

**PUBLIC HEARING:
Teacher Evaluation/Effectiveness
Wednesday, June 8, 2011 at 9:30 a.m.
Hearing Room #1/North Office Building
Testimony from Kathleen deLaski**

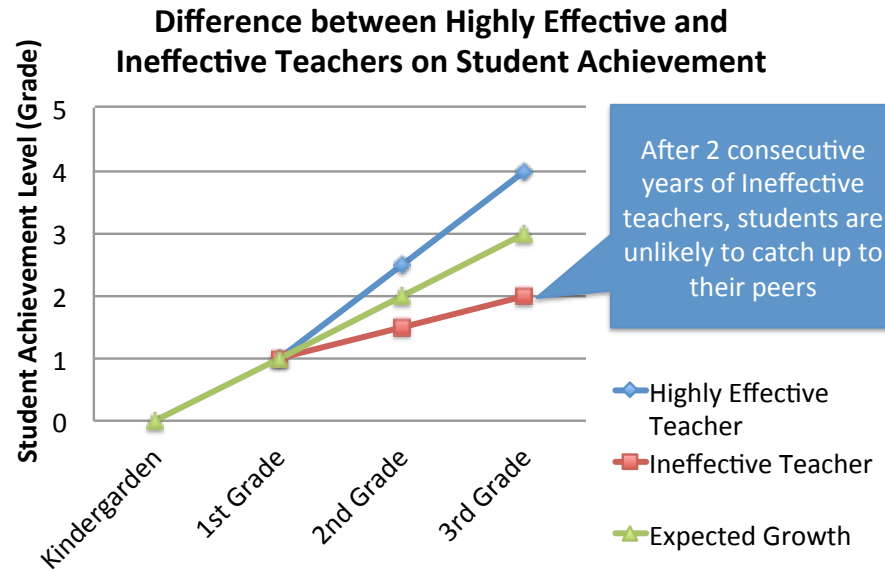
Teachers – A School System’s Most Powerful Resource: Testimony on Teacher Evaluations and supporting Teacher Effectiveness

I’m Kathleen deLaski, national engagement director for StudentsFirst. As most of you know, Michelle Rhee, former Chancellor of DC Public Schools, started a movement to transform public education last fall. We have 325,000 members across the country who share our belief that students’ interests are not at the forefront of our education policy making and budget decisions, and that’s largely why our education system is broken. 14,000 of those members are here in Pennsylvania. You may have heard from them or you likely soon will.

StudentsFirst believes that teacher quality is the most important lever for school reform. Research tells us that teachers are the most powerful school based influence on student achievement in our classrooms, and most of us would be hard pressed to imagine where our own lives would be without their influence.

In fact, Stanford economist Eric Hanushek’s study on teacher quality shows that while a highly effective teacher can create 1.5 years of academic growth for a student in a single year, ineffective teachers create on average only 0.5 years of growth; students with highly effective teachers learn 3x as much as those with ineffective teachers.

The Impact of Highly Effective Teachers on Student Achievement



Source: Hanushek, Eric A. 2010. "The Difference is Teacher Quality." In *Waiting for "Superman": How We Can Save America's Failing Public Schools*, edited by Karl Weber (81–100). New York: Public Affairs.

While there are efforts underway in the state to address this issue, Pennsylvania was given a “D” by the National Council on Teacher Quality in 2009 for its ability to identify effective teachers. Identifying and retaining highly effective teachers must be the primary objective of a school system seeking to educate the children of Pennsylvania, and teacher evaluation systems based primarily on objective student achievement data allow states and districts to do just that.

There are a number of reforms states can implement that value the profession of teaching by focusing on their impact on student achievement, and I want to share a few that we believe are most important.

Teacher Evaluations:

Reform Teacher Evaluations to Raise Accountability and Reward Success

When Michelle Rhee started as Chancellor of DC Public Schools, 8 percent of kids performed at grade level proficiency in math. However, if you looked at the performance evaluations of adults in the system at the same time, you would have seen that 95 percent of teachers were being rated as doing a good job.

A 2009 study surveying 15,000 teachers nationwide found that less than 1% of teachers receive evaluations that are unsatisfactory.

When the sole function of a school system is to educate children, how can you have a system in which the vast majority of adults are running around thinking they are doing a great job while simultaneously producing such dismal results for kids?

This dynamic is not fair to students, families, or teachers, who deserve an accurate assessment of their impact after pouring their sweat into children's achievement every day. Teaching is an incredibly complex skill that is not easy to assess, and no evaluation will be perfect. However, research shows that meaningful performance evaluations promote teacher effectiveness by identifying effective teachers to promote or reward and underperforming teachers to target with professional development. Nothing should stop districts from implementing good evaluations and improving them every year with ongoing feedback.

