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Date: Thu, 26 Jan 2012 10:59:48 -0500

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Subject: PEAC agreement

Folks

Yesterday, the Professional Educators Assessment Committee (PEAC), which has been meeting for two years, finally came up with up with components of a new teacher and principal evaluation system. It was done by consensus(!) with no negative votes. While the many details must be worked out in committees that will be meeting soon, we felt that it was a good first step—and probably the hardest one. Attached is the [Hartford Courant](#) article on this.

At this point, we are waiting to hear the next steps and are already starting to push for the funding for professional development that is critical if this new plan is to be successful. We will keep you up-to-date as there are things to report.

Bob and Patrice

Breakthrough On Teacher Evaluations

Student Achievement 'At Heart' Of Proposed Job Assessments

By KATHLEEN MEGAN, kmegan@courant.com The Hartford Courant

9:43 p.m. EST, January 25, 2012

After about two years of wrangling, a group representing teachers, school administrators and school boards agreed Wednesday on a new way to evaluate teachers that places a strong emphasis on student achievement.

Members of the state Performance Evaluation Advisory Council said the breakthrough in their discussions on the contentious issue occurred in the past few months under the leadership of Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor.

"Two or three years ago, there would have been disagreement over whether student learning should even be part of the evaluation," said Joseph Cirasuolo, executive director of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents and a member of the panel.

Teachers have long raised questions about whether test scores can provide fair assessments of their performance. Some feared that an overly rigid system based solely on test scores to measure their effectiveness would miss the nuances of their work and put their jobs in jeopardy.

In the past, Cirusuolo said, evaluations were largely based on observing teachers in action in the classroom.

He called the agreement, which the State Board of Education is likely to consider next month, "a major step forward."

"It speaks well for the leadership of the commissioner ... and the cooperative and collaborative spirit that was displayed around the table," Cirusuolo said.

Diane Ullman, superintendent of Simsbury schools and a panel member, said, "What's so exciting is that student achievement is at the heart of what will be the new teacher ... evaluation plan."

Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, who was in Switzerland to attend the World Economic Forum, sent his congratulations to the committee and the state education agency.

"Connecticut has taken a major step toward a meaningful teacher evaluation system," the governor said in a prepared statement. "Today's consensus proposal has real potential to increase teacher effectiveness — and as a result, to elevate student achievement."

But one national expert said it's too soon to tell how effective the evaluation system will be.

"On its face it sounds very promising," said Sandi Jacobs, vice president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, "but certainly there is enough wiggle room there to see how it could not turn out as strong."

The new system gives specific weights to various elements in a teacher evaluation.

Forty-five percent of an evaluation would be based on various measures of student achievement, with about half based on standardized test scores. Other indicators of student learning could include portfolios of student work.

Fifteen percent of an evaluation would derive from feedback from peers, students and parents; at least a third of that would come from how well an entire school is performing and on student feedback. The panel's members noted that this 15 percent also is closely tied to student performance.

Finally, the remaining 40 percent would be based on observing teachers at work.

Ullman said the proposal contains a "nice blend of some clear guidelines and yet some flexibility."

Patrick Riccards, chief executive officer with ConnCAN, a New Haven-based education reform group that is often critical of the state, praised the proposal for recognizing "that we need to evaluate our teachers and we need to do so in a smart, yet fair, yet rigorous way."

He added: "We've always said we need multiple measures. ... Student performance is the primary driver on the evaluation."

If Connecticut adopts the proposed framework for evaluating teachers, it will join 17 other states that include student achievement "in a significant way" as part of the process, Jacobs said.

She said her primary concern with the proposal is the extent to which the measurement of student performance is not based on test results.

"If a lot of 'mooshy' stuff is allowed in that other half, it could really weaken and soften the measures," Jacobs said. "We've certainly seen examples of that over time."

In some other states, for instance, teachers were allowed to choose which students' portfolios would represent them.

The key thing, Jacobs said, is to make sure that objective evidence of student achievement is the predominant criterion.

"Here, Connecticut might benefit from the fact that there are states that are a good year ahead," Jacobs said. "Rhode Island, Delaware, Tennessee."

Several committee members seemed surprised at how swiftly and smoothly the panel reached the agreement on the new evaluation system.

"We've been trying to find a way to do this for a good two years now, and we really got bogged down in philosophical points of view," said Sharon Palmer, who leads the state's chapter of the American Federation of Teachers. "This new commissioner and the folks he's brought with him have been able to focus on the things we have in common. That has enabled us to make a lot more progress than we thought we might be able to."

Pryor — who said Wednesday that he was "very pleased" with "the enormous progress" the panel made — attended all of its meetings in recent months and brought in a consultant from Illinois, John Luczak with Education First, to help.

In past discussions of teacher evaluations, Palmer said, "we had conventional roles that we played in labor management relations. Finally we are breaking through and finding ways of collaborating. And I think it makes all the difference. ... We know the reform work absolutely has to be done for the sake of the kids and the future of education."

In an email, Mary Loftus Levine, executive director of the state's largest teachers union, the Connecticut Education Association, said: "It was a compromise by consensus, which was reached after many months of long, tough conversations. What the positive consensus shows is

that all education stakeholders want the same results. ... Student achievement is the overarching goal."

Robert Rader, executive director of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, said the last couple of months under Pryor's leadership "was not the usual — the land of steady and slow habits. It was really more like: 'Let's study the issue, but let's move quickly.' Everyone was willing to give."