



Justin Boucher, Executive Director, Educators for Excellence-Connecticut
Testimony on SB 183

Good afternoon Chairpersons Slossberg, Boucher, and Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Justin Boucher and I am the Executive Director of Educators for Excellence-Connecticut, a nonprofit working to ensure educators have a leading voice in policies that will elevate the teaching profession and improve student outcomes. We work with educators around the state on issues of educational equity and excellence. Our teachers are particularly concerned about recruiting and retaining teachers of color, so I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of a series of bills that will create a system enabling talented people of all backgrounds to educate our students.

Flexibility in Teacher Course Requirements - SB 183

We greatly support inserting the "or equivalent" language in teacher prep programs, allowing alternate routes to provide U.S. history and reading instruction. This change would remove needless barriers to certification and build bridges to attract and retain top talent to serve in Connecticut schools and districts.

Moreover, there are additional areas that the legislature should consider to provide even greater flexibility with regards to teacher preparation. In particular, we would like to see that upon the successful completion of an appropriate subject-matter educator assessment, an initial, provisional, or professional educator certificate holder be able to obtain a cross-endorsement into a content shortage area, as identified by the Department of Education. Particularly in subjects experiencing a teacher shortage, this change would make it possible for competent teachers to move into fields where they have the knowledge necessary, but may lack all of the credit requirements to certify in an entirely new area.

Addressing these possibilities would simplify and streamline the certification process for prospective in-state and out-of-state candidates, as well as improve the quality of instruction for our students.

Allowing K-6 Certification- SB 183

Additionally, I would like to comment on the importance of the commissioner's proposal to change 1-6 certification to K-6 certification. Our nation, and in particular Connecticut, has alarmingly few teachers of color, with teachers of color representing only nine percent of Connecticut's teacher workforce. There are many obstacles to joining the teaching profession in our state, and the requirement to separate kindergarten from grade 1-6 certification is one of those obstacles.

While our teachers generally agree with the spirit of providing more training for educators in early grades, eliminating the requirement for an additional program to teach kindergarten would allow districts, schools, and teachers greater flexibility to meet the needs of their students. This change will allow our districts to adjust staffing to better support our youngest students, as well as give teachers greater choice to transfer between grades, which can help keep them in the profession.

Technical Changes to Temporary Certification- SB 183

We also hope the legislature moves to eliminate the cost and bureaucracy associated with renewing a temporary teaching permit every year for three years, instead issuing permits for three years outright. From a teacher's perspective, we strongly support this change, which would diminish the cost for teacher candidates, making it easier for a wide variety of teachers to enter the workforce. In addition, the state could reallocate the money it saves from processing the permits to the classroom, where it is most useful.

Changes to TEAM Program- SB 183

Finally, I wish to comment on the changes to the TEAM program, a course that is near and dear to my heart. As a former TEAM mentor, I am saddened that the state has chosen to eliminate essential funding to this crucial assistance to teachers. This program is an important part of supporting educators through their first years teaching, improving retention, and facilitating student-teachers' transitions into the classroom. In my own experience, serving as a mentor was time-consuming, but incredibly rewarding. My relationship with my mentees went well beyond the required 10 hours, covering a range of subjects beyond those for which they were required to write papers. We ask that as you reenter budget negotiations, you strongly consider restoring funding cuts to

the TEAM program, particularly to support funding stipends to members and program implementation for districts, as they develop plans to use the new flexibility provided in the commissioner's plan.

But in light of last year's cuts, I recognize the difficult choices the state must make in order to ensure this transformative program's long-term sustainability. In particular, we agree with the provision of additional flexibility for districts to facilitate implementation, though we believe that flexibility should include resources for implementation. The TEAM program will benefit from the kind of experimentation the commissioner's suggestions would offer. And while we believe that data is crucial to allow programs to measure their efficacy and determine ways to improve, we accept that the state must eliminate the requirement to create a data system to report on the program's success in order to reduce burdens on personnel and finances.

On behalf of the hundreds of Educators for Excellence-Connecticut members who make a difference each and every day in the lives of our youth, I want to thank the Chairpersons and committee members for your dedication to providing every student in the state with an excellent education and your consideration of our testimony today. We would like to express our commitment to working with the committee on future issues. I look forward to answering any questions.

