



# Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

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**House Education Committee  
November 3, 2011  
Hearing on Teacher Evaluation and House Bill 1980  
Testimony of  
Joan L. Benso, President and CEO  
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Good afternoon Chairman Clymer, Chairman Roebuck and members of the House Education Committee. I am Joan Benso, President and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC). PPC is a statewide, non-partisan, non-profit, independent child advocacy organization committed to improving the health, education and well-being of children and youth in Pennsylvania. Our vision is to make the Commonwealth one of the top 10 states in the nation to be a child and to raise a child. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss teacher evaluations, and more specifically, House Bill 1980.

At first blush, a discussion about evaluations for teachers, principals and non-teaching professionals might seem like “inside baseball” - an issue that would only be of concern to teachers and school administrators. PPC, however, believes state policy discussions on teacher evaluations (and the evaluation of other professionals within our public education system) are relevant to parents, employers and every taxpayer in the Commonwealth. As the only independent statewide child advocacy organization in Pennsylvania, we are hard pressed to name an issue more important than this one.

PPC recently launched a new initiative called, “Making the Grade: Effective Teaching in Every Classroom.” The goal of “Making the Grade” is to create awareness about the importance of having an effective teacher in every classroom and advancing the public policies required to assure that every child benefits from effective teaching every school day. We released a report this summer on this initiative and I’ve attached copies of the report to my testimony today.

Earlier this week, we hosted a virtual town hall meeting in partnership with the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units (PAIU) that was attended by nearly 1,400 participants at 30 sites throughout the Commonwealth. The public forum provided an opportunity for people from around the state to hear from Secretary Tomalis and Deputy Secretary Dumaresq on what is happening at the state level, from the Pittsburgh

Public Schools - where the Empowering Effective Teachers Project is being used as part of a comprehensive effort to boost teacher effectiveness - and from the four local education agencies (LEAs) that were part of the PDE Round I Pilot discussed earlier today. It was an excellent opportunity to share information and recognize that we all have the same goal--to ensure every classroom is led by an effective teacher and every school building by an effective principal. Dr. Dumaresq also shared the plans for the Round II pilot which includes more than 100 LEAs, including over 80 school districts.

Even as Pennsylvania moves forward to consider how it can improve teacher and principal evaluations, it is important to note the important steps the Commonwealth already has taken to promote effective teaching. They include:

- Internationally benchmarked academic standards, known as the Common Core, to ensure graduates can compete in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.
- The Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS), which can fully measure student growth - not just student achievement – so superintendents and school boards know where to better allocate resources to help every student.
- The development of diagnostic tools and assessments to help improve instruction and measure student growth.
- A strong professional development system for school leaders and improvements to teacher certification, which is making teachers better prepared for the challenges they face in the classroom.
- Alternative methods for teacher certification.

These are all important elements towards improving teacher effectiveness and student success, but where Pennsylvania has come up short is in making sure all of these elements are braided together into a single aligned and consistent system with the goal of fostering the academic success of every student.

The next logical challenge for Pennsylvania schools is to help teachers become more effective. One of the key ways to improve teacher effectiveness is with a better system of teacher evaluation, one that helps teachers identify areas where they could improve and provides supports to help them make those improvements. Pennsylvania cannot improve teacher effectiveness by simply blaming teachers for all that is wrong in our public education system. Teachers need the tools and supports to improve and succeed – no differently than their students.

As we heard today from Secretary Tomalis, the results of PDE's survey on teacher and principal evaluations shows that Pennsylvania has a problem. Statewide, 99.4 percent of all teachers and 99.2 percent of all principals who were evaluated during the 2009-10 school year received a "satisfactory" rating. While it's hard to believe that 99 percent of people in any profession or industry have satisfactory performance, the important takeaway from this data is what it doesn't tell us. It doesn't provide information to

teachers to help them improve and hone their teaching skills. It doesn't demonstrate if teachers or principals are effective at their jobs. It doesn't provide information to administrators on how to target professional development or place the most effective teachers with the kids that need them the most.

Research in recent years has shown what many of us would consider common sense -- that an effective teacher is the most important school-based factor influencing school achievement, even more important than class size, which school a student attends or afterschool program quality.<sup>1</sup> This statement should make all of us pause and consider the enormity of the task before us. There are a lot of education issues being debated in this building currently, but none are more important than what is under consideration today.

Intensive research and analysis is being conducted to determine ways in which effective teaching can be measured fairly and consistently. This is actually the goal of the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project. The Project is studying multiple measures of teacher effectiveness, including videotaped classroom observations, student surveys and other test and non-test based data, and will determine which measures are most closely related to gains in student achievement. The MET Project has recruited more than 3,000 teachers, including 200 in Pittsburgh, to participate. Preliminary findings of this three-year Project demonstrate that:

1. **Teachers' past success in raising student achievement on state assessments is one of the strongest predictors of their ability to do so in the future** – In looking at value-added data, the MET Project has found that effective teachers are replicating their results from year to year. Imagine what could happen if we could, for example, help target professional development to meet the specific needs of teachers who are not yet seeing the expected gains.
2. **Teachers' with the highest value-added scores on state assessments also tend to help students understand the underlying concepts** – This finding refutes the argument that the best teachers are simply "teaching to the test." MET Project researchers have seen evidence that teachers with high value-added scores on state assessments also help students perform well on other exams. Additionally, they found that the teachers whose students reported they spent a lot of time just preparing for state assessments did not have the highest value-added scores on state assessments.
3. **Students know effective teaching when they experience it** – Research shows students learn better when they sense a teacher cares about whether they are learning and challenges them to work hard. When students report positive classroom experiences, their classrooms tend to achieve greater learning gains.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen G. Rivkin, Eric A. Hanusheck and John F. Kain. "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement." *Econometrica*. Volume 73, No. 2. March 2005. Pages 417-458.

