

# philadelphia school partnership

November 18, 2013

The Honorable Paul Clymer  
216 Ryan Office Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2145

Re: HB 1722 “Protecting Excellent Teachers Act”

Dear Chairman Clymer,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the House Education Committee in support of Rep. Tim Krieger’s “Protecting Excellent Teachers Act” (HB1722).

My name is Mark Gleason and I am the Executive Director of the Philadelphia School Partnership (PSP). PSP is a nonprofit working to help create and expand high-performing schools that serve students from low-income communities in Philadelphia. We are raising and investing \$100 million over five years, with the vast majority of that headed to high-performing public schools. I also served for six years on the school board for a diverse school district in New Jersey; that state recently amended its teacher tenure laws for some of the same reasons I and others support HB1722.

Since 2011, PSP has committed \$29 million to more than 25 schools of all different types. We have evaluated dozens of schools across the city and carefully selected schools for investment based on their ability to prepare students for college and careers. From this work we have learned that while great schools come in all shapes and sizes, the common thread among them is an *outstanding leader with the ability and flexibility to build a great team of teachers*—all committed to the belief that every child can learn and achieve at high levels.

For this reason, we believe that staffing policies for Pennsylvania teachers need to evolve, especially around the issues of seniority-based layoffs and tenure eligibility. As it stands now, when school districts face tough economic times, they are required to lay off teachers in reverse order to their seniority, or the amount of time they have spent teaching.

The Commonwealth’s current requirement for seniority-based layoffs has a significant impact on schools and students:

- Research confirms that a teacher's length of service does not always correlate with his/her performance in the classroom. There are teachers with only a few years experience who are just as effective, if not more effective, than teachers with more classroom experience. Therefore, basing layoff decisions solely on seniority results in the loss of some high-performing teachers. (*Exhibit A*)
- Some teachers are so good at helping their students to learn that they consistently deliver substantially superior results, providing as much as an extra half-year of learning for their students. New research has shown that school districts do far too little to retain and encourage these "irreplaceables," in large part because seniority-based layoff and compensation policies limit their ability to do so. The result: Schools retain their most top-notch teachers at rates barely different than the retention rate for average teachers. (*Exhibit B*)
- Research also has shown that U.S. schools struggle to attract top college graduates into the teaching profession(<http://mckinseysociety.com/closing-the-talent-gap/>). Pennsylvania's current seniority-based policy, by not protecting excellent teachers who are early in their career, makes it harder for schools and districts to recruit top college graduates into the profession.
- Schools with a high concentration of low-income and minority students tend to employ less experienced teachers. When school districts are faced with layoff decisions, these schools are disproportionately affected because they stand to lose more teachers. This policy concentrates churn in the most disadvantaged schools and contributes to inequities among our students.
- Basing layoff decisions solely on seniority means more teachers have to lose their jobs than necessary. Because most districts base teacher pay almost entirely on seniority, less senior teachers earn less money than their veteran colleagues. If only teachers at the bottom of the pay scale are removed during layoffs, districts need to lay off more of them to make ends meet. Having fewer teachers in the system means less flexibility for principals to deploy teachers in a way that makes sense for their schools.

It is difficult to pass legislation that offers significant changes to policies that are engrained in our education system. However, there is no time like the present. With the rollout of the new teacher evaluation system, Pennsylvania is in an ideal position to pass comprehensive legislation that addresses economic furlough decisions, as well as tenure eligibility, and ties these decisions to classroom observations and multiple measures of student achievement.

Some who oppose HB1722 may argue that seniority-based policies are needed to protect the many veteran teachers who are effective. In fact, HB1722 protects effective teachers regardless of their seniority; it does not discriminate against seniority. Any teacher whose observations and other measures demonstrate effectiveness will be protected by this change in the law.

In summary, ending “last-in, first-out” and increasing the length of time to earn tenure will help schools align staffing policies to student needs and ensure that all students share the classroom with the most effective teachers.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer our support of HB 1722.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Gleason". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Mark Gleason  
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Philadelphia School Partnership  
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