can control for, it is critical that Connecticut enacts policies to help us attract, recruit and retain highly-qualified educators and school leaders, especially candidates of color.

While we appreciate the intention of SB 379 to maintain and continue the work of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force as well as the creation of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Policy Oversight Council within the Department of Education, we must do more to address the barriers that have been identified as preventing quality educators, including those of color, from being able to teach in Connecticut. This includes granting full teacher certification reciprocity for out-of-state educators.

We need policies that allow Connecticut to attract, recruit, and retain high quality educators, particularly educators of color, and licensure reciprocity does just that. Teachers who have completed a traditional or alternate preparation program in another state, have taught in another state, and have a record of effective practice and instruction should be able to teach in Connecticut without additional hurdles or barriers to being able to teach in the state - including

having to take additional courses or re-complete training they have successfully completed in another state.

Clear and sensible policies like teacher certification reciprocity allow us not only to diversify the teaching and school leader workforce but may also help us fill our state's subject shortage areas. Teacher certification policies that include rigorous but reasonable safeguards for quality help us bring talented, effective, and diverse educators to our state. It can also bring some much-needed stability to the schools and students who need it most. The benefits of increasing diversity at the school- and student-level are clear.

The state's subject shortage areas have long been difficult for the state to fill. For example, 9 out of 10 of the state's shortage areas for 2016-2017 were also shortage areas in 2015-2016. And as of fall 2015, although the number has dropped in recent years, the state still had nearly 5,000 vacancies to fill. This clearly prevents our kids from having access to the quality teachers and leaders they need and deserve. And with a student population that is more than 40% percent minority and with just 8% of minority certified staff and educators, we must do all that we can to provide students with access to a great education, including through a diverse teaching workforce.

Research shows that students of color, when taught by educators of color, perform better on a number of academic indicators, including student performance, attendance, expulsion and suspension. And diversity does not only benefit students of color, but has a positive impact on all students. A more diverse teacher and school leader workforce in Connecticut can widen the sense of community in our schools, providing all our children with examples of unique racial, ethnic and cultural perspectives. Simply put, greater diversity benefits all children.

Your efforts last session showed your commitment to the initiative, and we need you to build upon this progress. While we are encouraged to see that this bill seeks to continue the work of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force, we can and must do more. We urge you to strengthen this legislation with proposals that have been brought to the Task Force, including full teacher certification reciprocity, and other efforts to bring in qualified educators, such as implementing the existing alternate route to certification for administrators, superintendents, and early childhood educators.

HB 5550: An Act Concerning Various Revisions and Additions to the Education Statutes and HB 5551: An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools

HB 5551 makes revisions to the Commissioner's Network law and HB 5550 includes annual reporting requirements for the state's turnaround program. We support these proposals and urge you to do the same. We know that research shows that strong turnaround programs have the ability to dramatically impact student achievement and growth, especially for our students most in need of support.

This legislation takes critical steps to ensure the highest likelihood of success in turning around our state's lowest-performing schools. This includes providing school leaders and lead partners the tools, resources, autonomy and flexibility in areas including staffing, scheduling, budgeting, and programming to successfully implement high-level intervention and turnaround strategies.

Results from the release of the state's new next-generation school and district accountability system show that 40 schools are in the state's turnaround category, the lowest classification in the system. In fact, of the 136 schools identified as Focus or Turnaround, 50 had been classified over 3 and a half years ago as the lowest performing. A number of these schools have been persistently underperforming for generations, and we need strong laws and policies in place to take the steps to turning around these schools.

We have seen turnaround efforts across the country that have made significant progress in turning around their lowest-performing schools; These programs can serve as models for improving Connecticut's turnaround program. Programs located in Massachusetts, Louisiana, Tennessee, and the district of Philadelphia reveal the possibilities for the Commissioner's Network and the large gains that students can achieve when a turnaround is successful.

For example, in Massachusetts, UP Academy Boston, once one of the lowest-performing schools in the city, ranked #1 in the state for four consecutive years for student growth in math on the state's performance test. In Tennessee, the average composite proficiency rate has seen double digit growth since the presence of the Achievement School District (ASD). Priority schools in the bottom 5% are getting better, faster — 4 times the rate of non-Priority schools. In Louisiana, the percentage of students at or above basic achievement levels has nearly doubled from 28% to 53% between 2008 and 2015.

We also see other critical changes within strong turnaround programs. In Philadelphia, through a partnership with Mastery Charter Schools, schools within the district's turnaround program have improved student achievement and also have a 93% student retention rate and an 80% decrease in violence.

To date, the state has appropriated \$45 million in state funding to the Network. We must couple this significant investment of resources with impactful changes to ensure improved results. With the right policy, operating conditions, and school leaders and models in place, there can be bold, transformational changes in student achievement. Please support the Commissioner's Network provisions of HB 5550 and HB 5551.

We know that you have much to consider in the legislative proposals before you, but we urge you to support the policies that will help us bring great teachers and school leaders to our schools and allow us to robustly intervene turn around the state's lowest performing schools.

Thank you.