



A Union of Professionals

**Remarks For AFT President Randi Weingarten
AFT Teacher Evaluation Conference
“Toward A True Development And Evaluation System”**

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As Prepared For Delivery

I. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Thank you all for being here, at our second conference on teacher development and evaluation. I'd also like to thank the Gates Foundation, which has provided support for this conference and for some of the other work the AFT is doing to improve teaching and learning in our nation's public schools. This conference is a forum for an important dialogue about how to develop and evaluate the art and the science of teaching in a way that helps teachers improve and students succeed.

I wish the governor of Wisconsin could see the work we're doing here. Or perhaps the mayor of Providence, who just mass-fired every teacher in that city.

Because this conference is a powerful reminder of who educators are: people who feel a profound responsibility to our profession and to the children we teach, and who act on that responsibility every day.

Because this conference is a powerful reminder of how the labor-management relationship can and should be used—employing the collective bargaining process as a vehicle for positive change, and drawing on insights educators have gained from living the daily realities of the classroom.

And because this conference is demonstrating that collective bargaining is more than an abstract right. It's what gives the people who do the work a voice in the process and a vehicle through which they can strive for something better.

That “something better” is about more than salaries and benefits. That “something better” can also be a better way of doing things—a better way of improving and evaluating teaching, defining tenure, and, ultimately, a better way of helping students succeed.

At its best, collective bargaining is collaborative problem-solving—where management and the people on the frontlines come together and figure out how to make things work better.

And, although it is obvious to us that making schools better places for teachers to teach also makes them better places for students to learn, sadly, it's not obvious to the governor of Wisconsin.

Last week, I was in Wisconsin, where I spoke to so many educators who told me that, yes, the cuts to their pension and healthcare benefits are going to hurt their budgets and their families—but that wasn't what it was about for them. They were afraid that their voices would be silenced when it came to ideas about how to make schools better.

Today, we come together to confront another education challenge—how to continue the work on teacher quality; specifically, the building of both the evaluation and the improvement processes in a way that offers support when needed, and clarity about how to proceed if the support doesn't work.

That's what I want to focus my comments on today.

A little more than 13 months ago, here in Washington, I spoke at the National Press Club—and laid out a framework for effective teacher development and evaluation. Since that time, delegates representing the 1.5 million AFT members adopted a resolution making that framework AFT policy.

That framework is already influencing how hundreds of school systems—with their unions—think about these issues, with a number of districts adopting it outright.

And last year we also promised to develop a framework in which due process is aligned to a comprehensive teacher development and evaluation system. Today, I will outline that framework.

As important as evaluation is to assessing teacher performance, what passes for teacher evaluation in many districts frankly isn't up to this important task. Way too often, teacher evaluations are superficial. They're subjective. They miss a prime opportunity to improve teacher practice and, thereby, *increase student learning*. And that's what it's all about, isn't it?

The result is an arbitrary evaluation, followed by an arbitrary process, at which point an arbitrator gets asked to figure it all out.

The AFT has been working on a “continuous improvement” model, where there's a development and evaluation process, followed by, if necessary, an improvement and support process, followed by, if necessary, a hearing process.

These are three clear steps that align evaluation with due process.

II. A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR MISCONDUCT

Before I delve into that, permit me a minute to update you on the other aspect of teacher quality I raised in that speech at the National Press Club last year. Most attention was paid to what I said about the need for a process that is both fair and fast when it comes to cases of alleged teacher misconduct. At the time, I announced that Kenneth Feinberg, a well-regarded arbiter, had agreed to spearhead the AFT's effort to develop a fair, efficient protocol for adjudicating questions of teacher discipline and, when called for, teacher removal.

Just last month, Mr. Feinberg presented his framework to us. Feinberg and his team found that, all too often, there are myriad ways a teacher misconduct process can get mired in all sorts of delaying tactics. To address this, he recommended that, absent the most extraordinary circumstances, an allegation should be pled (very specifically), considered and resolved within 100 days.

This month, the AFT executive council voted unanimously to support the Feinberg framework, and we're now working for its adoption in the states.

III. THE SHORTCOMINGS OF OUR CURRENT SYSTEM, AND THE FLAWED LOGIC OF FIRING OUR WAY TO BETTER TEACHING

While this is important progress on an issue about which passions run high, allegations of serious misconduct are rare. We do not have an epidemic of “bad” teachers.

But all teachers are affected by the lack of comprehensive development and evaluation systems, in two ways.

First, the lack of such systems undermines teachers’ ability to do their best work—both for themselves and their students.

Second, in the absence of such systems, there is no reliable way of determining who is and who is not an effective teacher—allowing some to use the “bad teacher” stereotype to inaccurately, indiscriminately and irresponsibly taint the entire profession.

