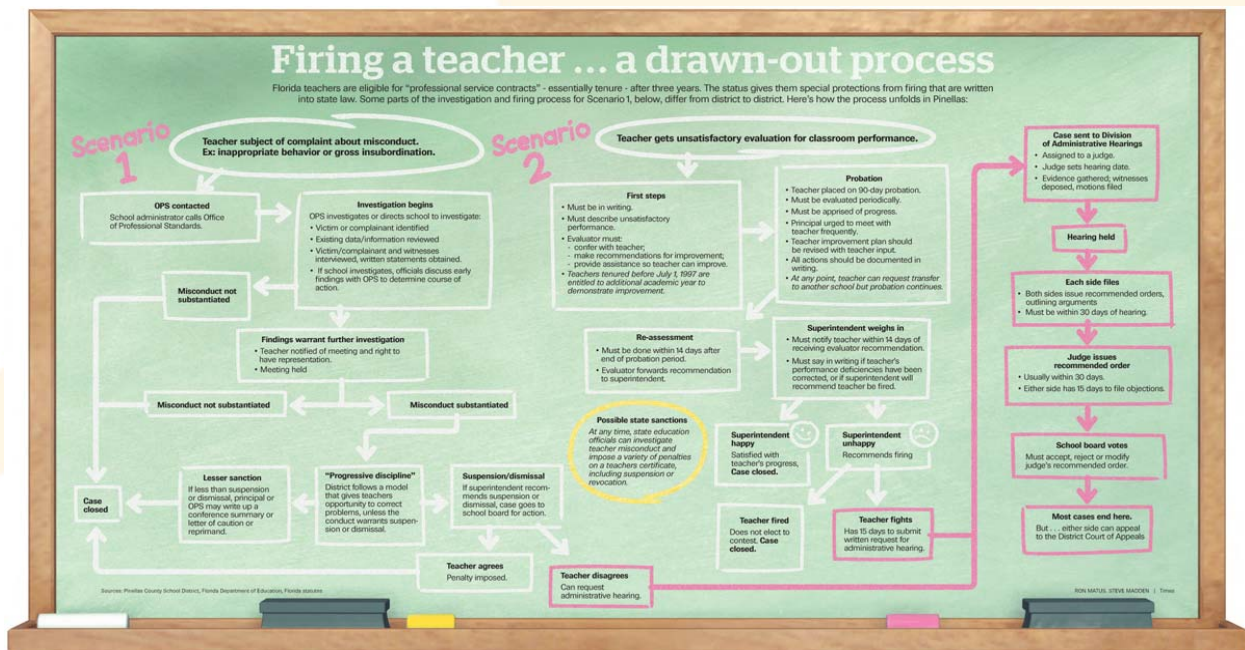


Teacher Excellence: The Quality Teachers for All Florida Students Initiative

Next to parents, the most important factor in a student's academic career is the effectiveness of their teachers. Yet, instead of rewarding our best teachers and removing the poor ones, Florida clings to an antiquated system of recruitment and reward that cheats our students of success in school and beyond.

While Florida has made significant progress in improving recruitment of teachers, nothing has been done to remove ineffective teachers. After three consecutive years of adequate service under annual contracts, school districts are required by state law to enter into a lifetime contract with teachers, otherwise known as tenure. Under the law, tenure becomes a "right," making it next to impossible to take away.

In the past year, at least three Florida superintendents have expressed the difficulty in removing bad teachers from the classroom, describing it as complex, time consuming, and legally challenging.¹ In the last year of available data, less than .3 percent of teachers in Florida were fired for cause, a significant percentage of these for breaking the law or gross misconduct. In Pasco County, for example, not a single teacher has been fired for poor performance in the past five years. A flow chart created by the newspaper illustrates the steps required to remove a teacher in Pinellas County.



Despite reforms to modernize the way teachers are paid, little change has occurred at the negotiating table. For the most part, school districts and teachers unions negotiate

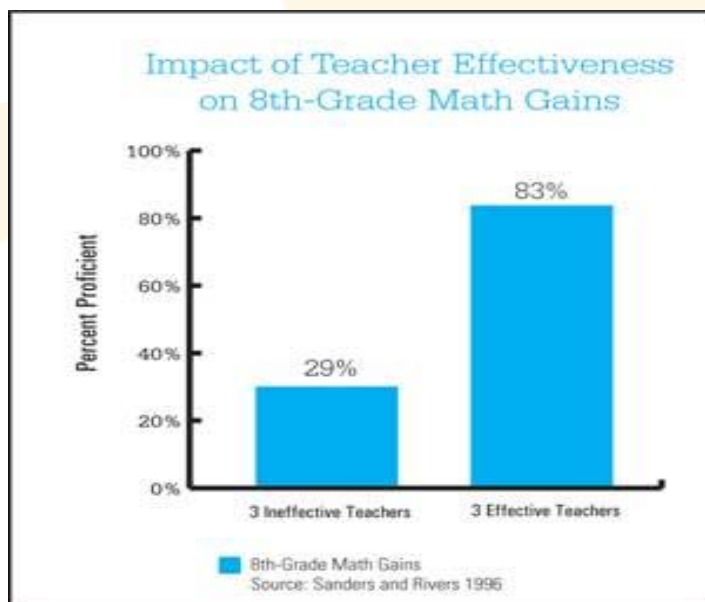
the compensation packages of teachers based on their level of education and years of service, regardless of their effectiveness in the classroom. Starting in 2008, Florida required school districts and unions to consider other factors in negotiating pay scales, including teaching subjects with a shortage of teachers, teaching in high poverty schools and accepting additional responsibilities such as mentoring other educators. Yet, most districts are not complying with this provision of law. Florida created merit pay programs to reward teachers for their students' performance on annual standardized tests; neither was embraced by the teachers unions and, as a result, millions in bonuses to teachers were returned to the state coffers.

