

Tuesday, November 21, 2023

Dear commission members:

I am submitting testimony for use by the members of the commission on Providence Public School District (PPSD)'s schools because I am unable to come to testify in person due to my teaching schedule at Brown University. Previous to taking my current position of Professor of Practice in Education at Brown in 2019, I served as the Assistant Superintendent of Human Capital in Boston Public Schools where I was at the negotiating table on behalf of the Boston School Committee for multiple rounds of union-district contract negotiations, including co-leading negotiations in 2018-19.

It is with perspectives gained from these experiences that I send my comments about ways that the state legislature can support efforts to have an effective teacher in every classroom and an excellent principal in every school. I suggest that the commission focus efforts in three main ways, considering statewide:

- (1) career ladder legislation, which can provide leadership roles for excellent teachers and then provide / encompass support for new teachers; a longer timeline for the achievement of tenure; and easier dismissal processes for teachers, especially in cases where districts have formed a Peer Assistance and Review program,
- (2) specific layoff language that will enable districts to retain excellent teachers and preserve the diversity of the workforce they have worked to build over the past years, and
- (3) support for recruiting, preparing and supporting effective principals.

These recommendations are grounded in considerations about where to best locate decision-making power for strong outcomes for students - in some cases it makes sense to locate decision-making power at the school level with the principal and teachers, and in other cases it may lead to better outcomes to have strong legislation that outlines a framework and creates incentives for schools or districts to create programs and structures that are likely to lead to stronger learning conditions for students. I write these suggestions based on the research that identifies the strongest school-based influence on student learning to be first the

teacher and second the principal, and in consideration of how to create the policy structure to support teachers and principals and their growth.

(1) **Career ladder legislation considerations:** I've been doing work with superintendents in different states to improve teacher retention and have been really intrigued by states that have put in place frameworks for career ladders. These frameworks outline parameters for each district to negotiate with their union a ladder that meet the needs of experienced highly-effective teachers, experienced teachers in need of support, and newer teachers who are still actively learning. One state to look to, for example, is the state of Maryland with The Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Pillar 2: High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders); their career ladder legislation lays out a framework that - if negotiated and implemented well - can set teachers up both to shape the ways they spend their days how they prefer, with differentiated jobs, and to receive the support that they need. With this type of framework, the state can create the conditions needed to have the highest quality teacher in every classroom.

A state-wide career ladder can help districts accomplish several things:

- Establish competitive salaries for teachers, setting a floor and also providing for higher salaries for teachers who take on leadership roles;
- Orient human capital processes around teacher effectiveness instead of years of experience, enabling highly effective teachers who take on leadership roles based on their skill level and areas of expertise;
- Provide incentives and support for districts to create Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) programs in order to give teachers the ability to set a high bar for their peers' performance and a structure within which to provide the support for their colleagues. These programs are anchored by a panel of teachers and administrators who together hire Consulting Teachers who will coach and evaluate teachers who need support;
- Enable, if desired, new teachers to co-teach for part of the day with a highly-effective teacher, thereby providing opportunities for a coaching role for a teacher leader and a learning environment for a new teacher;
- Create at the state level the organizational structures that support strong teaching and enable teachers to continuously improve. Although the school principal will ensure

implementation of these structures, the state can provide templates for common planning time and create professional development sessions on teaming;

- Lengthen the timeline for tenure in the state statute. Provide intensive professional development for new teachers and then evaluate them more rigorously (more often and/or with a different procedure) than tenured teachers. Five years after they are hired, evaluate teachers for tenure with an intensive review by exemplary teachers and administrators. Dismiss teachers at this point if they've been provided with intensive support and are not reaching a high bar of performance. Ideally, consider doing all of this within the structure of PAR;
- Again, ideally utilizing a structure such as PAR, create state legislative language that makes it easier to get rid of probationary teachers in the state of RI. If a new teacher has been provided intensive support and then evaluated by a highly-effective teacher and still isn't meeting a high bar for performance by the end of their fourth year, enable the district to let that teacher go with minimal process;
- Likewise, within the structure of PAR, make the bar for teacher dismissal lower if a panel of teachers and administrators agree that a teacher should be dismissed;
- Provide differentiated professional development for teachers who are struggling or have more room to grow and enable highly effective teachers to create and provide that professional development. Through a career structure, create flexibility in the contract to create those conditions differentiated based on the effectiveness of teacher;
- Invest in professional development and in high-quality curriculum and lesson plan support at the state level. Invest in research around effective teaching and disseminate that knowledge;
- Consider providing some flexibility in the school day for teachers, for example to provide some online tutoring, etc. When these flexibilities are created as part of a career ladder, teachers' roles can be differentiated to meet the different needs of students and also to meet the different needs of teachers at different stages in their career.

(2) **State-level layoff language:** Consider rewriting state law on teacher layoffs to require school districts to consider factors other than seniority when laying off teachers. These factors could include linguistic proficiency, or preparation through a grow-your-own program

that the district has created, or an evaluative review by the Consulting Teacher in the PAR program. This language will help provide districts with some flexibility to retain their most effective teachers and maintain a diverse workforce rather than to risk losing teachers their students need in the event of a layoff.

(3) Focus on preparing and supporting excellent school principals: Excellent school leaders will create the conditions that help teachers thrive. Research has shown that effective school leaders are not only essential in attracting and retaining teachers, but they also have been shown to create the conditions that lead to improved student achievement. The state can play a role in preparing individuals with excellent leadership potential, providing cutting-edge professional development and coaching, and supporting leaders with skills to run their buildings.

Statewide programs to develop principals can take advantage of economies of scale and create an academy that (1) structures organizational partnerships between programs and districts, (2) supports learning in cohorts or networks, (3) creates authentic learning opportunities, including an opportunity for aspiring principals to be coached, and (4) supports principals in learning how to improve school-wide instruction and support collegial teaching and learning environments (Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

Rhode Island's context is unique, and a structural focus on teachers and principals will depend on existing state statutes, priorities and the way that the commission chooses to structure incentives for districts. By focusing on state level policies that will enable districts in Rhode Island to support and grow exemplary teachers and then keep the teachers who are most effective with students, Rhode Island will be best positioned to improve learning outcomes for students.

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Also have consulted in two capacities: previously at MA DESE writing state regulations, and currently across the country in teacher retention, learning what teachers need to stay in the profession and working with superintendents and their leadership teams to design structures and conditions to support teachers' success so that they will stay and thrive. Bringing you my perspective of research and best practice around creating the conditions to ensure kids in PPSD (or RI?) have the same.

References and messy notes:

General Law Title 16 [here](#)

Rhode Island General Laws, Title 28, Chapter 9.1, which is known as the "Rhode Island Teacher Collective Bargaining Act." link here:

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE28/28-9.3/28-9.3-2.htm>

Change it so that the state controls teacher compensation, and that the law should be amended so that governance structures look more like what's spelled out in MA's law

State policy: funding allocations, standards and accountability policy development, PD, salaries, infrastructure investment, early childhood education, special education services, facilitation of parental involvement, mental health support, data and research, wraparound services

