

Dear Education Committee and Senator Lautenbaugh:

I am a strong supporter of LB 809. I am sorry I am not able to testify today, because I am in Houston, TX for work. I know this letter will not do the justice needed to show you my passion for this bill as my personal testimony would, but I will do my best. I am convinced from the research and my personal experience on the Omaha Public School Board and the Learning Community Coordinating Council we, as a State, must evaluate teachers annually to improve academic achievement.

Years and years of research have proven that the most effective way to close the achievement gap is to increase teacher effectiveness. Studies have confirmed the following:

- A few years with effective teachers can put even the most disadvantaged students on the path to college. A few years with ineffective teachers can deal students an academic blow from which they may never recover.<sup>1</sup>
- “The effect of increases in teacher quality swamps the impact of any other educational investment, such as reductions in class size.”<sup>2</sup>
- “The most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher..... an influence many times greater than poverty or per-pupil expenditures.”<sup>3</sup>
- “Having a top-quartile teacher rather than a bottom-quartile teacher four years in a row could be enough to close the black-white test score gap.”<sup>4</sup>
- “Having a high-quality teacher throughout elementary school can substantially offset or even eliminate the disadvantage of low socio-economic background.”<sup>5</sup>

To ensure that every child learns from the most effective teachers possible, the State, Districts, and Schools must be able to gauge teachers’ performance fairly and accurately. Evaluations should provide all teachers with regular feedback that helps them grow as professionals, no matter how long they have been in the classroom. Our current evaluation system is flawed in the following areas:

- Frequency: The current statute only requires probationary teachers to be evaluated annually. Many teachers—especially more experienced teachers—are evaluated every three to five years depending on the district.
  - Annual evaluation is the only way to ensure that all teachers—regardless of their ability level or years of experience—get the ongoing feedback on their performance that all professionals deserve. This approach recognizes that a teacher’s effectiveness and developmental needs may change over time, and it sends a message to school leaders that they are accountable for helping *all* their teachers grow as professionals, not just new teachers.
  - *LB 809 addresses this issue by creating yearly evaluations for all teachers.*

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<sup>1</sup> Jordan, Mendro, and Weerasing, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Goldhaber, Dan, 2009

<sup>3</sup> Sanders, Wright and Horn, 1997

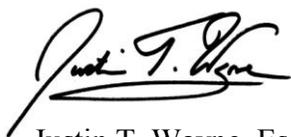
<sup>4</sup> Gordon, Kane and Staiger, 2006

<sup>5</sup> Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain, 2002

- Focus: Throughout the State, teachers are not observed on a consistent basis or for the same length of time. Classroom observations typically differ depending on the school, grade and subject matter; thus, creating an inherent inconsistent measurement tool in evaluating teachers throughout this State.
  - *LB 809 addresses this issue by making the classroom observations by a school “district administrator, unless otherwise agreed to in a collective-bargaining agreement, for a minimum of ninety minutes per semester with no one observation being less than thirty minutes.”*
    - Additionally, by allowing the unions and administration to sit down at the table and work this out is a win win for teachers, administration, and the students.
- Differentiation: It seems that every school and district has different people evaluate teachers. Some districts use other teachers, while others use administrators. This leads to inconsistency.
  - *LB 809 makes it clear that administrators must perform the evaluations, and if that cannot work, they must work with the teachers unions to come up with a process that can be used.*
- Probation vs. Tenure:
  - “The need for tenure is replaced by a peer review program that provides opportunities for improvement or, when improvement is lacking, ensures due process throughout dismissal procedures. By guaranteeing teachers’ due process rights through a fair and transparent peer review system, continued employment is based on performance.”<sup>6</sup>

The crucial question now facing education leaders is, “How?” How can they create evaluations that become useful tools for teachers and school leaders and that help push students to new heights? As policymakers we have to grapple with difficult issues that have received only lip service in the past: How can we help all teachers reach their full potential in the classroom? How can we ensure that teachers love their jobs, so that the best teachers want to keep teaching? How can we address consistently ineffective teaching fairly but decisively? We cannot address any of these issues without better teacher evaluation systems and that starts with a framework for annual evaluations.

LB 809 provides a blueprint for an annual review. The experts in the field—teachers and administrators—should develop a rigorous, fair and credible teacher evaluation system centered on student outcomes within this framework provided by LB 809. Please support LB 809 and tell your fellow Senators to support this bill as well.



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<sup>6</sup> Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching (CETT) presented to the NEA, *Transforming Teaching: Connecting Professional Responsibility with Student Learning*, 2011