4. **Feedback should not be limited to test scores alone** – This supports the concept of “multiple measures.” from the MET Project. It shows combining measures provides a more complete understanding of teaching practice and provide teachers with specific ways to improve.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, to the above important research findings we can use to advise our teacher evaluation, Pennsylvania has contracted with Mathematica to evaluate the Momentum Round I Pilot and determine which teacher practice components have the greatest impact on improving student growth. That research will assist in our rating tool development for teacher in assessed and non-assessed subject matter.

Pennsylvania is not alone in considering these important reforms. Research and the realization that evaluations for teachers should help them be more effective as a means to drive further student academic growth are driving reforms around the country. Thirty-two states and the District of Columbia have made changes to their teacher evaluation policies since 2009.<sup>3</sup> Weighting student performance at 50 percent of a teacher’s evaluation is also in line with the action taken by other states, including several of our neighbors. The National Council on Teacher Quality reports that student performance is weighted as 50 percent in Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma and Tennessee. In total, 23 states require teacher evaluations include “objective evidence of student learning in the form of student growth and/or valued-added data.”<sup>4</sup>

PPC is enormously pleased that Rep. Aument introduced House Bill 1980, so Pennsylvania can take the necessary steps to reform its evaluation system for teachers, principals and non-teaching professionals and include student performance as a substantial component of a multiple measure approach. We hope that the House Education Committee will consider House Bill 1980 soon. The bill contains several elements that PPC strongly supports, including:

**Requires the use of multiple measures of student achievement** – House Bill 1980 notes the use of performance data on assessments and PVAAS as measures of student achievement, *but does not limit the use of those student performance measures* in the development of the rating tool. The Department has repeatedly noted that some of these measures could be chosen by local districts. For subjects and grade-levels not measured by assessments, other standardized tests (including nationally recognized

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<sup>2</sup> Learning About Teaching: Initial Findings from the Measures of Effective Teaching Project. The MET Project. December 2010. [http://www.metproject.org/downloads/Preliminary\\_Findings-Research\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.metproject.org/downloads/Preliminary_Findings-Research_Paper.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> State of the States: Trends and Early Lessons on Teacher Evaluation and Effectiveness Policies. National Council on Teacher Quality. October 2011.

<sup>4</sup> State of the States: Trends and Early Lessons on Teacher Evaluation and Effectiveness Policies. National Council on Teacher Quality. October 2011.

exams), industry certification examinations or those selected by school district and approved by PDE can be used.

**Multiple observation and practice areas** -- The observation and practice models included in the legislation were the very ones identified by the Momentum Pilot Stakeholder Group, on which PPC served. These were the areas identified as most related to student achievement for teachers and principals and are being validated by Mathematica.

**A significant weight for student achievement** – PPC feels that student performance should be a significant component of teacher and principal evaluation. We would support as proposal that includes 50 percent student achievement of which 15 percent would be a building academic performance measure. It is critical that this be based on multiple measures. As I mentioned earlier, setting the bar at 50 percent is consistent with action taken by numerous other states in recent years. While House Bill 1980 ensures that student performance would comprise at least 50 percent of the evaluation, the way the bill is currently written student performance could actually be 99 percent and classroom observation and practice could be 1 percent. The bill does not specifically reference the inclusion of a building measure within the student performance component. PPC believes that House Bill 1980 should be amended to include a rigorous but appropriate measure of student achievement in the development of the new evaluation systems.

Equally important is the need for the bill to apply to all public schools. As currently written, House Bill 1980 only applies to school districts, intermediate units and vocational-technical schools. Charter and cyber charters schools – albeit both public schools – would not be required to adopt the proposed rating system or develop alternative evaluation systems that meet or exceed the standards of effectiveness included in House Bill 1980. This exclusion is more than just unequal treatment of public schools. It is an inherent disservice to the children and teachers in charter and cyber charter schools.

PPC would also urge the committee to consider including student feedback as a portion of the evaluation. We know from research from Harvard University's "Tripod Project" that student feedback can be quite informative about teacher effectiveness. Student evaluations of classroom environment align with value-added assessments. I found a particularly interesting early finding that teachers whose students agreed with the statement, "We spend a lot of time in this class practicing for the state test," tended to make smaller gains on value-added exams than other teachers. Students know effective teaching when they experience it. Both the MET Project and Pittsburgh Public Schools are also incorporating objective student feedback or evaluations of teachers into their evaluation systems because the research is showing that it can be a reliable tool.

I shared a lot of information with you today about why the General Assembly needs to take action to improve our teacher and principal evaluation systems, but these changes alone are not the universal remedy to ensure that Pennsylvania has an effective teacher in every classroom and an effective principal in every building. There are additional strategies that improve student performance, including:

- Targeted professional development to address individual teacher needs, just as educators differentiate instruction to meet individual student needs.
- Expanded teacher induction efforts and mentoring for other teachers.
- Incentives to put Pennsylvania's most effective teachers in classrooms where we have the highest-needs students.
- Better pathways to professional growth, so teachers can advance and not feel "stuck" at a seemingly arbitrary professional plateau.
- The use of student input to help teachers grow and develop.

Those next steps aside, I believe there is general consensus that Pennsylvania's teacher evaluation system needs to change. PPC looks forward to working with all of you, Rep. Aument and the groups here today to make an improved system a reality.