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A Union of Professionals

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Testimony to the Senate Committee on Education Regarding Teacher Development and Evaluation

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On behalf of our 65,000 members, thank you for affording us the opportunity to address an issue of critical importance to them and to the students they serve. Teachers, as professionals with deep knowledge and experience of good teaching practice, need to play a significant role in shaping the discussion about how good practice should be developed and measured. Too often, in the name of “accountability,” teachers have been excluded or marginalized from discussions about how and what they should teach. We believe that, if we are really to improve teaching practice and student outcomes, teacher engagement and indeed leadership in the discussion will make the difference.

Our testimony today will address all the elements of “teacher quality” outlined in the committee's agenda for this hearing, but our primary focus will be on teacher development and evaluation. As you will see, we have specific reasons for insisting that these two elements must be addressed together, not separately.

Our members know that teacher evaluations must foster both professional growth for teachers and improved student learning. However, much of the discussion around teacher evaluation fails to address how teachers can best meet the needs of their students, given the constantly changing and increasingly demanding world in which they live. Today, more than ever, students must master deeper content and be competent critical thinkers and problem solvers.

The members of both our national affiliate, the 1.5-million-member American Federation of Teachers, and Texas AFT have committed themselves to work toward creating, identifying, and sharing effective models of teacher development and evaluation as they emerge in local experiments throughout the country. To assist local AFT affiliates and their school districts in this work, AFT has developed extensive materials on the collaborative design and implementation of comprehensive teacher development and evaluation systems. Attached, for example, is a two-page summary of what we consider to be the crucial steps in the process, from planning to implementation.

Because our members are committed to a comprehensive, well-rounded model of teacher development and evaluation, they also have resolved to oppose teacher evaluation systems that rely solely or predominantly upon a single measure of student achievement to determine teacher effectiveness. Texas AFT members particularly oppose the use of unproven value-added

methodology in the evaluation of individual teachers. Such models have been studied and deemed inadequate for high-stakes decisions by a wide range of highly credible and authoritative educational researchers. Here are two examples of their conclusions:

Rand Education researchers in "The Promise and Peril of Using Value-Added Modeling to Measure Teacher Effectiveness" (2004): "The research base is currently insufficient for us to recommend the use of value-added methodology for high-stakes decisions regarding employee evaluation and compensation." The Rand research team comprehensively examined the potential of various value-added models to serve as a basis for measuring school and teacher effectiveness. They found that no current value-added methodologies can account for the many variables beyond the current-year teacher's performance that influence student achievement: for example, controlling for student backgrounds, and the criteria for linking particular students to particular teachers.

National Academy of Sciences, Board on Testing and Assessment (2009): In a letter expressing strong concerns about the direction of federal policy, scholars at the National Academy of Sciences said federal policy "places too much emphasis on measures of growth in student achievement (1) that have not yet been adequately studied for the purposes of evaluating teachers and principals and (2) that face substantial practical barriers to being successfully deployed in an operational personnel system that is fair, reliable, and valid." The National Academy of Sciences testing experts added: "The term 'value-added model' (VAM) has been applied to a range of approaches, varying in their data requirements and statistical complexity. Although the idea has intuitive appeal, a great deal is unknown about the potential and the limitations of alternative statistical models for evaluating teachers' value-added contributions to student learning. [The Board of Testing and Assessment] agrees with other experts who have urged the need for caution and for further research prior to any large-scale, high-stakes reliance on these approaches."

Designing an Effective Evaluation System

Any evaluation system that places direct accountability for student outcomes on teachers must be implemented in a way that ensures significant teacher pedagogical authority in producing these outcomes. An effective teacher development and evaluation system measures teachers on the practices that, over time, produce desirable student outcomes, and provides teachers the opportunity to hone effective practices. A teacher evaluation framework should be locally designed, teacher-led, focused on continuous professional development of teachers, account for student learning, define the teaching and learning conditions necessary for high achievement, and ensure due process. The system should be developed and implemented collaboratively with teachers, not imposed on them. Involving those affected by the evaluation system will foster collective responsibility and accountability. Productive, positive labor-management relationships, within structures that support those relationships, are a prerequisite for the design and implementation of improved teacher development and evaluation systems.

