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House of Representatives Education Committee
Testimony on HB 4625, HB 4626, HB 4627, and HB 4628
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My name is David Oravec and I am an English teacher at Warren Mott High School. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address this committee.

As a professional educator, I have been evaluated many times during my career and I am deeply concerned that these bills are unnecessary, redundant, and will force additional costs on public school districts. Let me state that I am not opposed to fair and valid teacher evaluation. I am, however, concerned that these bills are a knee-jerk reaction to misinterpreted data.

We are all familiar with Governor Snyder's lament that Michigan students have earned some of the lowest ACT test scores in the United States. This claim, while marginally true on the surface, is inaccurate. What Governor Snyder has not stated is that Michigan is one of only seven states which mandates that all students must take the ACT during their junior year in high school. Most states do not force their Special Education, ELL, EI, and other students with learning disabilities to take this national assessment. Do you think our high school ACT scores would increase if special needs students were exempt from participating in this assessment? Does the governor's stated assertion hold up under additional scrutiny?

While reading HB 4625, HB 4626, HB 4627, and HB 4628 I was struck by vague language in each of these bills. This worries me and other professional educators. If you feel, as a legislative body, that a new bill must be written, isn't it your duty to also ensure that the rights of Michigan's professional public educators are also protected?

House Bill 4625, Article II; Section 3 (1) states "the controlling board shall provide the probationary teacher with a definite written statement as to whether his **OR HER** work has been satisfactory." The word "satisfactory" is not included in the proposed evaluation system of Highly Effective, Effective, Minimally Effective, and Ineffective. This one word is open to interpretation, as it does not correspond to the measures proposed in HB 4627. The consistency of the language written in each of these bills is of crucial importance.

House Bill 4627, Section 1428, B, i, A states "Evidence of student achievement, which shall be the predominant factor in assessing an employee's performance." What student assessments will be used? Will national assessments such as the Plan Test, ACT, or SAT be valid assessments? Will each school district design an assessment for their students? This would be dangerous as a teacher may be classified as Ineffective in one district, but if they were an employee in another district, they may be classified as Effective. With over 500 school districts in the State of Michigan, this is a valid concern. Will the State of Michigan design a test for each grade level? Who will write the tests? When will they be available? Who will pay for the tests, the State of Michigan or the local school district? Who will pay for the scoring of the tests? Will new assessments replace, or be in addition to, current assessments? Aren't we running the risk of testing our children to death? China and Japan have recently discovered the harm of continuous testing.

In HB 4627, Section 1428, (ii) – What are clear, significant, and relevant contributions? What are the normal expectations for an individual in his peer group? Who will decide the measures for each of these objectives? Wouldn't you agree that the denotative and connotative definitions for each of these can and will vary for each and every evaluator? Can these individual definitions be the determining factor in a teacher receiving Effective or Mildly Effective an evaluation? Is this fair to the teacher who is evaluated? How many teachers can be classified as going above the normal expectations for an individual in his or her peer group and having demonstrated a record of exceptional performance? Won't this bill make it impossible for more than a handful of teachers in each school to attain a rating of "Effective"?

There seems to be a rush to paint public school teachers as lazy villains who hide behind the current tenure laws. This is a false assumption. Is there a small percentage of teachers who need to improve their professional skills? Yes, there are. Just as there are plumbers, lawyers, doctors, and, not to be disrespectful, local, state, and national legislators who need to improve their professional skills. Let us not forget that there is a current system for the removal of ineffective unionized teachers. The responsibility for this action lies not only with the union, but also with the building and school district administration.

Do not attack a valued profession because of the actions of a miniscule number of "ineffective" teachers. Unionized professional educators are not the enemy, we do not want "ineffective" teachers in the classroom any more than do parents, local school boards, and legislators. But, these bills are not the solution to this problem.

Instead, we must focus on a strict adherence to PA 4, PA 336, and PA 451 which adequately address the role of a professional educator in the classroom and which currently protect the interests of the children, parents, and school community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

David J. Oravec

