



Testimony

Testimony on Senate Bill 1643 (Teacher Quality)

Presented to the Senate Education Committee

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Use an annual review system for teachers that includes a balance between the current burdensome process to fire ineffective teachers and a safeguard against the arbitrary use of power by principals.

Make it easier for individuals with management and leadership skills to be able to use their skills running a school.

Make it easier for individuals in the private sector with a college degree and a significant amount of work experience in special fields to be able to teach their specialty in high school classrooms.

Thank you, Chair Shapiro and Members of the Committee.

I am Brooke Terry, an education policy analyst with the Texas Public Policy Foundation. The Texas Public Policy Foundation is a non-profit, free-market research organization guided by the principles of limited government, free markets, individual liberty, personal responsibility and private property rights. I will talk about some key concepts we support in Senate Bill 1643 and give some recommendations to improve the bill.

We support the key concept of annual review of teachers. In the private sector and in government, employees are usually on probation their first six months after they are hired. After their six month review, they are then reviewed every year. And usually if a weakness is identified when they are reviewed, the employee is given until the next review to improve. But in the world of education, teachers are on probation for their 1st three years and then essentially are given tenure where it is next to impossible to remove ineffective teachers with all of the red tape and documentation requirements, and multiple levels of appeal.

A Tennessee study says that students with strong teachers for three consecutive years achieve 50 percent more than students with weak teachers. And that students with strong teachers erase the achievement gap associated with race, ethnicity and income within 3 to 5 years.¹

To improve teacher quality, it is important to provide a process for removing ineffective teachers while providing safeguards against

arbitrary dismissals. The current lengthy and burdensome process does not achieve this balance.

Regarding principal and assistant principal review, we support evaluating school management based on student academic outcomes. Results. Outcomes. Are students learning? Are they progressing in their knowledge of key content areas? Do they have the ability to read and write? Again, this is no different than evaluating a CEO on their profit and loss statement, on their productivity gains, on market share and on the stock price.

The Foundation supports giving principals more flexibility in firing poor and ineffective teachers. Let me mention a quote from the CEO of Apple, Steve Jobs. At a recent education event here in Austin, Steve Jobs discussed the management structure of public schools. His comments did not receive much press, until the *Wall Street Journal* editorialized on his comments. The Texas Public Policy Foundation provided all of our offices with a copy of the editorial last month.

Steve Jobs said, “What kind of person can you get to run a small business if you told them, when they came in, they couldn’t get rid of people they thought weren’t any good in the first place? And they couldn’t pay people three times as much when they got three times as much work done?”

As far as recommendations the Foundation would like to see added to the bill, we would like to make it easier for individuals with management and leadership skills to be able to use their skills running a school. We support low-

ering barriers to entry for people outside of the education community to become principals and assistant principals.

We would also like to make it easier for individuals in the private sector who have college degrees and relevant work experience in special fields to be able to teach their specialty in high school classrooms. Right now, we have about 25 percent of teachers in Texas, according to the Texas Education Agency, teaching outside their field of study. So why can't we improve the process of alternative certification to expedite the placement of qualified individuals in the classroom? The current alternative certification is too costly and time-consuming.

I explained how to shorten the alternative certification process in an article that was published in the *Amarillo Globe News*. I received some really interesting feedback on my article. Let me read from two emails I received.

One is from a gentleman who is recently retired school superintendent and a former science teacher. He says, "I have been mentally toiling with this matter for the past couple of years. I agree that there needs to be more streamlined routes for certification so that retirees from industry and the military might be attracted."

Another email was from an insurance and financial services representative with State Farm. He said, "I would love to teach high school seniors about finances." Everyday, he works on these issues. Teachers currently ask him to come into the classroom and talk about banking, and credit cards and insurance to student. Much to their surprise, the teachers have so many follow-up questions that they realize they don't know as much as they thought they did on those issues. He says that if the teacher certification process is changed, he would be the first to sign up.

Again, the Foundation supports reviewing teachers on an annual basis and improving the current burdensome process of firing teachers while providing a safeguard against arbitrary dismissals. ★

¹ William L. Sanders and June C. Rivers, "Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Academic Achievement," *School Improvement in Maryland* (2002) http://www.mdk12.org/practices/ensure/tva/tva_2.html.