No one wants an ineffective teacher in the classroom. But no one should want an effective teacher tossed out of the profession because teacher evaluations are nonexistent, broken or mishandled. Just as there is not an epidemic of bad teachers, there is not an epidemic of bad principals. But abuses do happen, such as in New York City recently, when a principal ordered her assistant principals to give unsatisfactory ratings to teachers she wanted to get rid of—even before the teachers had been evaluated.

A comprehensive development and evaluation system would enable all teachers to improve, and to align their work with what kids need to know and do in the new knowledge economy.

Such a system would help determine who is and who is not an effective teacher—something that neither drive-by nor test-score-driven evaluations do.

Our aim is to have a comprehensive, fair, transparent and expedient process that identifies, improves and—if necessary—removes ineffective teachers.

But we also need to recognize that teaching is a very complex endeavor, and while teachers are extraordinarily important, we cannot educate children all by ourselves. Teaching is both an art and a science that teachers can master over time.

So an evaluation system that focuses solely on removing a tiny minority of teachers, without focusing on improving the vast majority—an evaluation system that isn’t also an improvement and support system—won’t ensure that all kids are taught by the excellent teachers they deserve.

That is why we have resisted—and will continue to resist—any system that is simply a sorting exercise. We need evaluation also to be a supporting exercise.

We’ve seen people like Eric Hanushek, who may know a great deal about economics but little about pedagogy, try to reduce teaching to a number—a regression analysis—with the implication being that you can fire your way to good teaching.

That’s a flawed approach.

It assumes that you can just drop somebody in, and, if she doesn't work, you can just show her the door. But this is teaching, not speed dating. That approach is incredibly disruptive to learning.

It defies the abundant research that shows that teachers improve over time, and with support—not unlike other professions. Could you imagine doing this in medicine?

And in this difficult fiscal environment, trying to fire your way to good teaching is an incredibly costly exercise. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future found that teacher turnover costs the nation \$7.34 billion each year—and that's 2007 dollars. That number is so high because of the huge turnover—it's the amount of money it takes annually to recruit, hire, process and train new teachers, as well as to provide recruitment incentives like relocation bonuses. So it's not just bad education policy, it's bad economic policy.

IV. THE REAL PROBLEM

There's a rallying cry from some education observers, and it goes something like this: The real problem with due process is that it takes too long to remove an ineffective teacher.

But, given their way, those people would skip the process altogether and go straight to the judgment.

More worrying, they've identified a symptom and suggested a cure without dealing with the underlying illness. That's like giving crutches to someone with an injured leg without first X-raying the bone.

Simply put, this is the problem: In the absence of a comprehensive development and evaluation system—with clear standards and clear steps—the adjudication becomes the evaluation. In that setting, how can anyone make a defensible judgment about who is or is not an effective teacher?

Drive-by evaluations are a quick fix.

Base-the-whole-evaluation-on-test-scores is a quick fix.

And we've seen that all of these quick fixes lead to long, long disputes.

Let me say it again: The reason that due process can be so long and cumbersome in performance cases is because there has been no real evaluation system, no support when teachers fall short, no consensus about the steps toward either improvement or removal, and no accountability when administrators fail to fulfill their responsibilities.

What happens instead is that the judicial system—the court system, the hearing before the arbitrator—is basically where the competency of an individual teacher gets litigated.

That shouldn't be the arbitrator's job. It's like asking an accountant to be an art critic.

So instead of evaluation quick fixes that can lead to long, long disputes, how about we have a comprehensive fix, and very few, very short disputes?

That's what we're proposing: a three step process, at the end of which, if it comes to that, the arbitrator is asked only to judge, and judge quickly, the fidelity of the process.

V. OUR PROPOSAL

Our proposal begins with implementing the development and evaluation system we've been promoting and pressing for the last year, because we need to get at the key question: What skills and performance should we expect from a teacher?

And that means having clear standards.

Teachers need to know the content and performance standards they're expected to meet and the measures being used to assess them. These standards should spell out what teachers should know and be able to do—because how else can we determine whether a teacher is performing, as she should?

School districts and unions must work together to develop the standards for instructional practice and student learning, as well as the guidelines, policies and timelines for its implementation.

Based on those standards, evaluation should take into account multiple measures: classroom observations, portfolio review, appraisal of lesson plans, and all the other tools we use to measure student learning—written work, performances, presentations and projects.

In the context of "multiple measures," student test scores based on valid and reliable assessments should also be considered—not by comparing the scores of last year's students with the scores of this year's students, but by assessing whether a teacher's students show real growth while in his classroom.

Comprehensive evaluation systems are currently being developed in places like Cleveland; Douglas County, Colo.; New Haven, Conn.; Pittsburgh; Hillsborough County, Fla.; and hundreds more. And the AFT received a federal Investing in Innovation Fund grant to expand the evaluation work currently under way in a dozen school districts in New York and Rhode Island.

