



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony
House Education Committee
Public Hearing on Economic Furloughs

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Good morning. Thank you Chairman Clymer, Chairman Roebuck, and members of the House Education Committee for the opportunity to comment on the topic of economic furloughs.

I know that many Members here today share my commitment to ensure that every child in Pennsylvania is taught by a well-trained, highly-qualified educator. My experience as an educator - teacher, principal, and superintendent - confirms what numerous research studies have concluded: classroom teachers are a critical component of a student's educational success and have a significant impact on student achievement. In fact, various research studies have repeatedly reported that classroom teachers are the most critical factor in the educational success of students.

As Pennsylvania's school districts seek to design instructional programs for their students within locally approved spending levels and in response to changing student enrollments and student needs, their ability to decrease their workforce is limited by the provisions of Section 1124 of the Public School Code. Section 1124 limits a school district's ability to decrease its workforce for the following causes:

1. A substantial decrease in pupil enrollment;
2. The alteration or curtailment of an educational program due to a decline in class or course enrollment;
3. The consolidation of schools or school districts; and
4. The re-organization of a school district.

Furthermore, when a school district determines, in accordance with Section 1124, that furloughing employees is needed, Section 1125.1 of the Public School Code requires that those furloughs be based on seniority, regardless of an employee's performance.

The Corbett Administration believes that Sections 1124 and 1125.1 should be amended to provide local school districts with maximum flexibility to manage their workforce by including language to allow for furloughs for economic reasons and to require furlough decisions to be based on performance, not solely on seniority. If we are truly committed to graduating students who are college and work force ready, then we need to ensure that we have a strong teaching staff – teachers whose performance reflect a focus on student achievement.

Decisions involving non-retention or furloughing are never easy ones, thus when a school district decides that the furloughing of employees is necessary, they should be able to make those decisions based on the best interests of students and school programs. Under current law, employees must be furloughed based on seniority, or "last in, first out," without regard to performance or impact on student achievement.

The Administration believes that Pennsylvania's students should learn from the best teachers. Therefore, the Administration supports amendments to the School Code that would eliminate seniority as the sole basis for furlough decisions and replace it with a performance-based system that retains those teachers who have a record of demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom.

Over the past several years, Pennsylvania has spent significant time and effort reviewing teacher practice and its impact on student growth and achievement. The result of that work is Act 82 of

2012, which established Pennsylvania's new educator effectiveness system. With the implementation of Act 82, Pennsylvania now has a data-driven, reliable system on which to evaluate and improve educator practice and performance. The educational practice side of the system has been proven through both qualitative and quantitative validation studies. The next step is to integrate the multiple measurements of student achievement into the evaluation system and begin by using them now as a basis for tenure and dismissal decisions and ultimately furlough decisions.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share these comments with you today. The Administration looks forward to working with the Members of the Committee to provide significant mandate relief to Pennsylvania's school districts by amending the School Code to allow for economic furloughs, and to allow for suspension decisions to be based on performance.