

Testimony Supporting H.B. 5491: "An Act Concerning Certain School District Reforms To Reduce The Achievement Gap in Connecticut" – Section 3;  
Supporting S.B. 440: "An Act Concerning School Districts and Teacher Performance Programs"; and  
Opposing S.B. 439: "An Act Concerning the Study of Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care"  
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Education Committee  
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Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

We testify today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children *supports* Section 3 of H.B. 5491 and *supports* S.B. 440. These bills work to close Connecticut's achievement gap by incorporating student performance growth in teacher evaluations. We also *oppose* S.B. 439 and encourage the members of the committee to support the implementation of educational stability as provided for in S.B. 31.

The Achievement Gap, Teacher Evaluations, and Student Academic Growth (H.B. 5491 and S.B. 440)

I. Connecticut has one of the worst achievement gaps in the nation, which results in devastating consequences for our children, our society, and our economy.

The gaps in performance between Connecticut's advantaged and disadvantaged students are among the worst in the United States. One of the most common ways of measuring the achievement gap across states is by the use of data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Data from the 2005 NAEP show that Connecticut has one of the country's worst achievement gaps when comparing non-poor to poor student achievement, white to black student achievement, *and* white to Hispanic student achievement, across all grade levels.<sup>1</sup> More recent NAEP data confirm that Connecticut's large achievement gaps continue to persist.<sup>2</sup> In addition to data from NAEP, achievement gaps are also evident in disparate graduation rates between Connecticut's advantaged and disadvantaged students. The US Department of Education puts Connecticut's graduation rate

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<sup>1</sup> See "The Achievement Gap." ConnCAN Issue Brief, Number 1. ConnCAN. July 2006. p. 2. Available online at: [http://www.conncan.org/sites/default/files/research/IB\\_Connecticut\\_Achievement\\_Gap.pdf](http://www.conncan.org/sites/default/files/research/IB_Connecticut_Achievement_Gap.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Data obtained by Connecticut Voices for Children using functions from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/statecomparisons/>.

gap between white students and their black and Hispanic peers at 16 percentage points and 23 percentage points, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

The cost to Connecticut of this substantial achievement gap is enormous. A national study by McKinsey & Company has shown that reducing the achievement gap could result in significant increases in economic output.<sup>4</sup> Closing the graduation rate gap in Connecticut would yield results such as: decreased criminal justice expenses, lower health care expenditures, and higher tax revenues.<sup>5</sup>

II. Extensive research shows that the quality of teachers is the most important factor for improving student performance and thereby closing the achievement gap.<sup>6</sup>

According to national research, having teachers of high quality is “critical” for high student performance.<sup>7</sup> In one study, whether similar students had an effective versus an ineffective teacher resulted in a difference of 50 percentile points on exams after three years. This effect was larger than the effect of class size.<sup>8</sup> As one report states: “*The contribution of teachers to student learning and outcomes is widely recognized. A teacher’s effectiveness has more impact on student learning than any other factor under the control of school systems, including class size, school size, and the quality of after-school programs.*”<sup>9</sup>

In Connecticut as well, it has been noted that it is “impossible to underestimate the role of the teacher in the student achievement equation.”<sup>10</sup>

III. Despite overwhelming evidence that student achievement and teacher effectiveness are closely linked, Connecticut currently does not require evaluations of teachers to include measures of student achievement growth.

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<sup>3</sup> See R Stillwell. “Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2006-07.” National Center for Education Statistics. October 2009. p. 7. Available online at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010313.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> See “The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America’s Schools.” Summary of Findings. McKinsey & Company. April 2009. pp. 17-20. Available online at: [http://www.mckinsey.com/App\\_Media/Images/Page\\_Images/Offices/SocialSector/PDF/achievement\\_gap\\_report.pdf](http://www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Images/Page_Images/Offices/SocialSector/PDF/achievement_gap_report.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> See J Amos. “Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars.” Alliance for Excellent Education. August 2008. pp. 2, 11-17, 37-39. Available online at: <http://www.all4ed.org/files/Econ2008.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See E Hanushek. “Teacher Deselection.” In *Creating a New Teaching Profession*, eds. D Goldhaber and J Hannaway. Urban Institute Press, Washington, DC: 2009. p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> See “How the World’s Best-Performing School Systems Come Out On Top.” McKinsey & Company. September 2007. p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Id at 12.

<sup>9</sup> See “Empowering Effective Teachers.” Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Issue Brief. February 2010. p. 1. Available online at: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/united-states/Documents/empowering-effective-teachers-readiness-for-reform.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> See F Carrano. “What Makes a Good Teacher?” *New Haven Independent*. 12 March 2010. Available online at: [http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/what\\_makes\\_a\\_good\\_teacher/](http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/what_makes_a_good_teacher/).

