

Remarks of Mary Loftus Levine
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Before the Program Review and Investigations Committee

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Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Rowe, and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. I'm Mary Loftus Levine, Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), and today I'd like to talk with you about the need for an Educator Professional Standards Board in Connecticut.

A great teacher is our greatest asset in public education. Our teachers know more about learning and academic achievement than any other group of individuals in the educational system. Yet, our current debate is like a traditional New England town hall meeting with the people who know the most about the subject - our teachers - left outside in the cold watching silently through the windows.

It's time to bring our teachers into the discussion. It's time to tap our best asset and use them to improve education in Connecticut. Those closest to the work of any profession are the most capable of understanding what the highest standards should be to achieve success.

The Connecticut Education Association supports the establishment of a standards board but only one that includes the input and participation of our state's public school teachers.

Our teachers know their classrooms and facilities. They know their text books and materials. They know the curriculum. They draw on deep stores of knowledge about the subjects they teach. And most of all, they know our children. In short, they know what it takes to educate and do the best for all students. Unfortunately, unlike our peers in countries with the highest achievement levels, educators currently have the least input and role in educational decision-making.

We hear a great deal these days about school reform, but how can we really improve education without the input of our teachers? We can't. It's simply common sense, if we want to improve schools we should talk to real, "feet on the ground" classroom teachers. And those teachers should help establish and oversee the standards of the profession for greater student achievement.

What is CEA's vision for an Educator Professional Standards Board for Connecticut? We envision an autonomous board whose members are nominated by specific constituent groups and appointed by the

governor. Membership would be delineated in statute: the Commissioner of Education or his designee as the non-voting chair; five classroom teachers representing the Connecticut Education Association; two classroom teachers representing the American Federation of Teachers – Connecticut; one administrator representing the American Federation of School Administrators; one administrator representing the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents; one representative of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education; one parent of a public school child/children; one representative from a public institution of higher education; and one representative from a private institution of higher education. As with other groups created by statute, this selection process assures balance, expertise, and a variety of perspectives, while keeping the group to a workable size.

What responsibilities and authority does CEA see an Educator Professional Standards Board having?

We would suggest this Board would do the following:

- establish a code of professional ethics;
- set the highest standards for educator certification;
- issue certificates to qualified educators;
- set standards for and accredit educator preparation programs;
- set standards for educator assessment for prospective teachers;
- set standards for and oversee TEAM, the educator induction program; and
- promote National Board certification for educators.

All of these responsibilities interact to create a world class teaching force. Practicing educators understand that we *can* create a system to handle these responsibilities that is flexible *and* promotes high, appropriate standards.

Our governor, the Commissioner of Education, and more recently, CAPSS have stressed the need for reform in Connecticut public education. We believe creating an Educator Professional Standards Board is a critical element in a comprehensive school reform package. Now is the time to engage and change the system at its roots. Please let us into the room.