Principals' Perspective on Current Secondary Reform Legislation

Executive Summary

Connecticut Association of Schools

February 9, 2012

Feedback Methods

- Response to Commissioner Pryor's inquiry as to perceived legislative/policy barriers- meeting with select group; follow-up work session; crosswalk- Governor's Six Principles and CT Standards for School Leadership
- Survey to all member principals
- Survey to secondary principals specific to Secondary Reform Legislation

General Summary of Responses

- Secondary reform is necessary
- Many schools have reform efforts underway and programs in place
- Need guidance on implementation
- Concern for impact on districts, specifically largest and smallest- funding, staffing, curricular reform and scheduling
- Connection to other reforms- Common Core standards and assessments, Evaluation, ESEA waiver implications
- Ongoing fiscal support

Increased Credit Requirement

- Focusing on a Carnegie Unit requirement will lead us boldly into the wrong decade- circa 1980
- Focusing teaching and learning on discrete disciplines is a limited vision for the 21st century; we need to allow students out of the "one size fits all" model
- Increased requirements are good only if we incorporate all areas: technical learning, fine arts, etc.

Increased Credit Requirement

- More required credits will imply significant staff increases
- There may be a shortage of highly qualified staff
- Increasing specific credit requirements may put graduation out of reach for many students
- Other initiatives already taxing schools and districts
- FUNDING

Model Curriculum and End-of-Course Exams

- We want to change our paradigm of teaching/learning to include critical/creative thinking and problem-solving; state end-of-course exams would undermine these efforts
- Need to have clear understanding of Common Core expectations first
- State curricula and exams must emphasize 21st century skills
- Must be aligned with higher education expectations

Model Curricula and End-of-Course Exams

- Worry about over-emphasis on standardized testing; other state examples have resulted in lowering standards
- Must not lose focus on the importance of formative assessments
- Common Core will assist schools in greater alignment but worry about plethora of computerized assessments
- Must also drastically raise expectations for teachers; those whom we allow in front of our children

Capstone Projects

- Why is this written in the legislation as a credit?
- This type of experience is essential; very meaningful learning opportunity
- Must scaffold experiences for students to prepare them
- Capstone projects must involve certified teachers; concern for adequate staffing, especially in larger schools, and potential union issues

Capstone Projects

- Wonderful idea; could be a huge logistical undertaking in many schools- new staff, professional development, development of community partnerships- need FUNDING
- Schools should have autonomy to develop such projects
- What supports would the state offer to ensure rigor and quality?

Standards-based Learning Experiences

- Alternative programming in high schools is essential; powerful method of improving teaching and learning
- Must get communities to rise above complacency
- Autonomy within districts/schools important
- Programs must be aligned with standards
- Can easily be tied to a Capstone approach

Out-of-School Learning Experiences

- Essential; most important for career orientation
- Must abandon notion that learning takes place only in a classroom or Monday through Friday
- Need increased cooperation from universities, community colleges, and business community
- Support from the SDE is necessary

Student Success Plans

- Sound idea; makes sense; student and family awareness should translate into a pursuit of success
- Laws are vague, deadlines are firm; there is no money
- Professional development is critical
- A multitude of initiatives require reporting of data
- SSP's great in ideology but in require additional staffing, especially in small schools
- Is there a State model or expected outcome?

Required Data Tracking

- Should be tied to SSP's
- Great idea, but establishing the programs, processes, staffing is a huge challenge
- Who should collect data; what will the state do with the data?
- Effective data tracking should promote learning; if this is required then districts should use this data to inform instruction

General Comments

- We need the SDE to provide explanation and guidance of how all initiatives fit together as part of an overall plan for educational improvement
- Look at successful practices currently happening across the state
- Need a plan from the SDE as to how to support needed resources
- All work must be challenging and worthwhile to students

General Comments

- Reform is necessary; resources and funding are huge concerns
- Raising the level of rigor and preparation is critical
- We should be making all decisions based on individualized student data
- Deeply hopeful that districts will be provided encouragement to explore alternatives that might be looked upon as models