

**Pennsylvania House Education Committee
Public Hearing
HB 1980 (Aument)—Teacher Evaluations
Testimony for Valerie Braman, AFT Pennsylvania**

Good Afternoon to Chairman Clymer, Chairman Roebuck, and members of the House Education Committee. Thank you for permitting me to testify before you today. I am Valerie Braman representing the American Federation of Teachers/PA and am a proud member of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

I have been a classroom teacher for 9 years at Kensington High School in the Kensington section of Philadelphia. I chose to teach in this school that was labeled “failing” because it had not, until the 2010-2011 school year, made AYP. I saw an opportunity to become a member of staff whose goal was to greatly improve student achievement. Our success was brought about through the hard work, professionalism, collaboration and dedication of the entire school community. I began there as a classroom teacher, became English Department leader and then the school’s Instructional Reform Facilitator, basically the in-school teaching coach and mentor to teachers.

My responsibilities included supporting the teaching staff in planning and developing lessons, building relationships with students, visiting classrooms and providing feedback, co-teaching and demonstrating lessons, facilitating lesson study, analyzing data, and looking at student work in Professional Learning Communities.

For the past four years, I have also been a National Trainer in the AFT’s Educational Research & Dissemination program which is a nationally renowned professional development program, and I help write, facilitate, and train other facilitators in research-based Professional Development, focusing on how to work with educators as adult learners to improve teaching and learning.

I give you my background because I believe that my work experience qualifies me to speak as a practitioner on the subject at hand today, teacher evaluation.

I'll begin with the purpose for evaluating teachers. The purpose for evaluating teachers should be to help improve teacher practice through fostering excellent teaching and nurturing teacher talent which will ultimately improve student learning. If we agree on that, I think we do, then I think we can also agree that:

- Teacher evaluations should not be a tool to just focus on finding, labeling, and getting rid of so-called “bad” or “failing” teachers. This will not improve student achievement.
- Teacher evaluations should not just identify the “bad” or failing teachers, without a comprehensive and integrated standards-based approach to teacher evaluation, growth, and development. This will not improve student achievement.
- Teacher evaluations should not be a tool used solely for punitive measures. This will not improve student achievement.
- Teacher evaluations should not be based upon unbalanced and sometimes inaccurate testing statistics. This will not improve student achievement.

Those were a lot of “should not’s;” let’s focus now on the “shoulds.”

- Teacher evaluation and development programs should identify exemplary teachers, so that they may serve as models, mentors, and coaches for their colleagues. This will improve student achievement.
- Teacher evaluation and development programs should support struggling teachers, and develop a system of support to remediate skills and support their professional growth. This will improve student achievement.
- Teacher evaluation and development programs should ensure that fair and valid employment decisions can be made regarding all teachers participating in the evaluation and development process. This will improve student achievement.
- Teacher evaluation and development programs should be based upon multiple measures of student performance and teacher work, to provide a robust, full picture of the facets and complexities of both student and adult learners. This will improve student achievement.

- Teacher evaluation and development programs should include the training and monitoring of those conducting observations and evaluations to ensure that they have a deep understanding and working knowledge not only of the evaluation forms, but also of the underlying principles of pedagogy, instructional practice, teacher development, and student learning theories.

The overall theme is clear—as professionals, we welcome, in fact, we are eager for opportunities to improve and grow our teaching skill and develop our craft.

Strengthening professional practice through supporting teacher collaboration, mentoring, and coaching, using evaluation as a stepping stone to meaningful professional dialogue and continued development, this would empower us to better meet the goal of improving teaching and learning in our schools. We also support a fair, transparent, and expedient process for dealing with ineffective teachers, in concert with an integrated approach to teacher evaluation and development.

