



## **Joint Statement on Senate Bill 458: An Act Concerning Educational Reform May 2012**

At the start of the 2012 legislative session, our coalition of six education, community, and business groups came together, for the first time, to advocate for bold reforms that could improve educational outcomes and increase learning opportunities for all children in Connecticut. During a difficult legislative session with many twists and turns, our coalition jointly advocated for fundamental reforms in these critical areas:

- Teacher and Principal Evaluation and Support
- Educator Preparation and Certification
- Relationship Between Time and Learning
- School and District Accountability
- Pre-Kindergarten
- Education Contract Negotiations

Through Senate Bill 458, Connecticut's elected leaders passed a sweeping education reform bill that will jumpstart significant reforms in many of these areas. Our coalition is greatly encouraged by these developments and, as the hard work of implementing these reforms begins, we remain committed to working together to ensure effective implementation.

Likewise, we recognize that more must be done to fix the issues that plague Connecticut's public school system, and we are committed to advocating for these changes together. Toward that end, we present the following comparison of our original position, what was accomplished through S.B. 458, and what remains to be done in these critical areas.

## TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EVALUATION AND SUPPORT

**Where things stand:** S.B. 458 will enact teacher and principal evaluation and support policies that our organizations feel are significant steps forward. From the start, we supported the State Board of Education-approved Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) framework for teacher and principal evaluation. This framework includes multiple measures of a teacher’s or principal’s effectiveness, with a clear focus on student outcomes as measured by student achievement growth, peer feedback, and classroom observations. S.B. 458 upholds the PEAC work and requires that all educators (teachers and principals) be evaluated annually, starting with a pilot program this year in 8-10 districts. The evaluation model will then be implemented statewide. Districts that develop their own evaluation model that is at least equal to the state model can seek permission from the state to use their own instead. This evaluation system will help assure that attention to student learning is intensified and should drive state and local professional development and allocation of resources to improve instruction. S.B. 458 also eliminated Continuing Education Credits and replaced them with job-embedded professional development that is tied to an educator’s needs as identified in his/her evaluation. This kind of training can help reduce the gaps between theory and practice and provide authentic and relevant training to grow and support our best educators.

Finally, S.B. 458 now requires that “ineffectiveness” (and not just incompetence) as demonstrated in evaluations, can be grounds for dismissal. The bill also streamlines the often time-consuming and costly process for termination hearings, and attempts to limit such hearings to whether or not the evaluation process was followed fairly.

**Recommendations:** S.B. 458 offers significant advancements in our state efforts to develop and support educators and may also help to dismiss ineffective teachers swiftly and fairly. We must now work to ensure that the PEAC recommendations and the evaluation model that is ultimately approved by the State Board of Education represent fair and rigorous standards that prioritize improving student outcomes. We re-affirm our commitment to ensuring a connection between performance evaluations and educator staffing decisions. We continue to believe that:

- Reductions in force, when necessary, should be guided primarily by evaluation results. If dismissals are needed, they should occur within levels of performance beginning first with ineffective educators and working up from there.
- Tenure and employment should be earned and kept based on satisfactory evaluation results. At any point, teachers who do not consistently receive at least a proficient rating after receiving support and an opportunity to improve should be dismissed. S.B. 458 offers some modest improvements to the currently costly and inefficient processes. For example, it reduces the length of time for a hearing, reduces the number of arbitrators from three to one, and it limits the arbitrator’s review and ruling to whether the evaluation process was followed fairly and is reasonable based on the evidence. We will need to closely observe implementation of these processes to determine whether in practice, they reduce the costs and time associated with dismissing chronically ineffective educators. We will also need to monitor implementation to determine whether these changes actually result in the dismissal of teachers whose are consistently low performing.

If the changes brought by S.B. 458 prove to be insufficient solutions, the legislature will need to clarify and strengthen dismissal procedures.

