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*Testimony of*  
*Kate Field*  
***Connecticut Education Association***  
*Before the Education Committee*  
*Raised Bill No. 6621*  
*March 17, 2021*

Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, my name is Kate Field, and I am the Teacher Development Specialist at Connecticut Education Association, an organization that advocates for teachers and public education. I am also a former teacher and school administrator.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding House Bill 6621 (RAISED) ASSORTED REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO EDUCATION STATUTES. We ask you to consider adding an amendment to this bill that would extend the educator evaluation and support flexibilities granted in Executive Order 7C into the 2021-2022 school year.

Extending evaluation and support flexibilities would allow educators to focus on the social emotional learning and wellbeing of their students, without fear that doing so will detract from academics and potentially negatively impact their annual performance rating. Extending the flexibilities would enable educators to work more intentionally and innovatively with students on their emotional preparedness as a foundation to learning. It would also provide needed time for the Educator Evaluation and Support Council to meet and recommend meaningful, long-term changes to the Connecticut Guidelines for Educator Evaluation.

The current system of evaluation in Connecticut has been in place for nearly a decade. Its development and implementation diverted substantial resources from teaching and learning and overburdened both teachers and administrators. Despite the emphasis on standardized measures of student growth, student achievement remains largely stagnant and the opportunity gap persists, while mental health issues and emotional problems have skyrocketed among children in every district across the state. The flexibilities will help districts focus resources like time and professional development on supporting social and emotional development so essential to learning.

Over 90% of teachers are rated proficient or higher under the current system, unchanged from before the evaluation system was implemented. Connecticut's teachers and administrators

were and continue to be highly qualified, dedicated, and skilled professionals, but over the past decade, the education profession has become steadily more stressful; in fact, in 2019 teaching was tied with nursing as the most stressful profession in the United States. And that was *before* the pandemic.

The negative impact on children is also evident. The educator evaluator system has contributed to over-testing, less playtime, a narrowed curriculum, rigid pacing guides, increased student anxiety and frustration, and a dramatic increase in learning disruptions and student misbehavior.

Step into the shoes of a teacher and try to imagine what they will face when they return to their classrooms in the fall. There are 17,844 fewer students enrolled in school in Connecticut this year, of which 11,896 (2/3) are from low-income families. 1 in every 3 students with ADHD is chronically absent, as are 1 in 2 with diagnosed emotional disturbances. In Hartford, 1 out of every 13 students has stopped attending classes. Statewide, 33% of students are not on track to progress to the next grade, compared to 15% the previous year. Hospitals in Connecticut are facing a crisis---not from COVID infections, but from incidents of child self-harm and suicide attempts<sup>1</sup>. As a teacher, should you be forced to focus, despite all of this, on the standardized measures of student achievement that comprise 25% of your performance rating? Or has the time come to set aside meaningless ratings and give teachers the time, professional development, and space to focus on the needs of the whole child?

It is clear the need to reimagine teacher evaluation is now urgent. Extending the educator evaluation flexibilities provided by Executive Order 7C will minimize disruptions next year, enable more emotional support for students, and provide the Educator Evaluation and Support Council the time it needs to make recommendations for meaningful changes to educator evaluation. Doing so will also give teachers and school districts the permission to focus on what matters most---the welfare of our children.

Thank you for your time and all you do for the children of Connecticut.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ctmirror.org/2021/03/15/thousands-of-students-didnt-show-up-for-school-this-year-where-did-they-go/>