Pennsylvania requires districts use a state-provided, uniform rating form to evaluate teachers and we support that requirement. However, the state does not require that any objective evidence of student learning be included, severely limiting the effectiveness of this evaluation system.

A Positive Step for Pennsylvania Schools - Adding Student Achievement Growth to Teacher Evaluations

If the purpose of education is to give children the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed, then it only makes sense to measure where that is happening in our classrooms. Until Pennsylvania includes objective measurements of student achievement growth in teacher evaluations, it will be incredibly difficult to identify and reward teachers who are doing an outstanding job.

We strongly believe that any good evaluation will use multiple measures that incorporate valid student growth data and other factors that demonstrate command of teaching and learning. Because our underlying philosophy is grounded in research telling us that teachers are the single most important school-based factor in a student's academic achievement, we know that the largest single component of a teacher's evaluation should be based on objective measures of academic progress. For that reason, we recommend that 50 percent of the evaluation be based on student growth, as measured on standardized tests. This weighting reflects the significance of a teacher's ability to move any student forward academically.

Many states across the country, including Tennessee, Florida, Colorado, and the District of Columbia have put into place teacher and principal evaluation systems where 50% of the evaluation is based on student achievement. Just last week, Nevada passed this into law as well and Ohio and Michigan are far along in considering 50% bills this year. Pennsylvania has an opportunity to join these states on the leading edge of ensuring all students have an effective teacher at the front of the classroom. As you work to develop your plan, we are glad to serve as a resource with tools, rubrics, and research to help you develop your plan. Strong

evaluation systems are the foundation for the other reforms that are essential so that school districts can better recruit, identify, reward and retain great teachers.

Separate Teacher Evaluations from Collective Bargaining

With Pennsylvania poised to begin working to incorporate student achievement into new teacher evaluations, I would argue that in order to create evaluation systems that drive student achievement growth, going one step further would help Pennsylvania to be even more successful: separate teacher evaluations from collective bargaining.

To be most effective, teacher evaluations must be implemented with fidelity as part of larger accountability systems. These systems have to differentiate between teachers, reward the most successful, and swiftly improve or move out those who are not successful. This will be very difficult to do unless teacher evaluations are separated from the collective bargaining process.

Union leaders are legally obligated to represent the interests of all of their members, including ineffective members, yet the majority of rank and file teachers deeply value having strong colleagues and a culture of excellence. Their ethic of high standards becomes lost in the process when the union dedicates time, effort, and money fighting for the lowest performers, as required by their contract with *all* teachers. Simply put, labor leadership has a conflict of interest when it comes to evaluation of their members, and it does not lead to rigorous evaluations that promote reflection and improvement.

Other Teacher Effectiveness Policies

While not the main topic of this hearing, many of the policies below are being implemented across the country to promote teacher effectiveness.

Elimination of Last-in-First-Out Policies

Currently, the Pennsylvania legislature is considering a bill (SB 612 / HB 855) that could end LIFO in Pennsylvania. We urge you to support this legislation in its strongest form, prohibiting the use of seniority in making layoff decisions and instead basing them on performance measures.

With the current fiscal crisis the nation faces, we are at risk of losing some of the best teachers in the nation. States are making major cuts in education to close severe budget gaps, resulting in significant teacher lay-offs. In most jurisdictions, lay-offs are based on seniority, an outdated and bureaucratic practice known as “last in, first out” (LIFO). LIFO means that the last teacher hired has to be the first teacher fired, regardless of how good teachers are. LIFO is bad policy that hurts children, and there are three main reasons I support its elimination.

- First, research indicates that when districts with LIFO conduct lay-offs, they end up firing some of their most highly effective educators. These are the memorable and powerful teachers that students remember for the rest of their lives, and we lose more of them with every LIFO layoff.
- Second, LIFO policies increase the number of teachers that districts have to lay off. Because junior teachers make less money, districts have to lay off more of them in order to fill their budget gaps.
- Finally, LIFO disproportionately and negatively impacts the highest need schools. These schools have larger numbers of new teachers, who are the first to lose their jobs in a lay-off. High-income areas have more stable systems and fewer newer teachers, and they are often untouched by budget cuts. Meanwhile low income, high need schools where a large percentage of the staff are newer teachers, are decimated.

By eliminating LIFO, Pennsylvania would help to hold districts, boards of education and state legislators accountable. By disallowing it across the state, Pennsylvania will be able to save many great teachers during the economic recovery.

Implement Performance Pay – With Accountability

StudentsFirst strongly supports performance pay to reward the most effective educators. However, in most professions employees expect these rewards to come with high accountability for their work.

Legislators in Pennsylvania could choose to bring teaching in alignment to other professions by bringing this same expectation to education. Performance pay is only possible by differentiating between the level of performance among different teachers, and it makes sense that performance pay should come hand-in-hand with higher accountability. However, it will be very difficult to hold teachers accountable with current tenure provisions in place and without an effective evaluation system

Eliminate Tenure

While controversial, states must have a conversation about what value tenure adds to our school systems.

