

*Remarks of Aaron Brenner
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**For the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24
AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS
Sections 29 and 30, *Teacher Tenure and Teacher Evaluation***

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My name is Aaron Brenner, and I'm an English teacher in South Windsor.

The teacher tenure law as it is currently written is really a non-issue when it comes to the firing of incompetent teachers. If administrators do their jobs properly, both in the years before tenure is acquired and after, then they really have little trouble terminating unqualified teachers. The problem is two-fold: the public (and this includes many teachers) is ignorant of how the tenure law currently works, and administrators often do not do their jobs properly (either because they are overburdened or they themselves are incompetent).

Changing the law to play to your constituents does nothing to mitigate their ignorance or improve the quality of teachers in our schools. Changing the process for evaluating and terminating administrators might. Right now administrators have four years to observe, assess, coach and ultimately dismiss ineffective teachers without any fight to do so. They can even fire teachers who are perfectly competent for entirely unethical reasons. I would like to think this does not happen, but I have been teaching for sixteen years, so I know it does.

After a teacher acquires tenure, he/she can still be fired if administration does its due diligence and properly records the failings of that teacher. Unfortunately, most administrators seem to have more urgent interests than policing the quality of their staff. Many are looking to increase standardized test scores and facilitate programs that will look good on the application for their next promotion, while avoiding the negative repercussions of angering any powerful parents. Often their only real concern is any teacher who might negatively impact these efforts.

To be fair, the only evidence I have to support this claim is anecdotal, but I have taught in four schools over the past sixteen years and this has been the case in every one of them. I have seen teachers denied tenure or the right to teach certain courses simply because their methods did not demonstrate absolute allegiance to the self-serving goals of administration. These were not unpopular teachers; they were seasoned veterans beloved by their students. Additionally, in each of these schools, the tenure for administrators averaged two or three years before they found better opportunities elsewhere – and these were not difficult inner-city schools.

If you want to speak to the real problems of public education, then costly legislation that ostracizes and alienates many of our finest teachers while it does little to rid us of the less than 3% who are incompetent is not the path to take. It is well understood that the most severe

problems with education come from socio-economic problems in our communities. Perhaps those problems can't be fixed, and you would prefer to focus on what can be done in the schools themselves. If such is the case, then this is the fix: do more to train and hire competent administrators while firing incompetent ones.

I would like to urge the committee to reconsider its position on teacher tenure and evaluation until something can be done to ensure that the quality of administrators improves. These are the people who ultimately make the decisions affecting our work environment and our ability to continue happily and effectively in our chosen careers. If we can't be guaranteed that they will be the most ethical, knowledgeable and fair-minded people available, then how can you ask us to pay the consequences of their decisions.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.