- Teachers who consistently receive the highest evaluation ratings should be eligible for recognition, including promotions along a career ladder and salary increases. S.B. 458 does create a “Distinguished Educator Designation” that can help encourage excellent practice and reward excellent practitioners. By enabling teachers to take leadership roles, the law can also facilitate distributed leadership within schools and districts. However, this status does not necessarily entitle teachers to promotions, salary increases, or high levels of certification. In the future, this status should be aligned with certification.
- Principals must have high quality training and support in teacher evaluation. If we are serious about enabling school leaders to be true professionals, the PEAC, State Department of Education, and State Board of Education must ensure this training actually takes place, is of the highest quality, and that appropriate resources are made available to support this work. In addition, the Connecticut School Leadership Academy should be created to help recruit, prepare, and support talented school leaders in many areas, including staff evaluation.
- Principals should have significant decision-making authority over who is employed in his/her school or instructional unit so that nobody is assigned to a school or instructional unit over the principal’s objection. In addition, efforts must be made to provide incentives that recruit and retain our top teachers in our highest need schools. Future legislation should focus on accomplishing these goals.

## **EDUCATOR PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION**

**Where things stand:** Our partnership is committed to improving systems to prepare and certify teachers, principals, and superintendents. This year, state leaders accomplished some significant steps towards these goals. S.B. 458 will ensure that teacher candidates have more clinical experience (four semesters). In addition, the State Board of Education created the Educator Preparation Advisory Council (EPAC) to develop standards that will be used to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for how well their graduates perform on the job. These standards will likely include measures of quality such as teacher evaluations and student achievement growth.

**Recommendations:** We are encouraged by the steps the state will take to improve educator preparation. Our group plans to closely monitor EPAC’s work to ensure that it establishes strong standards and meaningful accountability for preparation programs. In addition, S.B. 458 made very few changes to educator certification. Once an evaluation system has been tested, the state should move towards linking measures of educator quality with certification.

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TIME AND LEARNING**

**Where things stand:** In February, our groups jointly committed to pursue reforms that would measure student learning not by time spent in classrooms, but by mastery of content. We believe that flexibility in meeting student learning needs must be used both for remediation for students who need additional learning time to master content, as well as for enrichment opportunities for

advanced study. Earlier versions of S.B. 458 proposed planning grants that would have allowed districts to begin moving towards a personalized learning system. In addition, a separate bill that would have commissioned a study of personalized learning was approved by the Education Committee but was not acted upon by the legislature.

**Recommendations:** The increasingly complex and dynamic society in which our students will be expected to work and live will demand an education system that is equally dynamic and responsive. Students must be able to demonstrate that learning has occurred based on measures other than time spent on task, so that they do not graduate without the requisite skills in basic subject areas like reading, math, and science. The state should move to pilot such initiatives soon. For example, to start, local boards of education could award students credit for evidence of work and experiences that demonstrate mastery in relation to the Common Core college and career readiness standards, rather than Carnegie Units earned or “seat time” accumulated, regardless of the time required for such mastery. Steps toward this type of system will be essential to help our children, our state, and our nation keep pace and thrive in the global workforce and society.

## **SCHOOL AND DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Where things stand:** In February, we issued a statement in support of differentiated accountability for schools and districts that provide varied support and interventions based on where schools and districts fall across a range of student performance levels. We also called for a system to provide immediate and intensive intervention to our lowest performing schools and to ensure that any increase in funding to these schools and districts is aimed at increasing student achievement. S.B. 458 takes the most significant steps towards these goals in recent Connecticut history.

The law establishes a new system of school and district accountability: the school performance index (SPI) and district performance index (DPI). Using 4 measures (SPI, change in SPI over time, student achievement growth, and graduation/dropout rates for high schools), the schools will be ranked from 1-5 (1 being the highest) in order to determine the level of state intervention appropriate to turn around schools “in need of improvement.” Level 3 schools will be required to create a plan to improve its performance, while level 4 and 5 schools could face state intervention.