First and foremost, for any system of teacher evaluation to be effective, it must be based upon a set of professional teaching standards, which set forth what teachers should know and be able to do. Those standards cannot be developed in a vacuum, but must bring educators and practitioners into the conversation of what “good” or “effective” teaching looks like, and how it can be discussed (An example that is widely used would be Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching, another would be the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards). Beyond the development and adoption of those standards, a process for ensuring that those standards are both clearly articulated to and understood by the teachers and the evaluators must be developed and implemented, so that all the educators involved in the professional dialogue are able to “speak the same language” and understand expectations. Further, the actual tools that will be used for observations, planning, and evaluations and ratings must be designed and introduced to teachers and evaluators. And, structures and supports for how a teacher may move from one level of “performance rating” to another must also be delineated.

As credentialed, creative professionals who have chosen to devote our lives and work to providing the best opportunities for our students, we as teachers know what good teaching is about-it is about exciting children to explore their world, to learn how it operates, to learn how to express their understanding of it and have respect for others with different opinions. It is to challenge students to acquire more knowledge and use it wisely; it is to provide them with the opportunity to reach their potential intellectually, socially and emotionally. Good teachers have high expectations for their students, use a variety of materials and resources to plan lessons, monitor instruction and assess student learning. Good teachers know the value of collaborating with other teachers, parents and administrators to ensure that their students are successful. Teachers understand that teaching children is not merely pouring content into them, but rather it is motivating them to learn, giving them the support necessary to develop skills and knowledge, and helping them overcome problems and assume responsibility for their actions and their learning.

Teaching is complex; there is no single pedagogy that can meet the needs of every learner. Teachers are complex; they bring to the classroom varying skills and knowledge that are a reflection of their training and experience. Teachers understand the multifaceted nature of teaching and learning. For these reasons, the evaluation process must reflect the complexity of teaching and the skills and knowledge of the teacher. A system focused on truly improving practice and promoting student learning not only creates procedures for assessing individual teachers' knowledge and skills, but also has systems of support that provide for the continuous improvement of all teachers.

This brings me to the idea of "multiple measures," which is a phrase that we see in the proposed language, and a concept that has been highly discussed as of late in education reform circles; but, this is also a concept that has been highly misunderstood and misinterpreted. Student achievement should absolutely comprise a significant component of a teacher's evaluation; however, multiple measures are not merely multiple standardized test scores, as the current language suggests. Students learn in various ways, and evidence of student learning takes on many forms. Evidence of student learning includes: written work; performances; collaborative group work; teacher- and

locally-made assessment results; work scored using a rubric; portfolios; research projects; and standardized tests. Other student outcomes beyond the high-stakes tests must also be taken into account, including: attendance; engagement; commitment; and mastery of 21st century skills. The tests alone represent a narrow portion of what we should be expecting our students to be able to know and do. Better than to rely so heavily on test scores that not only cannot fully provide an accurate picture of student learning, but also were not developed or reliable for the purposes of evaluating teacher performance would be to examine those independent indicators of student learning mentioned earlier.

Multiple measures for teachers, again, cannot consist only of multiple student test scores. These measures must include classroom observation, which cannot be a drive by or snapshot of a portion of a class conducted by an overburdened school leader. A great misconception about the work of teaching is that it happens only “onstage” when one is interacting with students. The research on teacher development and effectiveness is definitive on this point—teaching and learning improves when teachers have the time and space to work with peers to reflect on and hone their craft. Simply, student achievement is directly tied to the amount and quality of “offstage” teacher time spent researching and creating lesson plans and curricular materials, reflecting on practice, planning, analyzing data, and in Professional Development and collaborative work with colleagues. True observation and evaluation for professional growth and support of student learning must consist of ongoing, informal observations and visits to with opportunities for feedback and dialogue between the teacher and observer, and these must take into account all of the facets of a teacher’s work to support student achievement.

