

Jiménez and Mérida: Teacher evaluation bill a bad fit for DPS

One of the most difficult aspects of our job as school board members is to achieve the best educational outcomes for our students despite dwindling resources. We believe it is a civil right for each of the students in the Denver Public Schools to receive only the best classroom instruction; in fact, with only three to five consecutive years of top-notch teaching, we can eliminate the achievement gap. Given the fact that the Denver Public Schools is made up of 71% minority students, effective classroom instruction is the best, and most cost-effective, tool in our toolbox.

However, SB 10-191, the “educator effectiveness bill,” is not the right solution at this time. In our opinion, to impose weights on evaluations of teachers and principals without FIRST fixing Colorado's educator evaluation system is unfair to our dedicated public education professionals, the overwhelming majority of whom make magic in our classrooms every day, in spite of dwindling resources.

Right now, in any given Denver school, there is an educator that may not be performing up to par. Worse, some of these low-performing educators may be employed where the most vulnerable students attend school. The proposed senate bill, however, does not properly evaluate effective teaching in many of our classrooms that are in schools deemed “low performing.” Currently, teachers can only be rated “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory,” and 99 percent of all Denver teachers are rated “satisfactory” after never having had a principal's classroom observation, which is a required component of the evaluation. Of equal concern is the lack of any principal evaluation system at all. Further, within this broken system there is no way to recognize the work of an exceptional teacher, nor is there a way to help a satisfactory teacher to become an excellent teacher. There is no doubt that the lack of an effective and fair yardstick against which to measure and foster the best from our educators is severely hampering our ability to help our students achieve success.

Some of our suggestions for improving this proposed legislation include the following:

- Develop evaluations based on student growth, classroom observation, peer review and with less than 25% of the evaluation based on student standardized test scores.
- Update the standards for accreditation of teacher and principal training programs to reflect preparation for 21st-century, English-language learner and special-needs learner skills, as well as cultural/urban competency.
- Create standards for principals as effective instructional leaders.
- Broaden the scope of the evaluation scale from the current binary (satisfactory/unsatisfactory) to at least a five-degree scale: exceptional, highly effective, effective, marginally effective, and ineffective.
- Codify due-process rights in hiring, placement and retention policies for teachers and principals, so that each educator is given a non-subjective evaluation and the right to improve according to a fair plan.
- Develop a concerted, honest plan to include experienced educators in every step of the evaluation revamping process.

We call upon the Colorado State Legislature to set the horse before the cart and instead focus on the hard work of fixing our broken educator evaluation system. Let's end this culture of targeting teachers and principals by giving school districts the tools to ensure quality instruction...first.

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