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# RIDGEWOOD

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## PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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The Honorable Barbara Buono  
NJ State Senate  
Two Lincoln Highway, Ste. 101  
Edison, NJ 08820

Dear Senator Buono:

I am writing to you concerning Bill S-3129. I agree that teachers must be evaluated in a meaningful and fair manner. In addition, as the science of teaching and learning evolves, we are increasingly able to improve the evaluation standards against which the effectiveness of each teacher's performance is measured.

The performance of Ridgewood teachers is already evaluated against standards in the four domains listed in S-3129. In fact, the indicators we use break those domains down into what we feel are more precise and clearly articulated expectations; and teachers receive "comprehensive evaluations" using these standards every year. The evaluation instruments we use for both our tenured and non-tenured teachers focus on a how well each teacher employs effective teaching methods, makes effective use of teaching tools and learning materials, demonstrates command of subject matter, creates and maintains a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning, civility and respect, establishes positive and constructive rapport with his/her students, demonstrates consistent planning and preparation that correlates with district curricula and the actual instruction delivered in the classroom, engages in on-going evaluation of student achievement, recognizes and fulfills his/her total professional responsibilities, demonstrates ongoing initiative to grow professionally, and develops harmonious relationships with others. I think you will find that most school districts already evaluate above and beyond the standards in S-3129 without the mandate of law, and do so in ways that honor local priorities, relationships and histories.

Of greater concern to me, however, is the element of S-3129 that would require the participation of "lead teachers" in the assessment of individual teacher performance. These "lead teachers" would be in the same bargaining units as the rest of the faculty. This would create a conflict of interest that would preclude objectivity and any meaningful critical perspective. Beyond that, the skills necessary to evaluate teaching staff are now taught as part of the extensive graduate education required by the N.J.D.O.E. in order to obtain administrative certification. Those skills are then initially used and refined by novice administrators during mentored residency programs. These skills simply cannot be taught or learned effectively through "training" that would be any less rigorous. Finally, teachers evaluating the performance of other teachers cannot have the

same responsibility and accountability as Principals and other administrative supervisors for following up evaluations with appropriate professional development when it is needed; and cannot have the same responsibility and accountability if professional development efforts do not lead to improved teacher performance. Teachers can, are and should be part of the resources districts use to provide professional development to other teachers. They should not be evaluators of their colleagues' performance.

Creating a new "lead teacher" position to perform teacher evaluations would also create additional financial burdens on school districts. If this becomes a mandate, the cost of "training" will undoubtedly be borne by local boards of education that will be pressured to develop cadres of "lead teachers" from within their ranks. Teachers' associations will then undoubtedly demand to bargain for additional compensation under the premise that these "lead teachers" will be taking on added responsibility. A "lead teacher" coming from another school to perform observations would also require someone else to cover his/her instructional and other responsibilities in his/her own school while s/he is out of the building; and that "someone else" will need to be paid.

Although it is unclear how the "five levels of career progression" created in S-3129 would be used, I suspect they, too, would lead to increased costs to school districts. If they are intended to be a basis for salary advancement (and teacher's associations will assuredly argue in favor of this), they will result in massive additional burdens on local budgets because S-3129 does not require that current contractual entitlements to compensation be reduced or eliminated to balance them. As defined, the "five levels" are too subjective to be equitably applied across a single district, much less the entire state. If they do, in fact, become the basis for salary advancement, this subjectivity will lead to a regular stream of litigation when employees are unhappy with supervisors' assessments. Even if such litigation is prohibited in some revision of S-3129, the subjectivity of the "five levels" will undermine morale within districts.

Lastly, it is well-established in the law that while procedures for how and when performance observations and evaluations are conducted are subject to collective bargaining, evaluation standards are not. Determining what levels of performance employees must demonstrate should be left to the judgment of the employer (i.e., boards of education) who relies on the knowledge, insight and skill of its trained managers (i.e., school administrators). A statutory mandate to incorporate faculty into the evaluation process will create conflict, reduce effectiveness and increase costs. I believe S-3129 would be a step backward from the current practice in Ridgewood and most, if not all, other districts in New Jersey.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this important issue at your convenience.

Sincerely yours,



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Superintendent of Schools

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C: Senator Kevin O'Toole  
Assemblyman Scott Rumana  
Assemblyman David Russo  
Ridgewood Board of Education  
Bergen County Assoc. of School Administrators  
Garden State Coalition of Schools  
Ridgewood Public School Administrators