



TESTIMONY ON
TEACHER EVALUATIONS AND
HOUSE BILL 1980

PRESENTED TO
THE HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 3, 2011

BY
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Good morning. I am Kathy Swope, President of the Lewisburg Area School Board, and with me is Dr. Mark DiRocco, Superintendent of the Lewisburg Area School District. Thank you for allowing us to present testimony on behalf of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association on the impact of House Bill 1980 that revises the current system of evaluation for teachers, principals and certain other public school employees.

As a member of the Pennsylvania Teacher and Principal Model Evaluation Project Steering Committee created in 2010 that developed the instrument for Pilot 1, and its offspring, the more recently-formed Teacher Evaluation Committee managed by the Department of Education to oversee Pilot 2, PSBA is supportive of the ongoing work to develop a new evaluation system for teachers and principals that would include the use of multiple measures, and would incorporate value-added factors related to student achievement. The association agrees that the current state evaluation system that categorizes employees as either “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory” does not provide the depth needed to appropriately rate the effectiveness of an employee.

We believe that Pennsylvania’s new system, if carefully developed and clearly implemented, will establish an updated, comprehensive and consistent evaluation that will provide better feedback to educators and school leaders using various measures to reflect their performance. The new system can provide opportunity for teachers and principals to have constructive dialogue about areas of success as well as areas where improvement is needed to ensure that every child in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has an effective teacher in the classroom. **Today our comments will focus on the specifics of the language under HB 1980.**

Use of student performance as an evaluation measure: One of the key pieces of the new system will be the development of the student growth/value-added component in determining an individual teacher’s impact on each student’s academic achievement. PSBA supports the use of a student growth/value-added component, provided that it is fair, valid, properly field tested and used in conjunction with multiple measures as components of the entire evaluation system. In addition, it is critical for evaluators to be fully and adequately trained, and for those who are being evaluated to understand the new process.

It is important to note that Pennsylvania is not alone in seeking this approach. The National Council on Teacher Quality issued a report in October 2011 titled “Trends and Early Lessons on Teacher Evaluation and Effectiveness Policies.” The report found that 23 states currently require that teacher evaluations to include objective evidence of student learning in the form of student growth and/or value-added data, and 17 states have adopted legislation or regulations that specifically require that student achievement and/or student growth be a major consideration in teacher evaluations. In addition, the report concluded that “the policy implications of an evaluation system that truly measures teacher effectiveness are profound. If done well... the consequences could change much of what is now standard practice in the teaching profession by setting the foundation for better targeted policies for struggling teachers, higher standards for teacher preparation programs and fair but rigorous policies for replacing persistently ineffective teachers.” The weight of such performance as a component of the evaluation is matter for the developers of the tool to decide. However, the use of student assessment scores in a teacher evaluation should encourage teachers and not produce the unintended consequence of acting as a disincentive for them to work with struggling students, or in underperforming schools.

Multiple measures/evaluating teachers in non-tested grades/subjects: While we agree that PSSA scores can be an important measure of teacher effectiveness, we also believe that they are just one snapshot of student performance. PSBA supports language in HB 1980 that incorporates the use of multiple measures to determine teacher success. Student achievement should be the primary goal of every school, but excellent education includes growth in areas that may not be measured by PSSAs, Keystone Exams or other standardized tests. Academic progress can be shown through local assessments including written work by students, scientific experiments, demonstrations, performances, and project and portfolios by students related to specific academic standards.

The evaluation tool currently being developed looks beyond test scores to consider such factors as depth and breadth of locally developed lessons, student engagement, and attention to critical thinking skills.

There are no standardized tests for an art or music teacher, a foreign language or family and consumer science teachers. It is difficult to think of a standardized list of comparable measures of performance in certain areas of teaching and learning. Language under HB 1980 broadly states that

PDE must publish a list of approved measures of student achievement that would include “examinations that have been developed or selected by the school district and approved by the department.” While PSBA understands the concept, the language as written is vague and additional guidance is needed.

