



## Testimony by Jeffrey Villar, Ph.D. to the Education Committee

February 24, 2016

Good afternoon, distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Jeffrey Villar, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Council for Education Reform (CCER), a nonprofit that seeks to narrow Connecticut's achievement gap while raising academic outcomes for all students. On behalf of CCER, I would like to voice my support for S.B. 175, *An Act Concerning Recommendations of the Department of Education*, specifically as it relates to Alliance District funding and granting professional certificates to teachers from other states.

Section 5 of S.B. 175 amends last year's reciprocity language to remove barriers for qualified out-of-state teachers who want to work in Connecticut. Under this bill, qualified candidates will no longer need to have taught in their respective states. Instead, teachers will need to hold a bachelor's degree, have completed an approved educator program, and have completed approved post preparation assessments in order to be eligible for a Connecticut teaching certificate. This section of S.B. 175 also includes provisions for the Connecticut State Department of Education to unilaterally recognize states from which it will accept teachers in the event that interstate reciprocity agreements cannot be reached.

Since CCER's inception, we have supported measures to broaden the pool of high quality educational leaders in our state. Teachers are the most important factor in student achievement, and as many of our most experienced educators approach retirement it is important that we have a pipeline of high quality teachers to replace them.<sup>i</sup> Maintaining an effective teaching force is integral to closing the achievement gap and ensuring all of our students obtain a quality education.

While effective teachers are often cited as the most important factor in student achievement, research demonstrates that effective school and district leaders are essential to ensuring our best teachers remain in the classroom.<sup>ii</sup> Connecticut is facing a long-standing shortage of school-level administrators—a problem that is further complicated by the impending retirement of many of our most experienced leaders.<sup>iii</sup> In light of this, we believe that an effort to expand the pool of qualified educators in our state would be even more impactful if the reciprocity provisions were expanded to include school and district leaders.

Section 7 of S.B. 175 limits the amount of funds Alliance Districts may carry forward into the next fiscal year to three percent. This stipulation is an important step toward ensuring students and teachers in our lowest-performing districts are receiving the support they need. However, in this time of fiscal constraint, it is important that we not only ensure Alliance Districts are deploying funds, but also ensure that monies are allocated to best meet students' needs. As such, we believe this bill should include an additional provision that calls for the Connecticut State Department of Education to annually evaluate and publicly report the impact of Alliance District and Commissioner's Network programs to ensure public funds are being invested effectively around turnaround efforts.

In closing, we would like to commend the Education Committee for taking these important steps toward improving educational outcomes for all students. We urge your continued support of S.B. 175 and also urge you to consider amendments that will bring high-quality administrators to the state and ensure that we are using public monies to support our neediest students as best we can.

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<sup>i</sup>Arnold, M., Reichardt, R., Tedder, J. (2006) *In Search of Quality: Recruiting, Hiring, and Supporting Teachers*. p.2. Retrieved February 2016 at <http://www.ctschoolchange.org/wp-content/uploads/in-search-of-quality-exec-summary.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup>Hupfeld, K., Reichardt, R., Schlang, J., Snow, R. (2008) *Overwhelmed and Out: Principals, District Policy, and Teacher Retention*. p. 1. Retrieved February 2016 at <http://www.ctschoolchange.org/wp-content/uploads/Overwhelmed-and-Out.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup>Wentzell, D. (2015) *Teacher Shortage Areas, 2015-16 School Year*. p.1. Retrieved February 2016 at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/circ/circ14-15/c3.pdf>