

Senate Bill 24: Myths & Facts

Part 2: Myths about the proposals to improve teacher and principal quality



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CAS: The Connecticut Association of Schools

ConnCAN: The Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now

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Introduction

Recently, our coalition released Part 1 of a myths and facts document about Senate Bill 24, the legislation proposed by Governor Malloy to strengthen Connecticut’s education system. The bill is now under consideration in the legislature’s Education Committee. Questions and concerns about the bill have been raised in public forums across the state, many of which are based on misinformation. Some of this misinformation is being intentionally propagated by opponents of the bill. This document, Part 2, addresses additional myths and is meant to accompany Part 1. With these documents, we aim to cut through the rhetoric and present the truth about S.B. 24.

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### **Myth: Connecticut’s evaluation framework places too much emphasis on standardized test scores**

**Fact:** Connecticut’s teacher and principal evaluation guidelines,<sup>1</sup> including percentages for multiple measures, were approved by the State Board of Education and developed and endorsed by both teacher unions through their participation in the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC). Student achievement growth on state tests only accounts for 22.5 percent out of a total 100 percent in the evaluation framework, for those teachers who teach state-tested grades and subjects. Part 1 of our Myths and Facts<sup>2</sup> explains these guidelines. Connecticut’s weight for student achievement is in line with that of 24 other states that include student achievement measures in educator

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/cert/peac/sbe\\_report\\_adption\\_peac\\_evaluation\\_guidelines\\_2-10-12.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/cert/peac/sbe_report_adption_peac_evaluation_guidelines_2-10-12.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://conncan.org/sites/conncan.org/files/sb\\_24\\_educator\\_myths-facts.pdf](http://conncan.org/sites/conncan.org/files/sb_24_educator_myths-facts.pdf)

evaluations.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Connecticut's weight of 22.5 percent it is lower than many other states', including 13 states where student learning is the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluation.<sup>4</sup> Teacher and principal effectiveness and performance will never be determined—and shouldn't be determined—by one student test. Connecticut's system will include a number of other objective criteria, including whole-school student learning indicators or student feedback, observations of teacher performance and practice, and peer or parent feedback including surveys.

### **Myth: This bill puts teachers' certification and employment status in the hands of just one principal who may not make the best decision**

**Fact:** This bill will make it harder than it currently is for any one person to make arbitrary or subjective decisions about a teacher's certification or employment status. The evaluation guidelines on which staffing decisions are based in the bill require many measures of a teacher's effectiveness beyond a principal's evaluation. Evaluations will include at least two measures of student achievement growth, peer input, whole school measures, parent, and student input. In addition, local systems can choose to use third party evaluators who do not know the individuals involved to validate evaluation results for teachers. New Haven's teacher evaluation system includes this step.<sup>5</sup> The evaluation system will also hold principals accountable for results using similar evaluation guidelines.

### **Myth: S.B. 24 will lower teacher salaries**

**Fact:** Teacher salaries are locally negotiated; this bill would not change that. Local school districts and teachers unions will continue to negotiate salaries locally. S.B. 24 would simply require that local salary schedules reflect the new three-tiered certification level. If a teacher receives consistently low evaluation ratings, he or she could move down a certification level. However, should that occur, this bill does NOT require a salary reduction for that teacher. Local teachers unions and school boards would have to agree to such a reduction. The bill also proposes eliminating master's degree requirements for all but the master certification status (see our group's first Myths and Facts document for more information). The certification levels proposed in this bill emphasize demonstrated effectiveness on the job over seat time and seniority, a move supported by research<sup>6</sup> and increasingly common across the country. However, the bill does NOT specify salary levels at each certification level and it is not a way to pay teachers with advanced degrees less, as some have asserted. Salary bumps for advanced degrees and years of experience will continue to be locally negotiated. If a district wishes to include degree status and years of experience within the salary schedule, it will have the discretion to do so.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/nctq\\_stateOfTheStates.pdf](http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/nctq_stateOfTheStates.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nhps.net/node/1082>

<sup>6</sup> For example, <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/How-good-are-your-teachers-Trying-to-define-teacher-quality/Does-highly-qualified-mean-highly-effective.html> and [http://www.caldercenter.org/PDF/1001059\\_Teacher\\_Training.pdf](http://www.caldercenter.org/PDF/1001059_Teacher_Training.pdf)

