



October 22, 2019

**Representative Curt Sonney
Representative James Roebuck Jr.
Pennsylvania State Capital
501 North 3rd Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120**

Thank you Representatives Sonney and Roebuck for giving me the opportunity to offer my thoughts related to House Bill 751. My name is Dr. Alyssa Ford-Heywood. I am currently employed with the Pittsburgh Public Schools as the Director of Performance Management where I oversee the evaluation systems for teachers and other educators (i.e. non-teaching professionals and school leaders) and believe that my work in this area has allowed me to obtain insight about how the proposed changes to the educator evaluation system(s) could impact students and staff in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) is in its second cycle of implementing an alternate evaluation system that has been approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) through June 2020. The evaluation system was developed as a result of an investment of time and financial resources of the district, as well as a collaborative commitment between the district and the Pennsylvania Federation of Teachers (PFT) to develop a growth focused evaluation system for the district's educators. PPS believes that the current structure as reflected in our approved evaluation tool is most aligned to the needs of PPS' students and staff.

Upon reviewing the newly proposed legislation introduced by the General Assembly of Pennsylvania that would modify the existing evaluation model in PA, PPS wishes to elevate concerns related to the increased percentage of the observation component (i.e. increasing from 50% to 70%), a perceived risk of skewed performance level results and the potential loss of information that informs the student experience as a result of the proposed elimination of the elective data component. A comprehensive review of these issues is detailed below.

Office of Human Resources

Alyssa Ford-Heywood,
PhD
Director of Performance
Management

341 S. Bellefield Avenue
Room
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Afordheywood1@pghschools.org
Phone: 412-529-3484
Fax: 412-622-8560

Parent Hotline:
412-529-HELP (4357)
www.pghschools.org
www.discoverpps.org

1. *Increase in the observation component*

The district does not support changing the weight of the observation component from 50% to 70% because we believe that this model gives disproportionate weight to teacher performance while minimizing the use student growth scores as a metric for teacher assessment. Specifically, we maintain that the proposed change could dampen the impact of student achievement outcomes by giving an even greater weight to the observation results. While we recognize that teacher practice as demonstrated through observation is an important aspect of effectiveness, it is the district's belief that observation results should not be inflated in a way that completely discounts the impact of student performance outcomes as measured by growth scores. As such, the district wants to also ensure that the contributions that teachers have on student growth and achievement are adequately reflected in their

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evaluation model and thus believe that the professional practice and student outcome components should remain at their existing percentages.

Further, as a large urban district with achievement disparities, Pittsburgh is working hard to improve outcomes for students and acknowledges that there is more work to do in terms of student growth. Similarly, it stands to reason that in order to achieve the outcomes that we aspire to make with our students, that some of our educators may also have growth to make in terms of their own practice and thus should not all be expected to achieve at the highest levels of performance.

2. *Skewed Distributions of Teacher Performance Ratings Clustering at the Distinguished Level*

It should be noted that in Pittsburgh where we have experienced challenges in growing student achievement and closing the achievement gap that our data (2018-19 summary rating results) shows that more than 98% of our teachers were rated as either distinguished or proficient. Within this same year, less than 2% of teachers within the district were rated in the two lower performance levels (*i.e. Needs Improvement and Failing*).

Specifically, when applying the newly proposed criteria to Pittsburgh's data, the district finds that there is an even higher risk that higher percentages of the district's teachers will move into the distinguished category. This suggests that student outcomes, as reflected in the current evaluation model may not unfairly impact teacher outcomes in Pittsburgh Public Schools. The district is concerned that if increasingly higher percentages of teachers move into this category; the distinguished rating becomes potentially devalued.

As a district working to improve and accelerate student outcomes, it is believed that a distinguished rating, should be the result of having an impact on student outcomes. In order for this performance rating category to be meaningful (particularly in districts serving high need students), evaluation models should include sufficient student growth or achievement metrics.

3. *Elimination of the Elective Data Component*

Another concern that the district has related to Senate Bill No. 751, is the perceived supplanting of the elective data component (15%) from the model. Pittsburgh values student voice and uses the Tripod Student Survey to assess the quality of student experiences. The district believes that this information is useful in improving teacher performance and ultimately impacting student outcomes. The removal of the elective data component potentially threatens

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the district's opportunity to gain valuable insight about students' experiences with individual teachers' practice.

In summary, PPS has a significant investment in the district's current evaluation structure, as well as a fundamental belief that teachers and other educators are influential in moving student outcomes. As a result of this investment, the district hopes to obtain assurance from the legislature that Pittsburgh will be able to continue to receive approval to implement a system that honors the above values.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and attention to this testimony.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Ford-Heywood, PhD
Director of Performance Management

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