



Testimony of
Ed Leavy

President – State Vocational Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 4200A, AFL-CIO

***SB 378 An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the
High School Graduation Requirements Task Force***

Education Committee Hearing
March 7, 2016

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee, my name is Ed Leavy, and I am the president of the State Vocational Federation of Teachers. The SVFT represents the 1,200 educators in the Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS). I was asked by AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel to serve on the High School Graduation Task Force this past fall. I was honored to serve on the committee and take part in the process of developing the report. I am offering testimony in support of acceptance of this report.

Many of the meetings of the Committee featured presentations on mastery-based graduation requirements. The report recommends that a committee be formed into looking at moving to graduation requirements that focus on mastery of specific skills and content rather than classroom hours. Clearly, the demands of the 21st century workplace make it necessary that we are certain students master the skills they need, not simply be exposed to them. The presentations made me certain, however, that we have to carefully study how we transition to new requirements, if that transition is possible. I asked one superintendent who was proposing mastery-based graduation requirements how his district would handle a situation in which a student simply could not demonstrate mastery of, for example, solving simultaneous equations in an algebra class if that was necessary to get credit for the course. Would the district be willing to deny a high school diploma to a student because he was unable to master a skill that he was unlikely ever to use in his life? He said, "We are still grappling with these questions. We frankly don't have an answer." Questions such as these must be seriously considered by all stakeholders if such a transition is to be made.

The Graduation Task Force Report, in my opinion, makes a prudent recommendation to seriously study these issues over the next year. It would play an important advisory role as the Education Committee and the State Board of Education consider graduation requirements in the years ahead. The Committee fulfilled its charge by making concrete recommendations on specific standards now, such as maintaining a fine art or performance requirement. As with all committee reports, the product is a work of compromise, and I am certain that every member of the committee finds portions of the report in which he or she is in less than full agreement. I am no exception. I believe though, that the report is an important document that points to a thoughtful and prudent process as we move forward.

Thank you.