



Testimony Prepared for the Senate Finance Committee

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Chairman Widener and members of the Senate Finance Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today.

I will keep my comments brief. First, thank you for the improvements you have made to the charter school legislative language presented to you by the House. You have provided space for innovation and charter school expansion while also ensuring that all charter schools will be held accountable for their students' performance. This is important as we know from history in Ohio and the experience of other states that school choice is most effective when schools are held account for delivering results. Thank you for your strong leadership on this front.

I will use the remainder of my time to argue why now is not the time to back-track on matters of teacher effectiveness.

For as long as anyone can remember, in Ohio as in the rest of America, a public-school teacher's effectiveness and performance in the classroom have had little to no impact on decisions about whether she is retained by her district or laid off, how she is compensated or assigned to a district's schools, or how her professional development is crafted. Instead, all of these critical decisions are made on the basis of quality-blind state policies, like the notorious "last-in, first-out" mandate governing lay-offs, and tenure rules that allow teachers to have job protection for life and "bump" less senior teachers when jockeying for positions. Effective teachers are forced to go simply because they have not taught as long as others, regardless of how successful (or not) other teachers might be, students are left with whichever instructors have been in the system the longest, and teachers receive professional development that is not tied at all to their individual improvement needs.

To their credit, Governor Kasich and the Ohio House have been trying to transform the system by which the state handles these crucial teacher HR decisions. The biennial budget bill passed by the House assigns classroom effectiveness a key role in determining how teachers are assigned to schools, whether their contracts are renewed, and – when budgets make it unavoidable – how they are laid off. It would put in place a teacher evaluation system that incorporates student academic growth and several other key job-related performance factors and would rate teachers according to four tiers. Basic personnel decisions around tenure, placement, dismissal, and professional development would be tied directly to the evaluation results.

The evaluation model in this bill resembles those developed in bi-partisan fashion in other states. Recently, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Arizona, and Oklahoma have all passed laws that prohibit teacher layoffs based solely on seniority. These states all now require teacher performance ratings and/or evaluations to be considered in making such decisions. What's more, rigorous performance evaluations in these states are not just in place to help determine which teachers to let go. They will also help identify and reward highly effective teachers and tailor professional development in ways that help all teachers improve instruction. Ohio should do the same, and the teacher evaluation language presented to the Senate achieved just that.

Unfortunately, however, the Senate has dropped all of these provisions from its version of the budget, preferring instead to maintain Ohio's status as a laggard state with archaic laws that force school districts to consider only seniority when making teacher layoff decisions.

Some claim that the budget doesn't need to address teacher quality issues because Senate Bill 5 – the much-debated contentious collective bargaining measure signed by Governor Kasich in March – deals with these matters, too. (It is, of course, expected to be on the November ballot for voter consideration.) But they're wrong. The House budget bill's provisions are very different—and much better. While SB 5 does indeed remove the sanctity of seniority, it largely defines teacher effectiveness through antiquated input-based measures such as degrees earned and other paper credentials. Indeed, the teacher HR provisions of SB 5 are essentially unworkable, even if that law survives Election Day. They will be far

harder on districts to implement than the budget language and will not get Ohio where it needs to go in boosting student achievement.

The House version of the budget would. It connects measures of pupil academic growth to teachers, and further connects teachers' effectiveness to key personnel decisions. This is the direction other states are moving fast because they know teacher effectiveness is key to improving their schools.

The House budget version will also help Ohio to fulfill the promises it made in its successful \$400 million Race to the Top application. The state's Education Department and participating districts are already at work creating teacher-evaluation systems that incorporate student data. This is in keeping with Ohio's pledge to the feds to create a "comprehensive evaluation system that will provide constructive and timely feedback to teachers and principals, serve as a guide to professional development, and influence decisions regarding advanced licensure, continuing contracts, and removal of ineffective teachers and principals." Further, Ohio agreed to place "effective teachers and principals in their high-poverty and high-minority school through removing *seniority barriers*."

Moving toward a fairer and more modern system of gauging teacher effectiveness and using that information to inform personnel decisions will give districts the flexibility their leaders crave—and need even more when budgets are shrinking. It will help them retain their very best instructors while providing all teachers with the support and professional development they need to get better.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the opportunity to share my views on what I know are contentious issues. I know you are seeking solutions in tough times. Thank you for your leadership.