An effective teacher evaluation system should be able to identify specific professional development opportunities for teachers that will facilitate student learning. In order to accomplish this, teacher

evaluations should include classroom observations, review of lesson plans, student work, teaching artifacts, and portfolio assessments. The system should also contain support systems and opportunities for professional learning that facilitate the continuous improvement and growth of all teachers. Such opportunities include job-embedded professional development and mentoring and induction programs.

Multiple Growth Measures

Multiple measures provide a more complete picture of a teacher's contribution to student learning and can provide more complete evidence about student learning growth, particularly in non-tested subjects and grades. For example, Teacher A tailors her instruction narrowly to what she believes students need to know for the state standardized test, and spends long hours on test preparation. Teacher B focuses on meeting content standards through rich, engaging lessons and activities that help students develop a deep understanding of the subject. Both teachers have good results on the state test. But which teacher's classroom would you want *your* child in? Clearly, *how* teachers get good test results matters. Teachers of non-tested subjects can demonstrate their students are learning through student performances and projects, portfolios, curriculum-based tests, and classroom assessments performed by teachers. We should be able to know that good student outcomes on standardized tests are the result of good teaching, not a narrow focus on what is tested.

Evaluations should also recognize teachers for collaborating and sharing responsibility for student learning through their participation in Response to Intervention (RtI) teams or other teacher-led efforts to improve student opportunities to succeed. Teachers, counselors, and specialized personnel frequently collaborate to help struggling students, meeting in "triage" or RtI teams. Working together to identify students' needs and set learning objectives for individual students, they also coordinate efforts with the classroom teacher to monitor progress and adjust strategies. Such coordinated efforts keep students from being held back or referred to special education. If credit is given to just one teacher for learning growth and improved test scores, the important contributions of others who had a hand in those improvements go unrecognized. A comprehensive evaluation system should include ways to record the efforts of the staff who contribute to student success. Minutes or notes from team meetings, records of student assessment results, logs of interventions and the results of those interventions, and other relevant information can be collected and used for evaluations of all the participating staff.

Continuous Improvement Model for Professional Development

Multiple measures provide administrators and teachers with more information to improve teaching and learning. However, test results do not provide the teacher with information about the specific practices and instructional strategies that might be used to improve students' understanding of particular concepts. Other measures that involve feedback from evaluators and colleagues--such as classroom observations and analysis of lesson plans, for example--are more helpful in connecting teaching practices to learning objectives the teacher has set. Such additional measures also give evaluators a chance to steer the teacher toward resources available in the school or district to support teacher professional growth.

Campus Inventory

Before an evaluation system can serve as an effective tool, the system must first consider those factors affecting both teaching and learning conditions. Dr. Ed Fuller's research here in Texas has demonstrated that more experienced and appropriately certified teachers continue to be inequitably distributed across schools. The students who struggle the most--heavily concentrated in high-poverty, high-minority, low-performing schools--are disproportionately taught by inexperienced teachers or by teachers who are assigned to teach courses for subjects in which they are not certified. These are significant factors that should not be left out of account in teacher evaluations.

In addition to considering teacher experience and assignments, other contextual factors should also be examined. For instance, what is the size of the class the teacher must instruct? Are there enough textbooks for each student? Does the instructor have the necessary supplies and resources to teach the lesson? Are their structural factors affecting school facilities? A teacher's performance should not be downgraded because of district financial constraints or because of inappropriate assignment decisions of the administration that are beyond their control.

