

The Honorable Lisa Lyons  
Chair  
Committee on Education  
Michigan House of Representatives  
124 N. Capitol  
Lansing, MI 48909

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the package of bills addressing teacher and leader evaluation.

My name is Julie Durham, and I am the Director of Research and Data Initiatives for the Michigan Association of Public School Academies. I currently direct evaluations of over 900 teachers and 30 school leaders as part of a federally funded Teacher Incentive Grant. The grant is designed to determine if incentives paid to teachers impact their effectiveness and in turn, student achievement. Now in its fourth iteration, TIF recipients are *still* determining the most beneficial ways to evaluate and observe teachers and leaders.

No one argues that parents deserve some assurance that those responsible for their children's education are effective at their job. Taxpayers need to know that their children are being served to their greatest potential. Great educators want effective evaluation, feedback and coaching. However, the current bill, as introduced, truncates a school's ability to ensure this potential by over prescribing, with a heavy hand, the ways in which a school should go about evaluating teachers.

I would like to point out the progression of requirements for teacher observation specially, as it relates to the over legislation of the evaluation system. The original tenure bill allowed for a variety of locally developed tools. The legislation allowed existing protocols, as long as these protocols were consistent with the state evaluation tool. All tools must:

- Include a review of the teacher's lesson plan and student engagement during the observation.
- The observation does not need to be for an entire class period.
- Follow any protocols established within the specific tool.
- Observations are to be conducted multiple times throughout the year.

The MCEE went a bit further and outlines specific criteria that a local tool must meet in order for a school to opt out of the state selected model. MCEE provides eight specific guidelines including:

- How the observations will be conducted; by whom they will be performed; what their training is; and a system for tracking, managing and distributing evaluation data.
- A process for creating summative ratings.
- A plan for offering direct support.
- A process for continuous improvement and quality monitoring.

The current bill includes all of these characteristics and then almost doubles the criteria.

This effectively strips the ability of schools to use innovative or new evaluation systems and may force some to abandon existing and highly effective systems they currently use. Many of the additional requirements concern the development and use of a new tool and the information generated by that tool. *It is important that tools be:*

- Based on research of effective teaching practices.
- Implemented consistently with all teachers at a school.
- Implemented by well trained leaders and peer observers.
- Used to improve the competencies and effectiveness of teachers.

However, the additional requirements of this bill, including required approval of all modifications of existing tools, and conducting validity tests, are burdensome enough that schools will likely lean toward existing and established observation tools. Many of the points in the bill outline criteria for implementation and follow up rather than identifying what a good observation and evaluation protocol is. These requirements don't allow for innovation or modifications without extensive red tape. Based on feedback from our grant schools, the more removed the school staff is from the evaluation system, the less it means to them. Teacher and leader buy in has a measureable impact on the ability of the process to increase teacher effectiveness, which should be the ultimate goal of any evaluation system.

An administrator or school leader should be able to, with input from their teachers, create an observation tool and evaluation system that reflects the ever-changing needs of their school. Just as a doctor assesses his/her patient according to their condition and health-related goals, a school should also be able to focus and change their observation tools based on the specific needs of their school and teachers, and advance the tools beyond the constraints of the current language.

As with the observation protocol, the bill also outlines specifics in student assessments that inadvertently limit the choice of available student tests to a few specific vendors. Student achievement measures, though certainly a key piece in teacher effectiveness, shouldn't be developed in the context of how to best serve teacher evaluation purposes, but under the premise of what is best for students.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Daniel Quisenberry, President  
Julie Durham, Director of Research and Data Initiatives