

Good Early Morning,

I am urgently writing to you regarding this outrageous and completely undemocratic revision to the Commissioner's Network of Schools.

I cannot speak for any other municipality, but as someone born and raised in Bridgeport that received my entire K-12 public education from the Bridgeport Public Schools, a member of the Bridgeport Board of Education, the lead plaintiff in the CT Supreme Court decision which ruled the takeover of the BPS in 2011 was illegal, and an absolute defender of democracy and true public education in Bridgeport, I ask every single one of you to **oppose** this blatant power grab which undoubtedly is backed by our Fairfield County billionaires, millionaires, Wall Street executives, ConnCAN, FES, CERC, Northeast Charter Schools, etc.

The residents of Bridgeport have been absolutely clear on the issue of democracy, an elected school board, and local control. Although FORMER Mayor Finch and his billionaire/millionaire supporters spent close to \$600,000 in November 2012 to approve a change to our Charter eliminating an elected BOE and granting the Mayor sole authority to appoint our BOE, the voters soundly rejected this initiative at the polls. The Bridgeport community came together to fund a lawsuit to remove the "Michael Jordan of Education Reform" Paul Vallas as our Superintendent. Bridgeport accomplished what Chicago, New Orleans and Philadelphia could not. Many of us to this day firmly believe Paul Vallas was brought to Bridgeport to convert our entire public school system to charter schools.

Should Bill 5551 pass, the Commissioner of Education will have sole authority to choose an UNLIMITED amount of schools in the bottom 5% to enter the Commissioner's Network for an UNLIMITED period of time without the approval of the elected school board, or the turnaround committee which apparently would now be appointed by the Commissioner of Education. The School Governance Councils are completely eliminated from any involvement in this critical decision.

Do you think it is a coincidence this Bill is being introduced in the first year where the developmentally inappropriate SBAC test scores, which is based on the incredibly flawed Common Core standards, are being used to measure school performance? The SBAC cut scores were specifically chosen to ensure between 60-70% of our students failed which certainly impacts the number of schools that meet the criteria to qualify for the Commissioner's Network Schools.

The Turnaround Committee serves in an "advisory" capacity only. The agreement between the DOE and the BOE is NOT decided by the local elected board but by the Turnaround Committee. Should the Turnaround Committee vote to reject the plan, the Commissioner of Education will have sole authority to circumvent the Turnaround Committee's decision. How convenient.

During a potential "planning year" the Commissioner may designate a "receiver" or "ANY other entity to operate the commissioner's network school." These "designees" may be granted "the powers of the superintendent and school board" and reports directly to the commissioner. The Commissioner of Ed. has sole authority to identify a "receiver," "school leader" or "operator" to oversee schools in the commissioner's network."

The Commissioner of Ed. also has sole authority to withhold funds from a local school district, and the piece de resistance; they have sole authority to CLOSE a school and reassign those students.

BILL 5551 is an absolute insult to DEMOCRACY, ELECTED school boards, and LOCAL control.

The legislature has willingly and knowingly severely underfunded urban school districts like Bridgeport for decades, but now wants to potentially point their finger at those very same cities and claim they are at fault for the performance of their public schools while allowing the proliferation of charter schools, which this year alone drained \$5 million dollars from the BPS.

Those who live the realities of cities like Bridgeport every day, and have dedicated their lives to the well-being of our BPS students know what is best for our children, not those who work in Hartford. As a legislator, do you believe that the legislators of Massachusetts could possibly know what is in the best interest of CT when compared to you? Our urban school districts aren't struggling because school

administrator's and dedicated staff don't know what they are doing. They are struggling because of severe and chronic underfunding and because of social issues most suburban districts will never face.

This Bill is an insult to every resident, taxpayer, parent, grandparent, and educator that lives and breathes Bridgeport every day. Therefore I urge all of you to vehemently reject its passing.

Maria Pereira

BBOE Member