Teacher Compensation, Retention, Dismissal

You cannot have a serious discussion about improved teacher retention without addressing improved teacher pay and benefits. Average Texas teacher pay ranks 48th in the nation measured against salaries for similar occupations within the state--20 percent below pay for jobs demanding similar levels of knowledge and skill. Non-competitive pay is not the only factor that contributes to the departure of roughly 50 percent of new teachers within five years. But it does have an impact. Some years ago the Higher Education Coordinating Board found that it would take a real pay raise of roughly 30 percent to eliminate the shortage of teachers in Texas public schools with appropriate subject-matter expertise in the subjects they are assigned to teach.

In addition to increasing salaries, additional strategies to improve working conditions also serve to retain the best and most experienced teachers. New teachers should have a reduced teaching load, especially those teaching in high-poverty and low-achieving schools. Retired teachers should be encouraged to return to serve as mentors to beginning teachers. Educators should receive additional pay for helping to improve teaching practice and student outcomes by serving as mentors, reviewing or coaching other educators, or achieving National Board Certification.

Teachers in high-need schools also should be allowed more time to plan and work collaboratively. The TEA should establish a Best Educator Practices clearinghouse that allows innovative teachers to share skills and techniques with others throughout the state.

Since 2001, North Carolina has reduced class size in each of its lowest performing schools to 15 for grades K-3, 17 in grades 4-8, and 20 in grades 9-12. This program was carried out not just to improve student achievement in these schools, but also as a result of a statewide survey of teachers and administrators that asked what would be the most effective incentive for teachers to work in

low-performing schools. The number-one response was to lower class size, with 83.7 percent of teachers and 83.1 percent of administrators replying that it would be an effective incentive, exceeding any other proposal, including providing a signing bonus. Not only do class-size limits benefit students' performance, but also they serve as a retention strategy for keeping experienced teachers in the classroom.

Assuring teachers of due-process protection against arbitrary termination decisions is also important to teacher retention. Due process and compliance with teacher contract rights in Texas do not make it hard to dismiss teachers who perform unsatisfactorily. Texas due-process procedures for contested cases are streamlined already, allowing a district to "non-renew" a teacher's term contract in a short span of time, to terminate a contract in the middle of its term, and to "non-renew" a probationary contract in zero days. Of course, most cases are not contested in the first place, if the administrator has actually documented low performance and given the teacher a chance to correct deficiencies.

You don't have to take our word for this assessment of the teacher non-renewal and termination process in Texas. As Jim Walsh, a prominent Texas school-law specialist who represents many of the state's school districts in non-renewal and termination proceedings, has put it: "You hear it said that it's 'impossible' to fire a bad teacher. I don't think that's true in Texas at all...The standard is not that high." Walsh went on to say that school districts seldom lose a contested case of teacher dismissal, and when they do it's typically because they failed to meet even the most elementary standards of fair procedure.

Former education commissioner Shirley Neeley, who also served many years as a district superintendent, emphatically stated the same point in legislative testimony a few years back. To the surprise of some, Dr. Neeley disputed the idea that it's hard to remove teachers who aren't getting the job done. She said: "I get angry when people say, 'Oh, you can't.' Yes, you can. As long as you're not malicious or capricious, you do your documentation, you do your job, there's no excuse for incompetent teachers, or incompetent superintendents, or incompetent principals. They can be removed."

In closing, we again urge you to support promising experiments with teacher development and evaluation that meet the criteria we have outlined, including collaborative design of the experiments as an essential component. We believe that focusing on development and evaluation as parts of one integrated system will move policy and practice away from the fallacy of treating "teacher quality" as some fixed quantity and toward the realistic understanding that "teaching effectiveness" is a dynamic factor that can be improved by the right kind of teacher development and evaluation, for the ultimate benefit of our students.



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Overview of the Design and Implementation Process for a Comprehensive Teacher Development and Evaluation System

Step 1: Establish a collaborative process.

- Create a memorandum of understanding or strategic plan that outlines the process of designing, implementing and aligning the system to professional growth opportunities.
- Identify multiple milestones and benchmarks, the resources needed, and the persons responsible.

