

Written Testimony of
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Before the Education Committee

SB 183

An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Education

Good afternoon Senators Slossberg and Boucher, Representatives Fleischmann and Lavielle, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Michael Brosnan, and I am thankful to speak with you on behalf of Bridgeport Public Schools, where I serve as the new teacher coordinator and district Teacher Education and Mentoring, or TEAM, facilitator.

Clearly there are many concerns with our state's recently passed budget and subsequent cuts—and rightfully so. Education continues to be targeted for cuts, and I wish to thank all of you for the work you've done to preserve good programs and prevent ill-conceived cuts during your tenure on this committee.

One aspect of the budget that appears to experience continued fallout is the defunding of the TEAM program for beginning teachers. This program is addressed in SB 183, Section 9. This section would repeal the current language within CGS 10-145o and effectively turn TEAM into an unfunded mandate that will be locally developed, administered, and funded, which could result in disparate expectations and standards from one district to the next, exacerbate existing inequities, and disproportionately impact large urban districts with a high percentage of beginning teachers. Already the cost of shifting mentor stipends onto the districts has had a significant impact on large urban districts. It will cost Bridgeport an unforeseen \$91,000 to provide mentors with their \$500 statutorily-required stipends this school year, and that's disregarding the fact that no training of new mentors is being provided.

While initially it seemed that the major burden of cost that would fall on the municipalities would be the beginning teacher mentor stipend and the projected cost of training new mentors to work with beginning teachers, it seems that's not where the proposed cuts end.

Unfortunately, the Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) communicated that they are no longer able to sustain the TEAM dashboard that districts use to track and communicate TEAM completion for beginning teachers. To that end, the RESCs have requested \$150 per beginning teacher to continue to utilize the dashboard for the remainder of this academic year. While it's understandable that money is in short supply, pushing this additional cost onto municipalities in the middle of a fiscal year is reckless. Simply to utilize the dashboard, it would now cost Bridgeport Public an additional \$27,300. Yes, the number is high, but it is not surprising given that large urban districts employ a disproportionately large number of new teachers enrolled in the TEAM program compared to our suburban counterparts, due primarily to high annual teacher turnover.

Furthermore, despite a November memorandum from the commissioner's office outlining the districts' and SDE's respective responsibilities, which clearly states in bold, "...beginning teachers will no longer be required to submit reflection papers," district facilitators were informed that the statutory reflective requirement remains. This ambiguity has communicated an unclear message to new faculty and districts alike. It is more accurate to communicate that while reflection papers are no longer be required, they remain an option for districts. In lieu of reflection papers, districts may select alternative assessments to determine successful completion of modules. Some teachers will have to write reflection papers while others may complete some type of project, and there will be no oversight to ensure these types of culminating assessments are consistent across districts in terms of what is expected. By leaving so much to districts, beginning teachers will face inequitable expectations and inconsistent requirements. Some will be held to very high standards while others may not be held to stringent standards—particularly in districts with tight budgets that may not be able to afford anything but a barebones induction plan—which is particularly problematic when the completion of the program is required to advance to the next level of certification.

The bottom line is that we have an unfunded mandate that continues to grow in cost, and it is affecting the urban districts more significantly than others. Districts fulfilling their part of the general statute without the state accepting theirs in kind is unacceptable. I ask that you consider the importance of the quality induction plan for teachers that TEAM has been, and continue to fund and support it. It is critical that the legislature restore funds to train and pay mentors, preserve reflection paper reviewers, and maintain the user dashboard, all of which contribute to TEAM's strength as a teacher induction program and Connecticut as a leader in this arena. Thank you.

