



Seattle Teachers Are on the Brink of Adopting Historic Change

Seattle teachers are on the brink of adopting historic changes that could increase student achievement, help close the achievement gap and increase teacher accountability through a jointly developed evaluation system. But Seattle District leaders are risking throwing all that away, publicly trying to goad teachers into a strike, all to achieve reforms that don't pass the common sense test.

We're focused on quality teaching and providing accountability

- Seattle educators want to ensure there is a great teacher in every classroom.
- Educators and district leaders have worked together to create a plan that increases teacher accountability and focuses on student performance. Under the new plan, it will no longer be OK to just get by: teachers will face specific measures unless they're in the top two proficiency levels.
- Accountability also increases for administrators, who will now have standards on which to judge teachers. The joint SEA/district agreement provides a standards-based, four-level rating system (Innovative, Proficient, Basic, and Unsatisfactory).
- Any employee not in the top two proficiency tiers will get a plan of assistance. If they cannot improve and become proficient, even employees with a "basic" rating would enter the probation process. That's a new and higher threshold that educators must meet.
- These changes, which were developed collaboratively, have been jointly proposed to the bargaining team by SEA leaders and top district administrators. They could be implemented when school starts this fall. But that agreement is now stalled because the district superintendent wants to unilaterally change the proposal.
- The collaborative plan uses methods that are tested, proven and research-based.

We don't agree that tests results should be misused

- Students are more than test scores.
- The key difference between the superintendent's plan and the joint agreement developed by the district and educators is how to most effectively use test results to improve instruction.
- Tests are designed to understand how well a student understands a particular topic on a particular day, and serve as a basis to guide instruction. Education professionals understand classroom tests are not designed to rank teachers. Seattle's superintendent proposes to misuse student test scores as a basis for employee evaluation. The jointly developed plan by the district and Seattle's educators would use student test scores, but in an appropriate role as one of numerous indicators to help channel a teacher's professional growth.

- You don't have to decide who to believe on this issue: Even the testing companies state that the tests were not designed to determine teacher performance.
- Placing an even greater emphasis on test scores is likely to have unintended consequences. If jobs depend on tests, human nature will be to teach more to the test. That can only further narrow the curriculum at a time when options are already disappearing because of budget cuts.

Educators believe students learn best in a professional setting that fosters trust and collaboration

- Seattle's educators are ready to follow through with the plan jointly developed with the district, but the superintendent is now obstructing that agreement.
- In contrast to the joint plan that was developed collaboratively, the superintendent deliberately waited until Seattle's educators left town for the summer before presenting her first comprehensive draft of the SERVE proposal. Seattle educators and district negotiators already had met for nearly 15 bargaining sessions. The superintendent would divert \$4 million to create a computer system that spits out employee evaluations. These millions would be better used to supply direct student services, instead of foolishly attempting to automate a process as individualized as teacher evaluations.

Resources:

1. Professional Growth and Evaluation Joint Task Force's self assessment tool modeled after the work of Charlotte Danielson: http://www.seattlewea.org/static_content/pge.pdf
2. Charlotte Danielson's work: <http://www.danielsongroup.org/theframeteach.htm>
3. SPS's SERVE proposal: http://www.seattleschools.org/area/laborrelations/20100804_Summary_of_SPS_Proposals_for_Certificated_Staff.pdf
4. SEA's research-based proposals: http://www.seattlewea.org/static_content/researchproposal.pdf
5. SEA's message to members about the "Truth about SERVE": http://www.seattlewea.org/static_content/bargainupdate7.pdf
6. Professor Daniel Willingham explains the pitfalls of linking student test scores to teacher evaluations: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uONqxysWEk8>
7. Northwest Evaluation Association: <http://www.nwea.org/>