A system that ignores performance and rewards ineffectiveness is doomed to fail its students. Palm Beach School District provided a stark assessment of the situation in a grant application submitted to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation just this summer. School administrators concluded that *seventy percent* of teachers in their classrooms are ineffective. The more shocking revelation was an acknowledgement that their highest A rated schools do no better than D and F schools at teaching students who are most behind.ⁱⁱ

The Case for Reform

A. Teacher Effectiveness

The most effective teachers produce student gains almost four times greater than the least effective teachers. These effects can be seen for at least three years in a child's education. 5th grade students who have an effective teacher for three consecutive years score 50+ percentile points higher than students who have an ineffective teacher for three consecutive years. Dr. Bill Sanders, University of Tennessee, pioneered this research over a decade ago and subsequent studies show that their effects may persist even longer, especially among young elementary students.



According to Ric Hanushek with Stanford University, a good teacher can move a student up at least four percentiles within one year. Kati Haycock with The Education Trust found the most effective teachers produce student gains almost four times greater than least effective teachers.

B. Inequality in Quality

Though research is clear on teacher quality, the Education Trust found inequities of teacher quality are common-place in school districts with out-of-field or temporarily certified teachers being far more common in high-poverty schools. In their report released earlier this year, 27% of teachers in high-poverty schools are teaching out-of-field subjects, versus 14% of teachers in low-poverty schools.

C. Impact of Teacher Certification

This year, the Institute for Educational Sciences, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education, released a report showing no statistically significant differences between teachers who were alternatively certified and those who were certified traditionally. Both had similar scores on college entrance exams, the selectivity of their college, or their level of educational attainment. Perhaps more importantly, there was no statistically significant difference in performance between their students. This is no evidence that more teacher training coursework is associated with effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in the classroom.

D. Impact of Layoff Policies

Marguerite Roza, of Washington University in Seattle, found that if a district is required to layoff teachers to reduce its budget by 10 percent, the district would need to fire 14.3 percent of its workforce when firing junior employees to meet the 10 percent budget reduction. However, if the district followed a seniority-neutral layoff policy – say by a standard of employee effectiveness – only 10% of the workforce would lose their jobs. Nationally, if seniority-neutral layoff policies were followed to save 10 percent, 612,256 jobs would be lost compared with 874,623 lost under seniority-based policies. So, not even taking into account the quality of the teacher, merely protecting seniority keeps hundreds-of-thousands of jobs from being saved nationwide.

E. Researchers at Non-Profit Organizations Agree on Key Issues

There is no silver bullet to improve teacher quality; however, experts have agreed on several areas that must be addressed to ensure quality in every classroom:

- ✓ Reduce entry barriers to ensure quality candidates can more easily enter the teaching profession.

- ✓ Incentivize quality individuals to teach in the hard to place positions (low-income schools) and in hard to staff subjects (math, science, ESE).
- ✓ End salary schedules based on degrees or number of years served.
- ✓ Strengthen the teacher evaluation process.
- ✓ Link student learning to teacher evaluations and pay.
- ✓ Base tenure on effectiveness, not time served.

Several unaffiliated and independent non-profit organizations agree on the recommendations above. The Brookings Institute, the National Council on Teacher Quality, the New Teacher Project, and the Education Equality Project are only a few of these organizations that are very different politically and structurally, but agree on at least four of the recommendations aboveⁱⁱⁱ.

F. Public Opinion

In August of 2009, Phi Delta Kappa and Gallup released their 41st annual *Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools*. Conducted annually, this national survey tracks public opinion on education in America.

- ✓ Nearly three out of four (73%) percent of respondents disapprove of teacher contracts that essentially give lifetime tenure after two or three years of work.
- ✓ 72% of respondents say they favor Merit Pay, with similar levels of approval from Republicans, Democrats, and Independents.

G. Teachers

Teachers themselves acknowledge that some of their peers are not serving our students effectively. Last year, Education Trust released the results of a survey of over 1,000 K-12 public school teachers about their views on the teaching profession, teachers unions, and a host of reforms aimed at improving teacher quality. Among the results were:

- 76% of teachers say that too many burned-out veteran teachers stay because they don't want to walk away from benefits and service time accrued.
- Nearly half of teachers surveyed say they personally know a teacher who is ineffective and should not be in the classroom.
- 55% say that it's very difficult and time-consuming to remove teachers who shouldn't be in the classroom.
- Only 26% of teachers say that their most recent formal evaluation was useful and effective in helping them to improve their teaching. 79% support strengthening the formal evaluation of probationary teachers. 32% say that tenured teachers should be evaluated on an annual basis.

