

May 2, 2012

Hon. Donald E. Williams, Jr.  
Senate President Pro Tempore  
State of Connecticut  
210 Capital Avenue  
LOB, Room 3300  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Sen. Williams,

While I appreciate and recognize the difficult work that the legislature is engaged with over a short legislative period, I am writing to express my concerns over the recent revisions made by the Democratic legislative leadership in substitute Senate Bill 24, “An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness”, that was originally proposed by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy.

The most significant and notable change is a measure that removes or restricts, on a state level, many of the proven best practices that have contributed to the dramatic increases in student achievement in Hartford Public Schools over the past six years.

These changes run contrary to the national educational reform agenda and do little to boldly address Connecticut’s place as the state with the nation’s worst achievement gap.

Section 19 of the substitute proposal, for example, specifically eliminates the charter school option as a model for turning around low-performing schools. Section 20, moreover, prohibits the state Commissioner of Education from choosing an entity, such as a charter management organization to operate any of the lowest performing schools that would form part of the Commissioner’s turnaround network. Charter schools are public schools and those with proven achievement records should be seen as viable options to turnaround our historically low performing schools in this state.

Additionally, proposed Sections 28-30 of the bill obligates districts to include state grants for charter schools as part of their Education Cost Sharing allotment, but prohibits those districts from incorporating student performance data from those charter schools. This only exacerbates the divide between district and charter schools during a time when the state should be providing incentives for collaboration with a focus on student success.

Hartford Public Schools has adopted a wide variety of successful school models, including charter schools, as part of its reform strategy and for which it has received broad national recognition. Our portfolio approach places school choice in the hands of our families and accountability for school quality in the hands of a collaborative district and school-based

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leadership team. We have repeatedly offered our work and early success in Hartford as a lab for turnaround success. Our work in Hartford serves as an example of turnaround success. Success, however, can only be achieved and maintained if we have the proper mechanisms in law to do our job.

Our agreement with the Achievement First charter school management organization resulted in the creation of the Achievement First Hartford Academy, arguably among the most successful schools in the state. The district hopes to establish a comparable relationship with the Jumoke Academy, another Hartford-based charter school. About 90 percent of the students at both schools routinely score at the proficient level or above on state standardized tests and over 90 percent of Jumoke students attend college. These are two local charters, with local staff, with proven success. Why would we negate a proven student centered approach?

Substitute Senate Bill 24 also eliminates from the original Bill a teacher scholarship program funding for innovation schools and a state leadership academy for school administrators. These are approaches that have been consistently successful through our Principal's Academy in Hartford.

True and serious education reform demands that the state allow districts and the Commissioner of Education to choose from a variety of proven best practices and support those choices. Instead, I see distractions, in addition to more red tape, including: K-5 exercise requirements, certification requirements that revert back to traditional restrictive approaches rather than a talent approach, Superintendent waivers that restrict a district from recruiting talent from outside of Connecticut and takes a highly insular approach to leadership as only Connecticut based, and a universal PK study when full day Kindergarten is not yet addressed state-wide.

In addition, creating English Language Learner schools would segregate students based on language need, which is an educational service not a stand-alone school design. This seems to run contrary to Sheff v. O'Neill and federal law.

The bill as it is currently structured would inhibit Hartford Public Schools in continuing our progress. In order to advance our work, Connecticut must deliver a policy framework that supports meaningful educational reform.

I urge you and the rest of the Democratic leadership in the General Assembly to restore and approve SB 24 to its original form. The lives of thousands of children in Connecticut's urban centers - the state's future work force - are at stake. Let's take a stand together on behalf of Connecticut's children.

Sincerely,



Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto  
Superintendent

Cc: Rep. Andrew Fleischmann  
Rep. Gary Holder-Winfield  
Sen. Toni Harp  
Rep. Marie Lopez-Kirkley-Bey  
Rep. Kelvin Roldan

Sen. Andrea Stillman  
Rep. Hector Robles  
Rep. Toni Walker  
Sen. Eric Coleman

Rep. Minnie Gonzalez  
Rep. Douglas McCrory  
Rep. Matthew Ritter  
Sen. John Fonfara

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