### **Myth: A teacher can lose his or her certification under this legislation**

**Fact:** In Part 1 of our myths and facts, we debunked the myth that teachers could lose their certification after just one bad evaluation under S.B. 24. Teachers would hold certificates for five years and cannot lose certification within those five years. In fact, it is legally considered a property right. So can teachers lose their certification in the long-term under this bill? The answer is yes, but only after a very long period of consistent mediocre evaluation ratings. Here's how that might work:

S.B. 24 establishes three new levels of certification: initial, professional, and master. Educators begin their career with an initial educator certificate. This certificate is good for five years as a teacher works towards his/her professional certificate, which can be earned with either two “exemplary” ratings in three years, or any combination of three “proficient” or “exemplary” ratings in five years. If an educator does not meet these requirements during their first five years of certification, he/she may request up to three one-year extensions from the State Board of Education as he/she works towards earning a professional certificate and tenure. This means that a teacher could be in the classroom for **eight years** with mediocre performance before their initial certification would expire. For example, a teacher's path could look like the following:

- *Year 1:* teacher is on an initial certificate, is rated developing
- *Year 2:* teacher is on an initial certificate, is rated proficient
- *Year 3:* teacher is on an initial certificate, is rated developing
- *Year 4:* teacher is on an initial certificate, is rated proficient
- *Year 5:* teacher is on an initial certificate, is rated developing
- *Year 6:* teacher is granted a one-year extension of an initial certificate, and is rated developing
- *Year 7:* teacher is granted a one-year extension of an initial certificate, and is rated proficient
- *Year 8:* teacher is granted a one-year extension of an initial certificate, and is rated developing. The initial certificate is no longer valid and cannot be extended.

If the hypothetical educator above earned a “proficient” rating during year eight, he/she would have earned tenure and a professional certificate. Let's continue the scenario:

- *Years 9 – 13:* teacher retains the professional certificate for five years (all certificates must be renewed every five years) and earns three developing ratings.
- *Year 13:* teacher application to renew his/her professional certification is refused. Teacher bumped down to an initial certificate and loses tenure.
- *Years 13-18:* teacher repeats the cycle listed for years 1-5 above.
- *Year 18:* If a teacher does not earn sufficient ratings within these five years, he/she cannot renew certification.

This means that a teacher could be in the system for **18 years** and maintain his/her certification, even if he/she earned mediocre performance ratings at best during that entire time.

**Myth: Including student or parent feedback in evaluations will be unfair to teachers**

**Fact:** Student and parent feedback is among the multiple measures in the state guidelines for teacher evaluation approved by the State Board of Education and approved by the PEAC, which included both unions. For principals, these guidelines will also include teacher feedback. Research<sup>7</sup> shows that combining multiple measures (observation scores with evidence of student achievement gains and student feedback) offers greater predictive power and reliability than observations or value-added scores alone, and that these factors are more reliable predictors of teacher effectiveness than years of experience or graduate degrees.

**Myth: Changes to tenure disrespect teachers' honor and professionalism**

**Fact:** S.B. 24 does quite the contrary: it raises standards for teacher professionalism. Teachers and principals deserve to be paid, treated, and evaluated as professionals. The bill proposes raising standards for entry into the profession by overhauling teacher preparation, allocating funding to attract the best and the brightest to teach in our most struggling schools, and raising standards for certification. Once teachers are in the classroom, teachers who improve student success will be recognized and given opportunities for increased responsibility and status. They may also be eligible for increased pay if local districts and teacher unions negotiate such salary schedules. The bill also ensures that chronically ineffective teachers will be promptly and fairly dismissed.

**Myth: School reform won't happen unless teachers and parents are involved, and this bill does not adequately incorporate their critical roles**

**Fact:** S.B. 24 specifically address increased teacher and parental and community involvement. For example, in the teacher evaluation framework, 40 percent of the evaluation is comprised of teacher observation of performance and practice, and 10 percent is based on peer/parent feedback including surveys. Additionally, S.B. 24 provides detailed measures to include community members and parents in the school governance councils in the Commissioner's Network. In so doing, teachers and parents are involved in two of the most critical components of the bill, teacher evaluations and the Commissioner's Network (lowest performing schools).

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.metproject.org/> and <http://tntp.org/ideas-and-innovations/view/met-made-simple>