- 68% believe the schools where the principals and teachers have more control over the workforce are better for students than schools ones where work rules are defined by contract.

H. Bipartisan Support

The Education Quality Project (mentioned in point E) is bringing together leaders of both parties – from Al Sharpton to Newt Gingrich – to advocate for reform. Perhaps even more promising is the national dialogue on the issue from both parties.

President Barack Obama and Secretary Duncan are at the forefront of the debate on teacher effectiveness. The rules for the “Race to the Top” funds from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act are consistent with the public rhetoric on the topic. To qualify for funds, states must show how they have made significant progress in improving teacher effectiveness and achieving equity in teacher distribution.

President Obama on the subject since becoming president:

- “From the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents, it's the person standing at the front of the classroom.”
- “And just as we've given our teachers all the support they need to be successful, we need to make sure our students have the teacher they need to be successful. And that means states and school districts taking steps to move bad teachers out of the classroom.”
- “Both sides are going to have to acknowledge we're going to need more money for new science labs, to pay teachers more effectively. But, we're also going to need more reform, which means that we've got to train teachers more effectively; bad teachers need to be fired after being given the opportunity to train effectively.”

His Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, has been just as forthcoming:

- "If teachers aren't making it, we want to support them and help them develop, but ultimately if it's not working, our children deserve the best. They probably need to find something else to do."
- “We must expand teacher compensation based on performance. And for any of this to be effective, we must do more to develop and support strong and effective principals.”

The Solution: Ensuring Great Teachers in Every Classroom

Modernize the evaluation, contracting and salary structure for teachers.

- ✓ Revitalize evaluation methods to ensure student performance is a primary indicator.
- ✓ Limit tenure to multi-year contracts instead of open-ended, lifetime contracts.
- ✓ Implement oversight on how districts implement their of the Differentiated Pay Law, which requires higher pay to more fairly compensate teachers that teach in low-income schools, teach subjects suffering from a shortage of qualified instructors, or take on more difficult responsibilities.

Recruit exceptional candidates to serve as teachers.

- ✓ Accept nationally recognized programs, such as Troops for Teachers and Teach for America, as a path to gain state certification.
- ✓ A report should be conducted on the effectiveness of state-approved colleges of education in producing high-quality teachers.

Empower parents with information.

- ✓ Require school districts to report the demographics of teachers assigned to D and F schools.
- ✓ Require the Department of Education to define “educational insufficiency,” for the small number of ineffective teachers responsible for multiple years of overall student declines.
- ✓ Identify the number of teachers who qualify as educationally insufficient and allow parents to receive information on the collective learning gains of their child’s teacher.

The Challenge: A Call to Florida Leaders

A growing consensus among political opposites over the need to improve the quality of teaching creates the opportunity for bold reform. Florida has the opportunity to lead the nation, again, in transforming the quality of education by bringing the teaching profession into the 21st Century.

ⁱ This past March, the Senate Pre-K – 12 committee held a workshop on removing ineffective teachers. Two superintendents, Okaloosa County Supt. Alexis Tibbitts and Marion County Supt Jim Yancey, testified regarding the process of removing an ineffective teacher in their district. Superintendent Tibbitts called removing bad teachers a “tedious and arduous process” and provided many documents giving a glimpse at the paperwork it takes to remove a teacher from the classroom. Superintendent Yancey said that firing a teacher in Marion County requires 5-7 district employees to observe a teacher at least **four times within 90 days**. In these tough economic times, this is hardly a wise use of education dollars. With this stringent process, said Superintendent Yancey, a teacher can only be fired in one school year if the process is started in August and all involved stay persistent in removing the bad teacher throughout the school year.

The unions’ strict contracts not only affect tenured teachers, it also unfairly punishes new teachers. A good example happened recently in Jefferson County. In July of this year, Jefferson County Superintendent Bill Brumfield reported on his county’s financial troubles to the State Board of Education. Board member Roberto Martinez asked Mr. Brumfield a line of questions about teachers he had to fire because of the budget. Superintendent Brumfield replied frankly, saying, “I would’ve liked to have kept some of them, but I didn’t get a chance.” This is because of strict union contracts that force school leaders to fire high quality, untenured teachers to save jobs of teachers whose only distinction may be the number of years they have been working. When asked if he would have liked the flexibility to fire some of the tenured teachers instead of what he considered better quality, untenured teachers, Mr. Brumfield replied, “yes, I wish there were some I could have got rid of and kept the others, but I didn’t have a choice.” You can find the full discussion here, http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2009_07_14/meetingArchive.asp, from minutes 10:50 - 12:50.

ⁱⁱ See “[Palm Beach County school district concedes major failings, says 70 percent of teachers ineffective.](#)” Laura Green, Palm Beach Post. August 3, 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ All four of these organizations are independent and non-profit organizations with no political affiliations. More information can be found at their respective websites.