

**Standing Committee Meeting
Education
4/26/11**

Testimony of Donna Lasinski

My name is Donna Lasinski, and I am a parent in the Ann Arbor Public School District.

As a parent, I am very connected to the quality of education my student is receiving. As education standards increase amidst budget cuts and economic strains, I believe the focus should be on providing the highest quality of teaching expertise in every classroom.

I support HB 4241. The tenure process, and all of its individual players, has failed our students on every front. Ineffective teaching has become accepted in many places as the high cost and long duration of proceedings to discipline and remove a teacher exceed the perceived benefit of the removal.

The current failure of the tenure law reflects the greater failure of a lack of a meaningful performance evaluation process for teachers conducted by trained administrators.

Specifically, from a parent perspective, the process has failed due to

- Teachers and teacher unions delaying and obstructing the prosecution of tenure removal regardless of the merits of the case;
- Administrators failing to make meaningful and ongoing teacher evaluations throughout the duration of a teacher's career;
- Districts failing to provide progressive professional development opportunities to improve performance of individual teachers and the profession as a whole; and
- State budget cuts resulting in significant increases in the tenure process time and cost.

The current tenure process has driven an "up/down" mentality in teaching. Either a teacher has committed an egregious act and should not longer teach or the teacher is a quality, qualified teacher and equal to all other teachers in the field.

In our current climate, teachers are not viewed as individual professionals with unique strengths and weaknesses and needs for professional development and growth. It is disrespectful to our innovative, highly trained lead teachers to include them in the bucket of teachers "who have not committed egregious acts."

As the tenure process is considered for change, I would like to focus the discussion on the development of meaningful performance evaluations for teachers, supported

by professional development opportunities. The mere removal of the tenure process will do little to change the quality of the teaching in the vast majority of classrooms. Without effective evaluation procedures and a shift from punitive review processes to progressive development processes, our students are unlikely to see a meaningful change in teacher effectiveness.

Changes to tenure law should be viewed ONLY through the lens of increasing teaching quality in the classroom. If all of our teachers were highly effective, we would be grateful for a tenure law that encouraged them to stay in the teaching profession. However, given that a significant study revealed that 81 percent of administrators and 57 percent of teachers say there is a tenured teacher in their school who is performing poorly, and 43 percent of teachers say there is a tenured teacher who should be dismissed for poor performance, change is imperative.

As the repeal of the tenure law is considered, I would encourage the Education Committee to remain focused on the quality of teacher instruction in the classroom.

Specifically, based on research, I would recommend:

01 | Adopt a comprehensive performance evaluation system that fairly, accurately and credibly differentiates teachers based on their effectiveness in promoting student achievement.

02 | Train administrators and other evaluators in the teacher performance evaluation system and hold them accountable for using it effectively.

03 | Integrate the performance evaluation system with key tasks such as teacher assignment, professional development, compensation, retention and dismissal.

04 | Provide options for ineffective teachers to exit the district and a system of due process that is fair but efficient.

Thank you for your time and consideration today. I expect that my child will benefit greatly from the cadre of talented teachers he has been instructed by and will be instructed by in the future. I look forward to the day when **every** teacher my sons encounter will have been evaluated and developed into a high quality teacher.

Significant research referred to: THE WIDGET EFFECT - Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness, Daniel Weisberg Susan Sexton, Jennifer Mulhern, David Keeling

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