

Remarks of Dr. Linette Branham  
To the Education Committee  
Senate Bill 380 - An Act Concerning the Exclusion of  
Student Performance Results on the Mastery Test Examination  
From Teacher Evaluations

As a retired public school educator, I'd like to comment on SB 380, *An Act Concerning the Exclusion of Student Performance Results on the Mastery Test Examination From Teacher Evaluations*.

Research done over the past decade, as well as the perspective of Connecticut's public school educators on the use of the current teacher evaluation guidelines, has shown time and again how inappropriate it is to base the evaluation of a teacher on standardized test scores. The reasons are clear, simple, and logical, including the following:

1. Standardized tests are not designed to evaluate teacher performance.
2. Such tests do not show growth over time; they provide a snapshot of student performance on a given day and hour.
3. Standardized test results don't take into account how factors outside of a teacher's control impact student performance on the day the test is taken; these include factors such as whether or not the student slept and ate well prior to the test, social and emotional occurrences (e.g., student's parents are going through a divorce, there is a serious illness in the family, student had an argument with a best friend just before the class in which the test is given, student doesn't feel well that day).
4. What's tested on the test may not match the district curriculum in skill and content.
5. Students show what they know in many other, often more appropriate, ways, such as through oral or visual modes.
6. The standardized test may not be developmentally appropriate for the students.

Connecticut students themselves have shown that the SBAC test is meaningless to them. They know there are – rightfully - no consequences for this test performance on their class grades or movement to the next grade level, and they know that their teachers design more appropriate, interesting ways for them to show what they've learned in class. They learned to game the SBAC system during the initial field test, realizing quickly that, if they gave an incorrect answer

on the computer-adaptive question, they'd get an easier question next time. Other students show their disdain and lack of confidence in the SBAC ability to show their knowledge and growth by simply clicking on answers in a pattern as they go through the questions. Clearly, this is no way to show growth over time, which is what a good testing system should do. There is no standardized test available that can clearly and definitively show a cause / effect relationship between a teacher's performance and student outcomes. It's also erroneous to think that we can and should use one standardized test to compare the performance of teachers in districts across the state, when there are such differences in the students, teachers, and district resources that support teaching and learning. What, then should we be looking for in teacher evaluation? There are six things that make sense:

1. A clear set of standards for teacher performance, which is what the *CT Common Core of Teaching* delineates. However, there must be a great deal of flexibility in what's used to judge the performance of educators who provide support services for students, teachers, or the district educational program as a whole (e.g., school psychologists, counselors, social workers, literacy or math coaches, library media specialists).
2. A clear set of standards for student performance, designed by CT educators. Connecticut was one of the first states in the country to design their own set of standards – *The Common Core of Learning (CCL)* – which was appropriate for each discipline. The CCL explained what students should know and be able to do at each grade level K-12, and included a delineation of what the teacher in each discipline needed to know and be able to do in order to teach the content and skills in the CCL. However, CT made the mistake of completely eliminating the CCL, rather than updating it based on our state needs, when the national Common Core was developed. This needs to be revisited.
3. The use of performance monitoring tests for students, which are shorter tests, given more frequently than 3 times each year, clearly aligned to the curriculum the teacher uses, aligned to an updated CCL, and which can be designed by the district.
4. More emphasis on using other types of student work to determine student growth, such as a variety of writing exercises, student projects, student demonstrations, oral work,

etc. The State Department currently groups most of the different types of student work into a 'portfolio,' but emphasizes written assessments much more. As any teacher can confirm, students can often show much more of what they know when they're not limited to the written mode.

5. Better training for evaluators that focuses more on examining the quality of work students produce over time, looking for patterns that show growth, and linking that to what the teacher did to promote and support such growth.
6. The elimination of 'weights' in various components of teacher evaluation. The numbers game currently used doesn't work. Student outcomes and teacher performance are supposed to be equally weighted, but the reality is this: With the current numerical mathematical formula the State Department of Education emphasizes, there is no room for the factors that teachers can't control to be considered. Effective evaluators know this, and often end up changing the numbers.

There is no silver bullet to teacher evaluation, but we can do better with what we've learned in the last four years. I urge you to provide the direction CT needs, listen to what teachers in the classroom say works, and support SB 380. Thank you.