

*Remarks of Suzanne J. Kalish
1st Grade Teacher
Ridgefield Public Schools*

**Before the Education Committee
On S.B. No. 24 - AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS
Section 29-Teacher Evaluation and Tenure**

February 21, 2012

Good afternoon Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Suzanne Kalish, and I'm a 1st Grade teacher in Ridgefield. I am writing to you today to comment on Senate Bill 24, Section 29.

This is my 24th year of teaching. Over the past 24 years, I have felt the evaluation process to be a fair system of noting areas of strength, and specific in pointing out areas I needed to bolster. The process as it stands is collaborative and respectful.

Two years ago, I had only 16 students. With a class this small, one would assume that I could get so much more accomplished with these students. What was not apparent to those outside of my classroom was the composition of the class. Of the 16, one was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. If I were to pull a small group for instruction and this child was left unattended, he would rip his papers, squeeze them into balls, or push them across the floor with his knees. A second child had hearing loss in both ears. He was often frustrated, would avoid tasks and frequently yell out. He required a lot of redirection and skill repetition. When I would pull a small group to work with, this child often wandered around the room, threw pencils in the air, and generally got very little accomplished. I had 4 students who were continuously reprimanded for behavior. It was not uncommon for them to start food fights in the cafeteria, push others, and attempt jokes during lessons, pulling all of the class off task. I had 4 students who had Attention Deficit Disorder. If they were left to work independently, within minutes they were staring into space. I had three of the highest readers across 1st grade, and four of the lowest. Amongst 16 students, I had 7 different reading groups for whom I was responsible for meeting their individual needs through differentiated instruction.

My schedule had support staff coming into my class to help with my Asperger's and Hearing Impaired students, with whom I had to stick to the prescribed schedule. In an entire week, I had only two thirty-minute blocks alone with my class. Thus, there was no time to catch children up on areas of concern, or to be fun and spontaneous.

The prior year, I had phoned, e-mailed or met with parents approximately 50 times from September to January. When I had these 16 students, from September to January, I had communicated with parents well over 125 times in regard to behaviors and students falling below expectations due to a lack of focus, or lack of value placed on learning.

In my previous years, I always took great pride in getting all but one or two students on or above grade level by year's end. The year I taught these 16 students was an entirely different story.

The four who came to my class remained above grade level, but could have gone much farther. My four low students went on to second grade below grade level. I had spent far too much time managing behavior problems, in PPTs, my cries for help falling on deaf ears.

I am a respected teacher, known for pushing students to do their "personal best". I have hundreds of letters from parents commending my skills, and students who respect me and how I have taught them. I am known for "raising the bar" at the end of the year, to make the transition to second grade easier.

Class placement for that year seemed fine when I left in June. The four new students I picked up over the summer dramatically changed the class composition, directly impeded my ability to deliver instruction, and impacted the learning of all the students.

Should I have been evaluated on the progress and assessments of that class, I fear what the outcome may have been. To be judged ONLY on that year as a determination of my teaching abilities would have been a travesty.

Often, the teachers who are the best are given the toughest classes because, "They can handle it". This is common practice, and while unfair, does affect whether or not you can be a "highly effective teacher". I implore you to reconsider tying assessments to teaching certification.