Evaluation of nonteaching professional employees: HB 1980 also requires similar rating tools to be used in the evaluations of nonteaching professional employees, and this raises questions of what is fair and appropriate in measuring the effectiveness of an employee doing a specific job. Under the School Code, this would include guidance counselors, school nurses, dental hygienists, school librarians and some school secretaries. The bill states that a rating tool will be developed for these employees that would include, among other components, assessment results of all students in the building. While the concept here may be for all professional employees to share some responsibility for student progress, these employees do not have a parallel level of direct impact on instruction to the students they serve. How could a school nurse be evaluated on the success of a student on his latest math exam? The Evaluation Committee’s plan is to develop a separate instrument for non-classroom professional personnel, but the committee will need time to complete these important tasks, but I will address that later in my testimony.

Use of alternative rating tools: PSBA supports the development of the new evaluation system and believes that many school districts will want to use this structure. At the same time, PSBA acknowledges that some school districts have developed their own detailed and rigorous rating tools that meet the approval of the Department of Education. Therefore, PSBA supports provisions under HB 1980 that would allow the continuation of the use of alternative rating tools developed at the local level that would be approved by PDE. The association agrees that schools should be able to continue to use an alternate tool that would be required to meet or exceed the measures of effectiveness established under the new system. This does not mean evaluations will become subjective, unfair or inconsistent across the state because PDE will have the authority to approve or disapprove the criteria. Use of a locally-developed tool that models the framework established by PDE, and that has been approved by PDE, will not detract from the purpose and use of the state evaluation, and like the state tool, should not be subject to issues related to a collective bargaining agreement.

Passing the baton to the State Board of Education: PSBA supports the provision under HB 1980 to pass the baton to the State Board of Education in future years after the new system becomes operational. The work now being done by PDE to create this system began in 2010 and has been extensive and time-consuming. HB 1980 appropriately recognizes that the volunteer committees and staff performing this work are not permanently established, and that provisions must be made for continuing changes that will be necessary. This can efficiently be accomplished by the State Board through amendments to current regulations under Title 22, Chapter 351. The board also may develop standards or regulations for implementation. Giving these duties to the board will allow for more transparency and public input for the new system through the regulatory review process.

Concerns with timeline: Although PSBA shares the urgency to have an effective evaluation system implement in the state, the association has concerns with the timelines under HB 1980 and suggests that specific dates be removed so that the department can move forward as it deems appropriate. Being forced to move according to deadlines set in legislation could inadvertently undermine the system that PDE has moved so methodically to create. In addition, it is important to remember that the department is still working to develop a growth model that reflects the correlation to the effective teaching practices in the instrument, in order to determine the impact at the classroom level, which will ultimately be an important component of the evaluation. Nor have rating tools been created for nonteaching professional employees, and the instrument for principals needs additional modification and testing.

Development of an effective system, that is research-based and respected by educators statewide as valid and reliable, requires appropriate time for rounds of pilot testing, feedback and revisions, and training for evaluators. The committee learned from Pilot 1 that the time for training needed to increase from ½ day to two and a half days. It is essential that no matter what rating tool is used that adequate training be provided to teachers so that any potential anxieties about the new system can be addressed. Questions, comments and suggestions from the field must be considered before the system is operational statewide. Districts that want to develop an alternate form will need time to do so and submit it to PDE in time for review and approval.

The system is still being developed, with the second pilot scheduled to end in June of 2012. I strongly urge the House to allow PDE the time to do it right.

Implementation/collective bargaining issues: As written, some of the language under HB 1980 for implementation is unclear and creates ambiguity. The bill states that following publication in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*, the new tools “shall be used in the rating of *all* professional employees.” Will *all* districts be required to use the new rating tools beginning in 2012-13, or will the use be phased in over years as existing collective bargaining agreements expire? If districts are using old and new rating tools, will loopholes be created regarding issues of discipline or termination? While legislation cannot supersede provisions in a current collective bargaining contract, this legislation should not be open to interpretation. PSBA suggests that the language here be carefully reviewed and clarified regarding the implementation of the new system and the impact on local contracts. The association also offers support for language under HB 1980 that state that provisions of the bill shall not be subject to collective bargaining agreements entered into after the effective date.

In closing, PSBA offers its support for the development of the new rating system, and general support for HB 1980, with suggestions for further consideration of certain specific areas of the legislation. Particularly, in allocating the time necessary to do it right, and create a respected, valid, reliable system of evaluation that achieves the goal of ensuring an effective teacher for every child. Thank you again for considering our comments regarding the bill.