I’d also like to broach the topic of context. Individual teachers are in many ways only as good as the system in which they teach. The school’s professional context impacts student learning and teacher efficacy, and must be continually assessed and addressed. We must ask questions about the schools’ learning environments: is the school safe, clean, and orderly? Are books, computers, and other resources available? Do teachers have time to collaborate with their peers? Are class sizes manageable so that teachers can individualize and differentiate instruction? Is there strong leadership that facilitates

collaboration and, as necessary, addresses shortcomings? And, when students have unmet physical, social, and emotional needs that interfere with their ability to thrive academically, we must ensure that these students are provided with the necessary wraparound services they need to achieve. Simply, good, even great, teachers thrive in schools that identify, develop, and support their talent, whereas in a poor teaching environment, good teachers can, and do, languish.

Clearly, there is not a quick fix for ensuring that every classroom, and every student, has an excellent teacher. Quality teaching is the product of knowledge, skill, effort, and a supportive learning environment. It is both an art and a science that can be learned, and must be refined through mentoring, experience, exposure to best practices, and adequate resources.

Just as teachers use multiple forms of data to continually analyze and improve our methods of assessing and supporting students, a system of teacher evaluation should measure and make available data that demonstrates the system is effective at accurately assessing teaching practice, improving teaching practice and improving student learning. Conversely, the data should demonstrate that the system does not systematically privilege or penalize any teacher group (e.g., teachers of standardized tested subjects, special education teachers, teachers of grades and subjects for which there is no test).

An exemplary model of teacher evaluation and development is the Peer Assistance and Review program (PAR), that we began in the Philadelphia School District in the 2010-2011 academic year. PAR is a collaborative program with ongoing leadership between the union and the district that aligns teaching standards, professional development, observation and evaluation systems.

The focus of the PAR program is to support the classroom performance and efficacy of new teachers as they enter our profession and assist them in reaching the highest standards of practice. It is also to help improve the classroom performance and increase student learning by giving intensive classroom support to under performing teachers. The Consulting Teachers, who are considered master teachers, spend many hours in

classrooms coaching, modeling, planning and helping teachers make decisions that impact their lives and the lives of their students. They observe and review the progress of their teachers and in both cases, make retention or dismissal recommendations to a PAR Panel who reviews these recommendations along with the formal observations and recommendations made by the principals.

Further examples of teacher evaluation and development models that are based upon multiple measures of both teacher and student work and growth, and are characterized by ongoing professional dialogue and feedback among teachers and evaluators are the Research Based Inclusive System of Evaluation in Pittsburgh (the RISE program), and the teacher development and evaluation program in New Haven, Connecticut that is now beginning its second year. In both cases, educational practitioners, and the teachers' unions took instrumental roles in helping to develop the systems, and in both cases, there is a balance of shared accountability for student and teacher achievement, supported by appropriate resources. All three of these examples are also characterized by the elements of effective teacher evaluation systems that I have shared with you today.

I'd like to thank you for your time today, and for inviting me to be a part of this conversation. As you continue to consider this proposed legislation, I hope that you will take into account the many points that I have raised, and the questions that I have asked. I am very happy to take any questions that you may have at this time.

- There are elements of an effective teacher evaluation system that I do not see in this bill:
 - What are the actual criteria for the various ratings? (how would I achieve them?)
 - How are teachers involved in the process of evaluation? (PAR)
 - What are the professional standards for teaching and learning conditions—“the inputs?” (teachers’ time, facilities, resources; teacher empowerment, school leadership, professional growth opportunity, school climate and safety)
 - What are systems of PD and support for teachers ID’d as struggling, and also for areas of identified need for schools and districts?
 - What are the actual rating tools that will be used by rating officers? (here, p. 3 line 26-30, tool would be developed by June 30, 2012) The tool must come along with the rating and evaluation system so that it can be fully integrated and understood.
 - What are the measures of student achievement that will be used to determine the ratings for subjects and grade levels not measured by the listed assessments (p. 3 lines 16-25)? Thinking—gym, art... will the state develop standardized gym tests? Choir?