Our evaluation framework was developed by union leaders from around the country, with input from some of America's top teacher-evaluation experts—researchers like Charlotte Danielson, Susan Moore Johnson and Thomas Kane. And, as I said earlier, it was adopted as policy at the most recent AFT convention.

Today, we take that work to the next step.

In the cases when teachers are deemed to be unsatisfactory according to these standards, it must trigger a support process.

This begins with notification, in writing, of the specific concerns that led to the unsatisfactory performance judgment. And that notification should not be months or years afterward, it should be days afterward.

This is not a small thing. I've been involved in situations where teachers are told, after their evaluations, "It just wasn't a good class." Teachers deserve to know where they're falling short and what they need to focus on to improve.

We believe the best improvement and support system is one that includes principals and peers. However, in places that don't have a peer process, we need a second set of eyes.

And because an unsatisfactory evaluation could put a teacher on a path toward dismissal, that is when you want a second set of eyes.

This way, everybody is on the same page, and everybody can work together to help the teacher assemble an improvement plan—a plan that directly addresses the issues identified by the evaluator.

This improvement plan should be developed quickly—ideally, within a week—and it should include clearly articulated measures of success, timelines, support needed and periodic reviews. It should contain self, peer and administrative components. All parties should sign off on the plan, and the union should have the right to object to the plan if the support is not sufficient.

Teacher ownership of the plan is vitally important, because if teachers really own their improvement plan, and they are given the support they need to follow it, they can dramatically improve their practice.

And it is the district's and the union's joint responsibility to support the plan—to ensure that the teacher has all of the resources articulated in the improvement plan (for example, having a master teacher come in and co-teach a class to model effective practice).

Again, in the interest of a fair and expedient process, no improvement plan can continue for more than the equivalent of one school year. That time is necessary, as the best peer systems and the best induction programs for new teachers have taught us.

And this leads to the point at which there's a weighty decision—the hearing process. This is where the administrator makes his recommendation about whether the plan was successful and whether the teacher is performing up to the standard. Where there is a peer process, the peer experts may join the administrator's recommendation or make a separate recommendation. These recommendations are forwarded to the school district, which then decides whether to retain or remove a teacher. A neutral third party then reviews the recommendations for a final decision.

If there's a peer process and the judgments are the same, that's conclusive. If not, that is something an arbitrator would have to consider.

The bottom line is that the hearing is really a review of the entire evaluative process to ensure fairness and objectivity. It's not a re-litigation of what constitutes good teaching. And that's why, as in the framework laid out by Ken Feinberg, no adjudication for teacher performance could take longer than 100 days.

This is how we align evaluation and due process.

VI. COLLABORATIVE REFORM

Last week, the Department of Education, the AFT, the NEA, the American Association of School Administrators and other education groups sponsored a labor-management conference, which was held in Denver. I want to thank the Education Department, and specifically Secretary Duncan, for convening this

important meeting. That conference reinforced that when labor and management work together in a trusting, productive manner, it helps create the conditions for teachers to teach and students to learn.

One of the leaders who attended the conference was Dan Domenech, the executive director of the American Association of School Administrators. Dan is respected throughout the education community; prior to his current role at the AASA, he was a teacher, a superintendent and a developer of educational tools.

I'm pleased to announce that Dan has agreed to co-convene a group of leaders—from labor, management and the research field—who will look at the AFT's proposal for aligning due process with the system of development and evaluation, and consider ways to adjust, improve and ultimately implement it.

We're doing this because none of this works if management and the union don't work together, particularly given that school administrators have historically been responsible for teacher recruitment, induction, retention and discipline processes. Let's get real. Do we want to continue to point fingers and say these problems are "your fault"? Or do we want to try to solve problems—with management and labor working together?

VII. CONCLUSION: A MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITY

We believe that a system built on the three components I've just laid out will make teacher development and evaluation a tool to improve teaching and learning, and will lay the groundwork for a new approach to due process.

As I said before, we are prepared to work with any district willing to work with us to develop and implement a real teacher development and evaluation system, and a due process system aligned to it.

And I believe that despite the contentiousness that has surrounded this issue, we stand at an incredible moment of opportunity. Who would have thought, for example, that even in this tough fiscal environment, 44 states would have adopted new Common Core standards, around which new curricula, professional development tools and assessments are being developed?

This is the perfect time to incorporate a new approach to teacher support and evaluation.

This is the moment at which we can put to bed the issue of teachers who shouldn't be teaching, while at the same time promising our teachers the tools, conditions and help they need, and the fairness they deserve. Our kids, and their teachers, deserve nothing less.

It's a moment we can seize, together.

Thank you.