Our point is simple: there is no correlation between tenure and student achievement. The policy does not put students first, and with federal due process laws in place, tenure is no longer necessary to sufficiently protect teachers from arbitrary dismissal. Whether you are able to eliminate it or otherwise redefine it to separate tenure from personnel decisions, you can disempower this outdated practice that has no correlation to improved student achievement.

In Pennsylvania, teachers are essentially granted automatic tenure after just 3 years in the classroom. Once a teacher has tenure, that teacher essentially has a job for life regardless of performance, making the practice of tenure a barrier to separating teachers who are ineffective and unable to improve.

As much as we must acknowledge and reward effective educators, it should be virtually impossible for an ineffective teacher to remain in the classroom. Pennsylvania's policies must address the fact that even after just one year, an ineffective educator can set a child behind for years to come. This also puts a greater burden on subsequent teachers who are working so hard to catch that student up while advancing their other students to higher levels. As Stanford economist Eric Hanushek's study on teacher quality indicates, even if we replace just the bottom six to ten percent of teachers with average teachers, we will see dramatic results in student achievement. Tenure has come to feel like an entitlement over the decades, and, as such, is a difficult political issue, but it ties the hands of even the most skillful school leaders as they try to keep their best teachers in the classroom. As we have learned more about the importance of teacher effectiveness, it has become very clear that if we put students first, good teachers will be protected by the quality of their work and their impact on children.

StudentsFirst understands that proposing to eliminate tenure outright is incredibly difficult politically. But there are many ways to address the tenure issue to ensure that all personnel decisions are made in the best interests of students.

1. **Reduce Tenure's Impact Through Mutual Consent:** Under mutual consent, both the teacher and the principal must agree for the teacher to work in a school. Without it, teachers are often forced on schools in the event of a school closing or

staff reconstitution for failing schools (in which staff have to reapply for their jobs, but are often still owed a job somewhere in the system if the principal does not rehire them. This does not bode well for school or teacher performance, and mutual consent is in the best interest of schools and children.

Let me describe how this played out in my hometown, Washington, DC, where the teachers union and the district agreed to mutual consent when Michelle Rhee was Chancellor. One year we decided to reconstitute two of the large comprehensive high schools in the city. All teachers were required to reapply for their positions, which was great for those schools. However, as a system, we still owed those who weren't rehired at that school a job. This means that the upwards of 200 teachers from those schools would have to be forced on the 10 other comprehensive high schools in the city. In essence none of them could hire the candidates they thought were best, since we had to force these folks on the schools. It meant that the schools that were barely better than the worst were being disadvantaged by having teachers from failing schools forced on them.

The state can ensure this dynamic is avoided by mandating mutual consent placements, including the provision that if a teacher cannot find a mutual consent placement within a reasonable timeframe (such as 30-60 days) then that person is placed on unpaid leave from the district until the time that they can find a mutual consent placement.

2. Reduce Tenure's Impact in Teacher Evaluations: You can also fight tenure's negative impacts through a strong evaluation system that works in tandem with higher accountability measures that enforce it. This would separate ineffective teachers regardless of tenure on a timeline that responds to the urgency parents are calling for now.

A New Energy Coming From Voters

As StudentsFirst considers all that is happening in education reform right now, what heartens us most is the new level of energy people are bringing to this effort. As you well know, the nuts and bolts of this are not sexy, yet families are actively and vocally digging into the most difficult problems in education that are causing the US to fall from the top third among developed countries to the bottom third. It's a little bit like what we see happening with the deficit in Washington. We are finally waking up and saying "We can not ignore this. We cannot mortgage our children's futures because we are being asked to protect a broken status quo."

Do you know that out of every state in the country, we have found the highest level of engagement among our members in Pennsylvania? We have tapped into a vein here and we are very excited to work with you to develop your vision for reform.

This is not about attacking teachers, this is not about attacking unions, it is about reorienting our strategies to take student achievement into account as we plan how to do best by children.

I'd like to end by describing a teacher effectiveness model that is working in Pennsylvania. In fact experts, superintendents and funders are flocking from all over the country to see it in operation, because a group of schools in Philadelphia, allowed to operate outside most of the union and district rules, is getting some of the very best results in the country turning around failing public schools. The school is called Mastery. Mastery runs district schools and charter schools and are educating 5000 Philadelphia students. I had the chance last fall to tour one of the schools and we were allowed to see their teacher evaluation and professional development process in motion. They have built a system based on 4 levels of teachers, who are identifying by a rigorous observation and student achievement model and are paid at a graduated level according to their evaluation and performance. This is the future of teaching and where it is being allowed to happen, it's a system that finally puts students first.