Testimony of

Jacob Werblow

Central Connecticut State University

Wesleyan University

Connecticut Coalition for Real Learning

Before the Education Committee

HB 5555 AAC THE MINIMUM BUDGET REQUIREMENT AND PROHIBITING THE INCLUSION OF PARTICIPATION RATES FOR THE STATE-WIDE MASTERY EXAMINATION IN THE CALCULATION OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX SCORE

SB 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.***

March 7, 2016

Greetings Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee,

I am Jacob Werblow, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at Central Connecticut State University, Harber Fellow of Education at Wesleyan University, and the President of the Connecticut Coalition for Real Learning, the only all-volunteer local education reform organization led by nationally recognized teachers, educational researchers, and administrators (real-learning.weebly.com) and most importantly, a parent. I am testifying on HB 5555, HB380, and HB 551.

First, I will testify on HB 555 regarding participation rates in federally required annual testing. To simplify this issue, here is a question, "After 15 years of mandated testing under the *No Child Left Behind Law,* what do standardized test scores actually tell us about school and teacher quality? The answer: almost nothing.

In 2012, one of my graduate students and I explored this question using data of 191 high schools in Connecticut and found that multiple linear regressions revealed that 69% of the difference (variance) in a school's average student achievement can be explained by the percentage of students living in poverty. In other words, nearly 70% of the difference in the average achievement scores among all Connecticut High Schools is directly attributed to the percentages of poor kids enrolled in each school. Therefore, there is only 30% of the variance left to attribute to any factors related to differences in schools (or teachers). Therefore, punishing schools for low-test scores or threatening to take away school funds because children refuse to take the test is illogical and inappropriate.

Further, mandating that children be required to take standardized test is undemocratic. Parents and children should have the choice. You cannot force a child to answer a

standardized test question accurately, especially when the teacher is being held accountable.

Furthermore, numerous polls and surveys indicate a great need for the legislature to consider our policies on statewide testing options. Here are two findings:

- 77% of parents do not agree that "statewide assessments are an appropriate way to assess student mastery of material" (CT-PTA poll, State Mastery Exam Committee, Jan. 2016).
- 91% of administrators believe that the SBAC test is NOT a useful indicator of teacher or administrator effectiveness (CASA).

Because of this clear evidence, I also support supports S.B. No. 380 AN ACT CONCERNING THE EXCLUSION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE RESULTS ON THE MASTERY EXAMINATION FROM TEACHER EVALUATIONS.

I encourage you to support SB 380 because, as I previously outlined, differences in average standardized test score performance has little to do with teacher or school quality. This is something that national experts (i.e., David Berliner, Linda Darling-Hammond, Diane Ravitch, etc.) have been consistently saying for years. This is because nearly all of the variability in test score performance lies in the demographic differences among the student (just as I explained above). For more information, check out the EPI Briefing Paper #278, *"Problems with the use of student test scores to evaluate teachers."*

Next, I'd like to speak to **HB 551** ***AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK OF SCHOOLS.*** How can we make this simple? First, we should acknowledge that the largest urban school districts, where more of the Black and Brown children in Connecticut attend school, are consistently given less of a democracy than the rest of the state. Do you find this surprising? Then why don't the residents of Hartford, New Haven, and (temporarily) Bridgeport get to vote for all of their school board members? Essentially we have proposed bill that would undermine democracy in Connecticut's urban areas and likely further privatize our public school system.

Specifically, HB551 would remove the control of the elected board of education, "suspend laws" and eliminate the role of school governance councils, which were put in place by the state legislature a few years ago to give parents and teachers in low-performing schools a greater voice. I have served on a school governance council in New Britain. I can tell you that it is a valuable structure that provides parents in working-class communities a real opportunity to have a say in their child's education.

Also, before you vote on this bill, I believe we should consider the degree to which state takeovers of schools and districts have been successful? Let's start with my own experience, as a former resident of New Britain, I observed DiLoreto Dual Language Magnet School be taken-over by the state department of education under the "turnaround network." What happened? Despite an overflow crowd of DiLoreto parents, students, alumni, and teachers defending the dual-language program and two hours of public testimony, the board president told parents that they were misinformed and that 'no one is taking away dual language.' Two weeks later, the school's name and model was changed in

November of 2012. The theme of the school (dual-language) was terminated without the consent of the School Governance Council and all of this happened without a vote by the school board.

If you find this surprising, the reality is that state takeovers of schools and districts have been an abject failure across the country.

This bill is virtually a carbon copy of ConnCAN's proposal for the Commissioner's Network schools. http://webiva-downton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/7c/c/2766/255496644-ConnCAN-Turnaround-Report.pdf ConnCAN is an advocacy group, not a reputable research organization.

For more information, I suggest reading the Center for Popular Democracy report of state takeovers in New Orleans, Michigan's Education Achievement Authority, and Tennessee's Achievement School District's:
.https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/National%20Takeover%20Ed%20Report.pdf

Thank you for your time and attention.