



Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators
Proud Leadership for Pennsylvania Schools

**Testimony Presented to the
House Education Committee**

**on
H.B. 1980**

**presented by
Richard Fry
on behalf of the
Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators
November 3, 2011**

Good afternoon, Chairman Clymer, Chairman Roebuck and distinguished members of the House Education Committee. My name is Richard Fry. I have the honor of serving as superintendent of schools in the Big Spring School District, located in Cumberland County, and also serve as Chairman of the Legislative Committee of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA). PASA represents school superintendents and other chief school administrators across the state. We appreciate having the opportunity to share our views on House Bill 1980.

It is important to note from the start that PASA believes the existing state statutory and regulatory requirements for teacher and educator ratings have long passed their usefulness as effective evaluation tools.

The PDE-5501 form was published as a state regulation in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin* 33 years ago, in 1978. It is this form that provides administrators the limited option to rate a teacher either “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory.” At that time, it was designed to help administrators document their decisions about granting permanent certification, tenure or termination of

professional employees. With rating criteria limited to four areas – personality, preparation, technique and pupil reaction – it was not designed to provide an in-depth analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the essential elements that typify effective instructional practice. Since the time the form was issued, the art and science of teacher evaluation has made considerable strides forward, thus rendering the PDE-5501 and the statutory and regulatory provisions that created it obsolete.

School superintendents and other school leaders across the state applaud and support efforts to modernize the evaluation system used to rate classroom teachers, building principals and nonteaching professional personnel.

Ratings should include the fair and appropriate consideration of student achievement as determined through analysis of multiple measures of student performance. Multiple measures should include, when appropriate, consideration of standardized test scores, measures of student growth as determined by PVAAS, and locally developed performance measures that reflect the priorities and aspirations of the school and community. These may include student attendance, graduation and dropout rates, enrollments in post-secondary education and others. It is critical for the rating criteria to recognize that the needs and priorities of each community are different and, when appropriate, need to be reflected in the rating criteria. The new system should be designed to support principals and administrators as they seek to assist instructional staff how to identify their strengths and weaknesses, improve instructional practice and target professional development resources to address individual needs.

PASA supports the use of three separate rating systems, one for each category of educational professional: classroom teacher, support professional and building administrator. The new systems must reflect the principles outlined by one of the national leaders in the evaluation of educators, Charlotte Danielson, who advises that the characteristics of high quality systems include that they are “rigorous, valid, reliable, defensible, and be grounded in a research-based practice and accepted definitions of good teaching.”

PASA appreciates and supports the provision in the bill that allows school districts to use their own locally developed evaluation systems that have been approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education as having met or exceeded the measures of effectiveness established in the bill. It is important that this legislation recognize that some school districts have already adopted their own innovative, high-quality evaluation systems that contain many of the features provided for in House Bill 1980. We believe these districts should be permitted to continue to use these systems or be permitted to update and continue to use systems that meet with Department approval.

While PASA generally supports House Bill 1980, we offer several suggestions that we believe will improve the bill. Our suggestions are as follows:

- Provide the Department of Education the authority to approve innovative alternative rating systems that may not fully comply with the minimum standards provided in the bill. As technology and the art and science of teacher evaluation continue to develop, we do not want to be locked in to the same standards of evaluation for another 33 years. Provide school districts and the Department flexibility to adopt and use new evaluation systems in the future.
- Permit school districts to use a differentiated plan of staff assessment so that evaluations can be targeted at those who are most in need of performance reviews, such as novice teachers and professional staff who have demonstrated the need for ongoing assessment of performance. Such plans will permit administrators to target their attention to those most in need of review or improvement. Other veteran staff that has a long record of demonstrated effectiveness could be reviewed on a different schedule, such as every other year.
- Provide for a phase-in of the evaluation system for classroom teachers beyond the 2012-13 school year and for principals and nonteaching professional employees beyond the 2013-14 school years. The changes in the rating systems are major changes that will require considerable time to learn, implement and administer with fidelity. Phasing in the system over a two-year period for classroom teachers, who outnumber the combined total of nonteaching professionals and principals about 13 to 1, will allow administrators to

become familiar and comfortable with the new system, which in turn will help to insure it is properly implemented when evaluating all classroom teachers. The initial phase could be targeted to those novice teachers who have yet to receive tenure or Level II certification and to those who received an unsatisfactory rating during the previous school year.

- We caution the committee about having student achievement count too much in the evaluation tool designed for the evaluation of nonteaching support personnel. The bill provides that up to 20 percent of the evaluation may be based on student achievement. The states participating in federal Race to the Top grants have been struggling since receiving the grant with this one issue.

In addition to these suggestions, PASA also offers several suggestions and cautions about the evaluation process and tools and language contained in the bill itself:

- Make sure that language in the bill that makes null and void the PDE-5501 form and any alternative rating forms does not invalidate actual ratings of professional staff made on these forms. Any employee rating should remain valid. The bill should provide that use of the forms to perform new ratings of professional staff after publication of the new rating tool be prohibited.
- Ensure that the new evaluation system properly balances the need for a thorough and comprehensive analysis of performance against the need to make the system user-friendly and as minimally burdensome as possible, given the time constraints and competing obligations that face administrators.
- The bill provides authority to the State Board of Education to change the rating tools and develop standards or regulations necessary to implement the new requirements. Although a highly technical point, the existing regulations at 22 PA Code 351.21—351.28 are standards of the Secretary of Education, not the State Board of Education. We suggest that the Committee may want to continue to provide the authority to the Secretary rather than transfer it to the State Board of Education.

To summarize, PASA supports efforts to modernize the evaluation system that is used to rate professional educators. We also support the fair and appropriate use of multiple measures of student achievement as criteria in the evaluation of professional personnel. We recommend that the new systems be phased in over time to ensure they are properly and effectively implemented. Finally, during these extraordinarily difficult budgetary times, please be mindful of the costs and burdens such new systems will impose on already shrinking district budgets and administrative personnel.

I would be pleased to respond to your questions.