

Texas Classroom Teachers Association

P.O. Box 1489
Austin, TX 78767

512-477-9415
1-888-879-8282
Fax 512-469-9527
<http://www.tcta.org/>



Testimony to the Senate Education Committee By the Texas Classroom Teachers Association

RE: SB 1643

April 3, 2007

Thank you for this opportunity for input on this comprehensive teacher preparation, training, appraisal and employment bill. As with most comprehensive bills, there are some things that we can speak favorably about. However, due to the nature of the provisions contained in this bill that we take issue with, we are opposing the bill at this time.

The aspects of the bill that we could support, with some modification, relate to educator preparation programs and professional development. We have met with Senator Shapiro's staff and provided our views regarding the positive aspects of these portions of the bill and the modifications that we would like to see.

The aspects resulting in our strong opposition to the bill are those relating to teacher appraisal and employment. A major part of the bill radically changes the way teachers are evaluated by requiring that a majority of the evaluation be based upon student performance, including test scores. We have long noted our opposition to basing high-stakes decisions upon student test scores when to date, we are not aware of a widely available, valid and statistically sound way to do so. We have also long questioned whether any test or measure designed to measure student performance is also statistically validated to measure teacher performance. The TAKS test was designed to measure student performance, and has not been validated to measure teacher performance. In short, student test scores measure student – not teacher – performance.

This being said, we'd also like to point out that the current state appraisal system for teachers is based on observable, job-related behavior, including teachers' implementation of discipline management procedures and the performance of teachers' students.

Specifically the PDAS includes the following components representing observable student performance:

The teacher uses a variety of evaluation and feedback strategies which are appropriate to the varied characteristics of the students)

The teacher diagnoses student needs and provides performance feedback related to all appropriate TEKS/TAKS objectives.

Requiring that teacher appraisals be based on student test scores is problematic for other reasons as well. What about the teachers that don't teach subjects that are tested? What about teachers who are assigned out of field, something over which they have no control? Should they be marked down on their appraisals when their students don't do well on tests in a subject that the teacher was not ever trained to teach? What about teachers who are new to the campus? Should they be marked down on their appraisal based on the campuses' performance as this legislation requires?

Finally, the bill requires that teachers whose performance appraisals are unsatisfactory under the new system proposed by this legislation are subject to mandatory contract nonrenewal under specified circumstances. We consider this provision to be unduly punitive and inappropriate at a number of levels. Local school administrators have the ability to nonrenew the employment of probationary contract teachers with ease under current law, and are generally not required to provide either a reason or an opportunity for a hearing. To decree that certain teachers must be let go based on an arbitrary standard that cannot even be linked to the teacher's performance in a scientifically verifiable manner ignores the fact that roughly half of new teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years of employment already. Many of those teachers are encouraged to leave, and many self-select out when they recognize the challenges of teaching.

Beginning teachers need support and encouragement through programs such as mentoring, which we have consistently supported; not a punitive and ill-conceived, arbitrary consequence.

Thank you.