Across the country, teacher evaluations are conducted on a regular basis but without taking into account whether teachers' students are learning at acceptable rates. Many evaluation systems use classroom observations and subjective or objective feedback from principals. However, many studies have noted that such evaluation systems can be inconsistent and inefficient.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, regardless of how much or how little teachers' students advance, nearly all teachers receive ratings of satisfactory or better.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the substantial agreement that highly effective teachers are essential for raising achievement and closing achievement gaps, current evaluation systems are weak in differentiating which teachers are effective or ineffective in advancing student performance. In the words of one recent study, "excellence goes unrecognized," "poor performance goes unaddressed," and professional development is inadequate due to a lack of identification of teachers' specific development needs under current evaluation systems.<sup>13</sup> These three areas are meant to be outcomes of a well-functioning teacher evaluation system: excellence will be noted (and this notice will likely be motivating to teachers), remediation provided in areas of unsatisfactory performance, and other areas in need of improvement identified for professional development. In Connecticut, problems noticed during teacher evaluation are typically addressed in a remediation plan.<sup>14</sup> If student achievement growth is not included in teacher evaluations, difficulties in raising achievement may be overlooked and unaddressed, hurting both teachers and students.

Teachers and school personnel in Connecticut have also noted significant inadequacies in the current evaluation process. In a recent survey completed by 94% of administrators and 74% of teachers in the New Haven public school system, the majority of respondents stated that the current evaluation system "fails to 'recognize exemplary performance,' 'identify and offer concrete steps to remedy poor performance,' or 'promote student achievement.'"<sup>15</sup> Fewer than 40% of teachers expressed satisfaction with the current teacher evaluation system. *What is more, nearly every teacher and administrator agreed that student learning should be incorporated into evaluations.*<sup>16</sup>

In addition, Connecticut's State Department of Education issued guidelines for teacher evaluation and professional development that *do* state that teacher evaluation plans should "show a clear link between teacher evaluation... and improved student learning."<sup>17</sup> However, teacher evaluations are not required to include data on student academic growth as any significant factor.

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<sup>11</sup> See A Wise, L Darling-Hammond, M McLaughlin, H Bernstein. "Teacher Evaluation: A Study of Effective Practices." *The Elementary School Journal*. Vol. 86, No. 1. pp. 60-121. September 1985. pp. 71, 75.

<sup>12</sup> See D Weisberg, S Sexton, J Mulhern, D Keeling. "The Widget Effect." *The New Teacher Project*. 2009. p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> See T Mooney. "A Practical Guide to Connecticut School Law, Sixth Edition." Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc. 2008. p. 237.

<sup>15</sup> See P Bass. "Teachers Give Tough Grades – To Themselves." *New Haven Independent*. 29 January 2010. Available online at:

[http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/teachers\\_grade\\_themselves\\_tough/](http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/teachers_grade_themselves_tough/).

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> See Connecticut State Department of Education. "Connecticut Guidelines for Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development." May 1999. p. 4. Available online at:

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/EducatorStandards/tevalpd.pdf>.

As advancing student achievement is a primary goal of teachers, it is commonsense to provide this data in teacher evaluations; by factoring student academic growth into teacher evaluations, weakness in this area can be explicitly noted and improved upon, to the benefit of both the teacher and student.

IV. Section 3 of H.B. 5491 provides the statutory language for incorporating student achievement growth into teacher evaluations, an important step towards closing the achievement gap.

This bill establishes student academic growth as one element of teacher evaluations. Research shows that successful teacher evaluation systems focus on student achievement outcomes, in addition to incorporating additional options for describing instructional performance.<sup>18</sup>

The bill gives districts the autonomy to develop their own evaluation systems which include student academic growth as a significant factor. Districts retain the right to determine how student academic growth will be measured and weighted in the teacher evaluation process. Alternatively, districts can use an evaluation system developed by the State Board of Education and the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (established by this bill) that will also include student academic growth as a significant factor.

H.B. 5491 also provides for a data system to implement and report on the teacher evaluation systems.

V. S.B. 440, particularly Section 1(c)(3), updates the Public School Information System so that student performance can be linked to the students' teachers.

This is a common-sense step to utilize Connecticut's existing data system to link teachers and student performance. This data can then be used to identify and address areas in need of improvement in Connecticut's schools and teaching force. Other provisions of S.B. 440 will further enhance the state's existing data system.

VI. In sum, incorporating student academic growth in teacher evaluations is expected to improve Connecticut's position to 1) close the achievement gap, and 2) qualify for Race to the Top competitive grant funds.

