



ASSOCIATED PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS of LOUISIANA

May 19, 2010

A+PEL is proud of our long history of supporting Louisiana educators who are committed to providing students the best possible education. To that end, we support legislation and regulations that empower educators and that gives them the best tools available to best serve their students.

I am writing to you because there is legislation before the state legislature that some may consider controversial. The bill, H.B. 1033, makes several changes to current law, but most important to you, as an educator who prides yourself on doing your best every day, this bill changes the methodology used in your evaluations as well as the frequency of evaluations. It's important to note that H.B. 1033 has no effect on teacher pay.

After thoughtful consideration, A+PEL has decided to support H.B. 1033. We have heard from members who are both supportive and opposed to the bill. Not surprisingly, we are finding that misinformation about H.B. 1033 is circulating at rapid speed. I want to explain A+PEL's reasoning for supporting the bill and to give you detailed, accurate information about the legislation.

As an educator, I understand that changing the way you are evaluated is concerning to you. As the advocate of your profession, A+PEL takes very seriously any legislation that impacts you to this degree. More and more demands are being placed on educators today than ever before. Let's face it – today's education climate is very different from just a decade ago. As you read the information below, please keep an open mind as to the merits of this proposed legislation.

There are seven key reasons for A+PEL's support of H.B. 1033:

1. It addresses the disconnect between low student achievement and high satisfactory ratings of teachers.
2. It is not punitive toward teachers and seeks to improve teachers in their profession.
3. It allows for multiple measures outside of testing for teacher evaluations.
4. It is student centered.
5. It mandates teacher input for evaluation criteria and implementation.
6. It considers teachers in both core and non-core subject areas and testing and non-testing grades.
7. It is based on the successful use of a value-added model in 75 schools in Louisiana.

Reason #1: Disconnect between low student achievement and high satisfactory ratings of teachers

Data from the Louisiana Department of Education shows that for more than 30 years, 98% of all teachers in Louisiana receive "satisfactory" ratings under the current teacher evaluation system, even in schools where students fail to meet basic academic standards year after year. During this same time period, less than 1% of all teachers were rated as "needing improvement," yet over 200,000 school children are performing below grade-level. As educators, we cannot be satisfied knowing that 33% of Louisiana's students are not meeting basic

academic standards. H.B. 1033 addresses this disconnect and establishes a more quantitative and less subjective evaluation system.

Reason #2: Not punitive toward teachers and seeks to improve teachers in their profession

As educators, we know that teachers cannot control the circumstances of a student prior to entering our classrooms. Because every student enters the classroom at different levels, under this law, student success will be assessed on learning gains, not performance levels. These reforms require demonstrated progress – what students actually learn during the school year. This is a fair and more accurate way to evaluate teachers, and it ensures that each teacher gets credit for how much s/he adds to a student's learning over the course of a year.

The key to A+PEL's support of this bill is the inclusion of a value-added model. Value-added data measures whether a teacher's students scored better or worse than expected on standardized tests using a statistical formula that predicts a child's test scores based on past performance. This data also takes into account important student characteristics such as eligibility for special education services, free and reduced lunch status, discipline issues, school attendance and other factors beyond a teacher's control so that there is a more fair method to evaluate educators who teach similar students in Louisiana. Value-added data measures will be able to identify both effective teachers and those teachers who need more support. Further, the value-added model ensures that teachers and schools get credit not only for leading their students to achieve high absolute levels of academic success, but also for ensuring students continue to make positive academic gains each year.

Current evaluation programs do not provide teachers with measures of their strengths or specific areas where they are underperforming. The value-added model of assessment offers a tool to target those areas needing more focus and will help to identify specific professional development activities to assist a teacher. This will give teachers the best opportunity to improve their instruction and enhance student learning.

H.B. 1033 identifies effective teachers and supports teacher evaluations based on facts – not just subjective observations or opinion. In addition, the bill phases-in over a two year period, with official evaluations beginning in 2012, giving teachers and administrators time to become familiar with the improved system and ensure student growth measures are accurate.

Conferencing and classroom observations will remain intact; however, formal evaluations will occur annually instead of every three years. Satisfactory and unsatisfactory ratings will be replaced by the terms effective and ineffective, respectively. An educator may not be recertified by the local school board should s/he receive three consecutive years of ineffective ratings based on student growth (not student performance).

