

My name is Mark Reinders. I am a fourth grade teacher in Ridgefield. I would like to strongly urge the following.

1. Please do NOT tamper with binding arbitration. To say that removing it would somehow benefit student performance is an absurd statement and an outright lie. They are entirely disconnected subjects.

Binding arbitration is a very effective mechanism that "binds" both negotiating parties to a timeline for negotiations, mediation and arbitration that both are obligated to honor. It ensures that both parties negotiate in good faith. It has proven to be highly effective and, in the very few cases that actually go as far as the arbitration process, it statistically slightly favors municipalities. The ONLY reason to eliminate it is to grant ALL power to the towns and NONE to the teachers. It is nothing more than an attempt to crush the union.

2. Please leave tenure alone. It has proven to be an effective carrot or enticement to pull new talent into the field where they might otherwise commit to other careers that are higher paying for fewer hours. Also, the notion that tenured teachers cannot be removed is a deliberate falsehood. They are often "counseled" out of the profession and given the option to resign or retire rather than face a prolonged, expensive, public and embarrassing battle. This is never mentioned publicly by the anti-tenure crowd.

3. The notion that you can contrive a reasonable and fair teacher evaluation system based on "student performance" (tests) is ridiculous. No two classes are alike. If my salary rested on student performance it would fluctuate radically despite the fact that NOTHING about my level of commitment, effort, effectiveness, dedication and ability changes from year to year. In fact, each year I get better. This does not always guarantee a similar output by students. I may have 27 kids like last year who were often not super motivated no matter how hard I worked. This year I have 22 who ARE very motivated. A class in inner city New Haven will not be remotely comparable to a class of 20 in Darien, CT.

Creating a pay structure predicated on student testing would result in a) wildly fluctuating pay levels year by year (making it literally impossible to plan for the future), b) foster competitive and often antagonistic atmospheres within a building where collegiality now reigns because everyone will work to have the better students, fewer special needs students, better parents, etc. (this would happen because you would have made their professional survival utterly dependent on the best test takers) c) eliminate any hint of true education and sense of curiosity, inquiry and most of all enthusiasm for learning because taking a bunch of badly flawed tests and the relentlessly endless preparation for those tests the cornerstone of so-called education. Just because you take someone's temperature every day does not mean you are addressing their illness.

I feel that if the current proposals are permitted to become law they will virtually ensure that the best and the brightest will look at the teaching profession and turn away ASAP.

Ultimately the students will pay the greatest price because of the zealous pursuit of Stepford students, taught by Stepford teachers who are being encouraged to hoard all their best units and teaching methods with no guarantee of a salary increase or job security. You will absolutely be providing the greatest possible disservice to teachers and students and parents alike. Thank you. Mark Reinders