S.B. 458 also establishes a Commissioner’s Network to provide intense support and intervention to chronically failing schools. While the final law is not as strong as Governor Malloy’s original proposal, which we supported, it represents significant steps forward. The final legislation will allow the state Commissioner of Education to select up to 25 schools (no more than two from the same district per year, up to a total of four in all) as part of the Network. However, the final reduced appropriations for this Network and for talent development will not likely allow the state to intervene in the full number of schools allowed, given the high costs associated with such intervention. A turnaround committee at the school and/or the Commissioner will develop a turnaround plan for the school. School staff in the Network schools will continue to be employees of their local school district, and the law is promising in that it provides some flexibility from local collective bargaining agreements. Essentially, for any significant changes

to teachers working conditions in Network schools, the law allows financial/economic impact bargaining over issues like salaries, but not the reforms themselves. The law also establishes an expedited negotiations binding arbitration process should the union and district fail to reach an agreement. Additionally, the legislation explicitly notes that only not-for-profit entities may be selected for the management of the schools, with non-profit education management organizations (EMOs) managing up to six schools in total.

**Recommendations:** The Commissioner's Network will not be successful without the full financial allocations necessary to enact fundamental change in these fundamentally broken schools. Also, each turnaround school will have a designated "turnaround committee" which can select the intervention options for each respective school. Because the composition of said committee makes the school superintendent the non-voting chairperson, the district person who will ultimately be responsible for the results achieved at the school will not be able to participate in the turnaround committee process. This should be changed to allow for the superintendent to be a voting member of the process. Moreover, the exclusive representative for the teachers will have the majority of votes and hence could attempt to turn the contract for a Commissioner's Network school into a more traditional contract; the representation should reflect a better balance of interests. We also think that Network schools should be given more flexibility and resources to recruit and hire the right leaders and school staff, and the Network may also need further assistance from EMOs, which the current legislation limits. In the long term, state law must also do more to recognize high-performing, high-need schools and replicate their success.

## **PREKINDERGARTEN**

**Where things stand:** We have committed to ensuring that all children have access to programming beginning at age three that is developmentally appropriate and staffed by highly effective teachers, with initial priority given to low-income students. In addition, families need clear information about the quality of their prekindergarten options. S.B. 458 will deliver on these goals, right away, by creating 1,000 new pre-K school readiness seats focused in high-need, low-performing communities. SDE is also required to develop a quality rating and improvement system for home-, center-, and school-based early childcare and learning. Both of these efforts will help to insure that Connecticut's children will enter kindergarten with more equal backgrounds in terms of pre-K experiences and levels of school readiness, regardless of their family situation or socioeconomic status.

In addition, S.B. 458 will create an Early Literacy Pilot study to identify best practices in early literacy education and remediation, and the new statewide reading assessments (to be developed by January 1, 2013) will enhance early childhood literacy by identifying reading-deficient students early on. This will provide for frequent screening and monitoring of progress and response to interventions, and produce data that helps instructors to identify best practices in reading instruction.

**Recommendations:** These are important steps to improving outcomes for all children and closing the achievement gaps. Next, state leaders must take steps to guarantee teacher quality in these programs. We are encouraged that the bill will require all teachers of reading in grades K-3

to take an annual reading instruction exam, and local boards of education will be required to report these results to SDE. However, it is important to ensure that this test is a useful predictor of teacher quality. Teachers of grades K-3 must also receive high-quality training in reading instruction before they enter a classroom and have continued access to such training throughout their careers.

## **EDUCATION CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS**

**Where things stand:** We believe that parties involved in education contract negotiations must structure contracts to focus on student learning needs. Currently in education contract negotiations, if the school district and the local teachers union cannot come to an agreement, the decision goes to binding arbitration. We believe that the state law on binding arbitration must be amended so that students' learning needs are the primary factor guiding the binding arbitration process.

Unfortunately, state lawmakers did not bring about any changes to improve the binding arbitration statute. In fact, attempts during this legislative session were made to further complicate due process and protect the interests of adults over the learning needs of students.

**Recommendation:** State lawmakers must resist efforts to further complicate due process laws and should pass an amendment to the binding arbitration statute so that students' learning needs are the primary factors guiding the binding arbitration process.