Finally, the bill extends the current grievance process for teacher ratings under the new evaluation system, which means that due process for all educators is protected.

Reason #3: Allows for multiple measures outside of testing for teacher evaluations

No single test can give a complete picture of a teacher's effectiveness, but looking at how students improve over time on those tests can assist when combined with other evaluation criteria. By including student growth in test results into our current evaluation system - which now relies primarily only on classroom observations - we can ensure a more objective measure of ourselves and the schools in which we teach. Growth in student achievement will represent 50% of a teacher's evaluation and will be combined with school information, in-class observations, and other reviews. These multiple measures will provide a better understanding of how educators should focus their efforts to improve instruction for the benefit of all students.

Reason #4: Student centered

As an A+PEL member, you know that A+PEL's founding principles focus on putting a priority on student achievement. As an educators' organization, we cannot sit idly by while tens of thousands of students fall further behind. We must find a better way of identifying problem areas and rectify them.

While teachers cannot control circumstances outside the classroom, every student has the ability to learn and has the right to the best opportunity to learn. We should not allow low expectations to hold any student back from their learning potential. By measuring students' learning gains, we have the ability to see the progress of every student and more accurately assess what's working and what is not in our educational system.

Reason #5: Mandates teacher input for evaluation criteria and implementation

H.B. 1033 requires the state superintendent of education to appoint and convene an Educator Evaluation Advisory Committee to make recommendations to the board regarding the development of a value-added assessment model, the identification of measures of student growth for grades and subjects for which value-added data is not available and for personnel for whom value-added data is not available, and the adoption of standards of effectiveness. The membership of the advisory committee shall be approved by the board, and at least 50% of the membership shall be comprised of practicing classroom educators. A+PEL will be represented on this advisory committee.

Reason #6: It considers teachers in both core and non-core subject areas and testing and non-testing grades

While testing subjects and grades currently have clear measurements, H.B. 1033 ensures student growth will be a factor for every teacher. For subjects and grades where tests or value-added data are not available, BESE will determine other measures of student growth that will be just as rigorous and quantifiable as those in tested grades and subjects. For example, one methodology will have teachers set goals with their principals and then assess whether those goals are achieved. A+PEL believes that it is important that these measurements have teacher input and will work with BESE to help shape assessment of student growth in non-tested subjects and grades.

Reason #7: Based on the successful use of value-added model in 75 schools in Louisiana

Louisiana is recognized as a national leader in its use of the value-added model. Seventy-five schools in 12 districts across the state are already benefiting from this model. Louisiana's Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) relies on value-added to guide professional development and improve teacher effectiveness. More than 77% of these schools are experiencing more than one year of growth in student achievement. The Value-Added Teacher Preparation Assessment Model, operational for more than three years, measures the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs by tying student growth measures to their teachers, and to the colleges and universities that trained those teachers.

Due to the unprecedented spending from the U.S. Department of Education, many education leaders believe that what is happening in education is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve the quality of education in America. However, the way Washington has done business in the past has changed significantly. Competitively-based state education grants have replaced a formula-based granting system. This means that measurable outputs – namely student achievement – determine which states get a share of the federal dollars available.

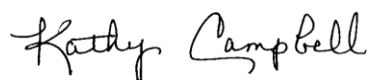
Indeed, Louisiana is no exception to amending education laws to attract federal dollars. State legislatures across the country are considering or have already passed legislation similar to H.B. 1033. To that end, states that show the greatest promise for strong student achievement are being rewarded while states that maintain the

status quo may suffer. A+PEL believes that Louisiana should not sit on the sidelines while other states add millions of dollars to their education budgets.

As an A+PEL member, you know that A+PEL is different from teacher unions as our priority on student learning is unmatched. Voter surveys show that the public is fed up with the status quo and demanding improvements in how we educate children. Elected officials are showing the political will to oppose the teacher union lobby and make decisions that put children first. We are indeed at an education tipping point. At A+PEL, we firmly believe that if educators don't lead, we will lose our voice in shaping policy that affects us. Therefore, we rolled up our sleeves and gave our input to improve this legislation so that it is fairer toward educators.

Based on this information, I hope that each of you will join A+PEL in supporting H.B. 1033. I encourage you to share this information with your colleagues and to contact our office if you have any questions.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathy Campbell".

Kathy Campbell
Executive Director