Closing Connecticut's very large achievement gaps requires improving student academic achievement. When improving student achievement is one of the top priorities of the state, districts, schools, teachers, and communities, it only makes sense to measure our progress against the progress of our students. At the school level, this means incorporating student academic growth into teacher and principal evaluations, with the purpose of helping school personnel to be able to help students more effectively. This result bears positive outcomes for the students, school personnel, and the state as a whole.

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<sup>18</sup> See D Weisberg, S Sexton, J Mulhern, D Keeling. "The Widget Effect." The New Teacher Project. 2009. p. 27.

In addition to the educational benefits of passing H.B. 5491 – Section 3 and S.B. 440, passage by the Legislature would also better position Connecticut to win Race to the Top funds. Of the 7 categories of Race to the Top criteria, the category entitled “Great Teachers and Leaders” commands the greatest share at 138 points, or 28% of total possible points. Of this category, “improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance” commands the greatest share at 58 points of the 138 possible. This subcriterion includes “taking into account student growth” as a significant factor of teacher and principal evaluations.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the provision in S.B. 440 for the linkage of teacher and principal effectiveness data with the educators’ in-state educator preparation institutions will qualify Connecticut for up to 14 points in the Race to the Top competition under the subcriterion entitled “improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs.”<sup>20</sup>

In March, Connecticut was eliminated as a contender for Race to the Top funds in Phase 1 of the competition. The state had requested \$193 million in grant money from the program. Applications for Phase 2 are due in June 2010.<sup>21</sup> Passing legislation now which incorporates student academic growth into teacher evaluations will increase Connecticut’s chances of winning Race to the Top money in Phase 2.

VII. Connecticut Voices for Children strongly supports the sections of H.B. 5491 and S.B. 440 detailed above. Further clarification in definitions, however, could strengthen these bills.

The section of Race to the Top (“Great Teachers and Leaders”) targeted by these sections of these bills calls for teacher evaluation systems that *differentiate effectiveness* based on teacher evaluations.<sup>22</sup> H.B. 5491 is lacking any definition of what a highly effective, effective, or ineffective teacher is, based on evaluations that include student academic growth. Without such definitions, even evaluations linked to student growth could prove ineffectual. Race to the Top provides definitions of effective teacher, effective principal, highly effective teacher, highly effective principal, student achievement, and student growth that could be used as models for Connecticut.<sup>23</sup> Removing the definitions in Section 1(a) of S.B. 440 and incorporating the Race to the Top definitions into this bill and H.B. 5491 would strengthen these bills and better position Connecticut to both close its achievement gaps and win Race to the Top funds.

#### Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care

I. Connecticut Voices for Children supports the intent of S.B. 439, An Act Concerning the Study of Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care; however we believe that it is imperative that the legislature implement a school stability program this session.

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<sup>19</sup> See US Department of Education. “Race to the Top Program Executive Summary.” November 2009. pp. 3, 9. Available online at: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Id at 10.

<sup>21</sup> See R Frahm. “Race to the Top: Making a New Start.” *The CT Mirror*. 5 March 2010. Available online at: <http://ctmirror.com/story/race-top-making-new-start>.

<sup>22</sup> See US Department of Education. “Race to the Top Program Executive Summary.” November 2009. p. 9. Available online at: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Id at 12, 14.

In October of 2008, the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act was signed into law.<sup>24</sup> This landmark legislation included a requirement that all states adopt an educational stability program by July 1, 2010. Last week, the Human Services Committee sent the Governor's bill, S.B. 31 An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning the Educational Placement of Children in the Care and Custody of the Department of Children and Families, to the Senate floor. This bill contains language that would bring the state into compliance with the federal mandate this session.

The failure of the state to implement educational stability by July 1 could be potentially catastrophic for the state's budget. Without state legislation in place there is the potential to jeopardize federal Title IV-E dollars, which the federal government reimburses to the state for eligible child welfare expenses. According to the Office of Fiscal Analysis this funding totaled \$100 million in FY 2010.<sup>25</sup>

We ask the committee to support the language for this program that is included in S.B. 31. This language was crafted using the careful recommendations of a Joint Task Force on school stability, which was brought together by the State Department of Education and the Department of Children and Families. This language meets the requirements of the federal law and reflects an agreement of the state agencies as well as children's advocates. We thank you for your continued work on this important initiative for the state's most vulnerable children.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony concerning the above mentioned bills.

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<sup>24</sup> See Pub. L. 110-351, Oct. 7, 2008, 122 Stat. 3949, 42 U.S.C. § 1305

<sup>25</sup> See the *Office of Fiscal Analysis' Fiscal Note for Senate Bill 31, An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning the Educational Placement of Children in the Care and Custody of the Department of Children and Families*. It can be viewed at: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2010/FN/2010SB-00031-R000021-FN.htm>.