Step 2: Conduct a review of the current teacher development and evaluation system.

- Conduct a needs assessment of the district's current teacher evaluation system
- Share the results of the needs assessment with all stakeholders
- Develop a plan to address all issues identified by the needs assessment

Step 3: Define professional teaching standards.

- Establish an inclusive process that involves all stakeholders (the state, the district and union leaders, along with administrators, teachers, parents and students).
- Ensure that the standards for both teaching practice and student learning reflect what you value.

Step 4: Determine what evidence you need to collect in order to assess how a teacher's performance measures up to the professional standards.

- For each indicator in the standards, establish an appropriate measure or set of measures that will allow you to determine an individual teacher's performance.
- Multiple measures are necessary to collect evidence for various standards, including student learning (e.g., classroom observations, lesson plans, student work, test scores).

Step 5: Define evidence and levels of competence by subject/grade level.

- Develop performance rubrics for all teachers (e.g., elementary teachers, middle school social studies teachers, high school math teachers).
- Determine the evidence needed to assess student learning for all teachers. (Keep in mind that most teachers cannot be evaluated using test scores.)
- Determine the evidence needed to establish levels of teaching practice.

Step 6: Determine the role of professional context in the teacher evaluation system.

- Identify the teaching and learning conditions to be assessed.
- Develop a procedure for assessing the school's teaching and learning conditions, and for using the data for improvement and/or reform purposes.
- Determine how teaching and learning conditions will be considered in a teacher's evaluation.

Step 7: Determine the development and evaluation system's process and procedures (i.e., decide *who*, *what* and *when*).

- Determine how teachers will be evaluated, given feedback and provided targeted support based on their performance reviews.
- Develop systems of support for new/probationary teachers using their evaluation results.
- Develop ways to collect evidence from novice teachers and from experienced teachers, and how those ways might differ (e.g., focus on teaching practice for newer teachers, focus on student learning growth for more advanced teachers).



- Develop the processes and procedures for all teachers’ evaluations (e.g., should *all* teachers be evaluated every year, and should *all* types of evidence be collected for them every year?).

Step 8: Determine appropriate procedures for collecting and evaluating evidence.

- Ensure that teachers are active participants in the process, and that the process is transparent.
- Design collection procedures that enhance the use of evidence for both teacher development and evaluation.
- Determine what constitutes *sufficient* evidence (e.g., are two classroom observations enough?).
- Ensure that those who are collecting and interpreting evidence (such as observers, evaluators and administrators) are appropriately trained and calibrated to ensure fairness, accuracy and credibility.

Step 9: Decide how to combine the evidence for formative and summative purposes.

- Consider issues of weighting, overall scoring and standard setting.
- Develop procedures to ensure the evidence collected was appropriate.
- Determine method for combining evidence—conjunctive, compensatory, complementary or blended approach.

Step 10: Decide how to incorporate evidence collected on individual teachers into unique, targeted, specific growth plans.

- Identify who will need to meet with the teachers to discuss evaluation results and what the evidence says about the teachers’ growth needs (e.g., administrator, curriculum supervisor, mentor, coach, master teacher, other).
- Determine what supports, resources and information will be offered to teachers to help them improve.

Step 11: Decide the supports, interventions and consequences required as a result of the evaluation.

- Set standards for interventions and consequences that are the results of evaluation ratings.
- Provide for appeals of evaluation ratings using a simple and efficient process (if not part of normal grievance procedures).
- Develop data-tracking systems to review the effectiveness of the development and evaluation system.

Step 12: Evaluate the system regularly.

- Establish an oversight board with the power to collect and evaluate information to determine the validity of the system along multiple dimensions.
 - *Differentiating* among high-performing and low-performing teachers;
 - Capturing evidence that allows for *accurate* assessment of an individual teacher’s performance on all standards for his or her grade level and subject; and
 - Ensuring *fairness* and *reliability* (i.e., that evidence is collected and evaluated in the same way every time).