



Daniel Fishbein, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

RIDGEWOOD

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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The Honorable M. Teresa Ruiz
NJ State Senate
166 Bloomfield Avenue
Newark, New Jersey 07104

Dear Senator Ruiz,

The Ridgewood Board of Education and I have reviewed the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for Children of New Jersey Act, TEACHNJ. We understand that you have been reaching out to stakeholders for feedback on the bill and we wanted to add our input as you prepare to discuss this legislation with your colleagues.

There is much we agree with in your bill. Teacher effectiveness is the most important factor for improving student achievement. High quality evaluations are needed to determine a teacher's strengths and weaknesses, shape an improvement plan, and inform personnel decisions. We support changes to the seniority system and the flexibility to make personnel decisions based on our students' needs and staff expertise when budget cuts force staff reductions:

However, there are two proposals in your bill that concern us. The first is the recommendation that gives the principal and the School Improvement Team the responsibility to hire, decide tenure, and dismiss staff. Missing in this proposal is the important role of the superintendent and Board of Education in making personnel decisions.

We do not understand the reasoning behind this proposal. By law it is the superintendent's responsibility to recommend to the Board of Education, staff to be hired and those to receive tenure. In addition, the superintendent recommends to the Board of Education increment withholding and tenure charges when warranted. In our district, as I am sure in most districts, recommendations to hire, retain, or dismiss staff are made only after careful consideration by the superintendent in consultation with the principals and supervisory staff. The recommendation is then reviewed by the Board of Education who affirms or denies it. When making staffing decisions the superintendent and the Board must weigh the impact they have on the district's budget and the potential to improve student achievement.

We are also concerned with the proposal that allows the school improvement team to make decisions about professional development for their school and their teachers. This would undermine the role of the superintendent as the district's instructional leader. With scarcity of budget dollars, decisions about professional development must be made with student achievement and district goals in mind. In large districts with multiple schools coordinating staff development centrally in consultation with the principals ensures collaboration and articulation among staff at various grade levels and schools. It is important that all schools within a district work together in improving instruction and teacher effectiveness.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you about these concerns.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Fishbein', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Daniel Fishbein, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

C: Ridgewood Board of Education
Senator Kevin O'Toole
Assemblyman Scott T. Rumana
Assemblyman David C. Russo