

Remarks of Sharon Leger
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To the Education Committee

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My name is Sharon Leger , and I am a 5th grade teacher in Farmington, Connecticut. I'd like to share with you my thoughts, concerns, and questions about SB183, specifically Section 9, which pertains to the TEAM program.

I will be the first to admit that despite my high-quality education from Central Connecticut State University, I was drastically unprepared for life in the classroom as a first-year teacher. Everything felt so overwhelming to me - students with a drastic range of needs, parents who demanded constant attention and an ever-changing curriculum that, despite my late nights and early mornings, I could not keep up with. But then TEAM happened. I was matched with another 5th grade teacher in my school who immediately became more than a mentor to me. I credit her and the TEAM program with the fact that I survived my first year teaching and beyond.

I had heard horror stories about the BEST program, which TEAM had replaced, so I didn't know what to expect the first time my principal introduced me to my new mentor. Mentor? What did that even mean? For our first meeting, my mentor and I sat down and had an honest, open conversation about how my first month of teaching was going. I remember breaking down to her and confessing that I thought I got in over my head. She was able to reassure me that what I was experiencing was totally normal and that she would be there to support me as I grew as a professional.

TEAM allowed us to meet on a weekly basis and provided me with a more experienced teacher who felt ownership over my success in the classroom. Through the process of TEAM, I was able to access resources that I don't believe I would have had access to otherwise, such as substitute coverage for observations and professional development opportunities. With all of the demands on my time as a first year teacher, I can confidently say that I wouldn't have sought out the learning that I did if it weren't for TEAM. I explored interventions, classroom management strategies, inquiry learning and teaching strategies with the support of my mentor, making me a better teacher and making me feel more confident in my role.

TEAM had such a positive impact on me that I jumped at the chance to become a mentor myself after teaching for five years. I have had the privilege of mentoring two new teachers and I can honestly say, it's been an experience like no other. Being able to support a new teacher in their most critical period for development is invaluable and I have loved the opportunity to enrich my own teaching and learning through my support of them.

I can honestly say that I would not be the teacher I am today if it wasn't for TEAM. The thought of discarding this program that has no evidence against its success is yet another tragedy for Connecticut's education system. As an educator, I am VERY concerned about the direction our state is taking and I think we have an opportunity right now to change our course. The elimination of the TEAM Dashboard and reflection paper will completely collapse the entire system.

The TEAM Dashboard allows school districts across the state to implement TEAM in an efficient, consistent manner. At TEAM trainings, I have sat with educators from across the state and we can say with confidence that we are supporting our new teachers in comparable ways. How are districts supposed to keep track of their mentors' and beginning teachers' work and completion of the modules if this dashboard is dismantled?

Elimination of the reflection paper will most definitely result in new teachers missing out on an important part of module learning as the accountability measure is removed. Districts across the state would be able to decide what their culminating "project" is, which could result in huge disparities and unfair inconsistencies across the state.

All of this is due to the fact that TEAM funding was cut from the budget, which the legislature has admitted was a mistake. The SDE has no interest in trying to shift funding from another program (like teacher evaluation, which isn't nearly as successful as TEAM) to cover even the basic costs of TEAM. Without funding from the state, TEAM will become a watered-down shell of a program that has no strength to it, yet which districts will have to implement on their own.

Please do not add TEAM to the ever-expanding list of negative hits that our educational system has taken this year. Getting rid of a high-quality, teacher support system can only harm Connecticut's most vulnerable teachers at a time when we need our teachers to be as strong as they can be.