



**Testimony of the
Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA)**

**Public Hearing Regarding
SB 751 and HB 1607**

**Presented to the
House Education Committee
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**By
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Good morning Chairman Sonney, Chairman Roebuck and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Rich Askey and I'm the President of the PA State Education Association (PSEA).

Thank you for inviting PSEA to testify on SB 751 and HB 1607 – two important pieces of legislation that PSEA is proud to have worked on in collaboration with Sen. Aument and Rep. Topper. We strongly support the bills for reasons I will briefly enumerate in a few moments. But first I want to express my sincere gratitude to Sen. Aument, his staff, and Rep. Topper for their thoughtful and deliberative approach to correct the evaluation system created by Act 82 of 2012. Their commitment to an inclusionary approach has shown us all that we can come together to solve problems—even if we have differing perspectives. Thank you for your attention and commitment to improve the educator evaluation system.

Accompanying me today is my friend and colleague Rachael Curry, a high school math teacher in the Red Lion School District in York County. We wanted Rachael to be here so you could have the perspective of two different types of educators. For 25 years, I was a music teacher with most of my career spent in the Harrisburg School District. I'm what they refer to as a “non-data available” teacher because there aren't standardized test scores associated with my content area. Rachael, on the hand, is a “data available” teacher as she provides instruction in both Algebra I and geometry. We both taught and were evaluated under the rating system prior to Act 82 and the current evaluation system. Given the importance of this issue and the scope of the bill before you, we both wanted to make ourselves available for discussion and questions from all of you.

SB 751 and HB 1607 represent two years of conversations and compromises to arrive at the product before you today. The bills include the feedback of numerous education stakeholders who proactively made themselves part of the process.

Working with Sen. Aument and his local superintendents, as well as Rep. Topper, we tried to identify problems and provide real solutions that could work for all of us – some solutions even coming from educators in the field today. There are four components of this bill I want to briefly highlight for you and then I will turn it over to Rachael for a few comments.

1. The importance of reducing standardized testing’s weight in the system

– It comes as no surprise to anyone that PSEA has been deeply concerned by the trend toward over testing in our schools. These tests are a terrible indicator of what a student truly learns and are an even worse indicator of an educator’s performance. What we’ve discovered since 2012 is that student achievement data for an entire school building has overshadowed the performance of individual educators, causing artificially *inflated* or *deflated* scores. As a result, great teachers in challenging school buildings often times have lower ratings than struggling teachers in higher performing buildings. This is unfair to both—it is mathematically impossible for the teacher in the challenging school cannot achieve a distinguished rating, and the struggling teacher doesn’t receive the support or improvement plans they need to become better at their craft. As an educator, especially one in a non-tested area, that’s difficult to accept. Recalibrating the weights under the bills will help to resolve these issues. The observations of administrators will have greater influence on the system, but the influence will come under the umbrella of instructional practice – the right priority for this rating system. All educators will have a pathway to a distinguished rating and people who

should be on improvement plans will mathematically be able to receive them under a 70/30 weighted system.

2. **Recognizing the impact of poverty** – Research dating back to 1966 demonstrates that family economic status is the strongest predictor of a student’s performance in the classroom. In 2014, Dr. Ed Fuller at Penn State University concluded that the building level score or school performance profile (SPP), is “more accurate at identifying the percentage of economically disadvantaged students in a school rather than identifying the effectiveness of a school.”¹ This does not mean that these students cannot succeed, because they can. I have seen it happen in my 25 years at Harrisburg. It simply means that we must recognize—and control for—the impact of poverty in our school buildings. While PSEA continues to maintain that there is a huge difference between “school quality measures” (i.e. the SPP) and “indicators of teacher quality” (i.e. the Danielson domains), the bill improves the SPP by including a modest “challenge multiplier” based on the population of economically disadvantaged students in a school building. The challenge multiplier will account for some of the relationship between the school quality measure and the percent economically disadvantaged students in a school building.
3. **Not limiting “distinguished” ratings** – Proponents of Act 82 in 2012 theorized that the new system would recognize and support the best and brightest teachers. Any educator or administrator can tell you that did not happen. In trainings across the state, our members and administrators repeatedly heard the same refrain: “Distinguished is somewhere you visit – not somewhere you live.” This unofficial rule of thumb turned into

¹ Dr. Edward Fuller. “An Examination of Pennsylvania School Performance Profile Scores.” The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy Analysis, Department of Education Policy Studies College of Education, Penn State University. 2014.

unofficial policies or practice across the state. Members reported to us that districts limited the number of people who could achieve “distinguished” ratings each year. This phenomenon completely negated one of the purposes of Act 82. SB 751 and HB 1607 would prohibit school entities from instituting caps on distinguished ratings – through official or unofficial policies or practices.

4. **Improving collaboration between employees and administrators** – One of the positive aspects of Act 82 is that it sometimes helped foster greater collaboration and conversation between educators and administrators. This is something that PSEA sought to strengthen by ensuring that employees can provide input on their improvement plans and provide evidence to their evaluators – all while maintaining administrators overarching authority. Evaluations must be based on evidence gathered through observation of employees – a current regulatory requirement. The bills codify that standard, but also ensure that employees are able to present administrators with evidence that pertain to their observation/practice results. Any good evaluation system has the opportunity for self-assessment. These changes will ensure that employees can more fully participate in the rating system by submitting evidence or offering suggestions for an improvement plan consequently fostering greater collaboration and trust in the system.

I want to reiterate how thankful we are that the House Education Committee held this hearing today to explore the details of SB 751 and HB 1607 in greater detail. Now I want to turn it over to Rachael for a few comments and then I will be happy to answer any questions.