

NJEA EDUCATION REFORM PLAN, PART 1: Nurturing a culture of teaching excellence

1. Tenure and professional residency: The pathway to success

NJEA's proposal makes it harder to earn tenure and easier for districts to remove teachers who deemed ineffective under a good evaluation system and who do not improve their performance. It also streamlines the process, making tenure cases less expensive and less time consuming.

The four-year time table

- Teachers will not earn tenure until the first day of the fifth year of employment – one year longer than the current system.
- During the four-year nontenured period, districts will retain the right to dismiss a teacher without just cause or due process. In essence, the non-tenured teacher is an at-will employee, as under the current system.
- During the nontenured period, teachers will participate in an initial professional residency year, under the guidance of a qualified, experienced teaching colleague. Following the residency year, the nontenured teacher will continue to be mentored by qualified, experienced teacher colleagues.
- The fourth year gives new teachers an extra year to grow and gives districts an extra year to observe and evaluate before deciding whether to grant tenure.

After tenure is obtained

- Tenured teachers will continue to be observed and evaluated under the improved evaluation system proposed by NJEA.
- Observations and evaluations will be more frequent for all teachers, including tenured teachers.
- If a teacher is deemed to be ineffective and is unable to improve his or her performance, a district will have grounds to bring tenure charges under the expedited tenure system.

The expedited process

- Tenure cases will be moved from the courts (OAL) to binding arbitration by nationally certified arbitrators.
- Timelines will be shortened, so that cases are heard and decided more quickly.

- Tenure cases will be much less expensive and much less time consuming, which removes a major objection to the current system.
- This system gives districts every opportunity to remove genuinely ineffective teachers, while preserving the right of teachers to defend themselves against unjust or politically motivated firings.

2. Evaluations that promote teacher excellence

NJEA's proposal calls for better more rigorous evaluations that provide both schools and teachers with useful data to help improve teaching and learning.

More frequent evaluations

- Non-tenured teachers would be evaluated four times per year, up from the current three.
- Tenured teachers would be evaluated twice per year, up from the current single evaluation.
- Tenured teachers who earn two consecutive ratings of "highly effective" would be allowed to participate in an alternative evaluation system for up to two years.
- This allows highly effective teachers to explore other professional learning and development opportunities.
- It allows administrators to focus more attention on teaching staff members who are not performing at the very highest level.
- After two years of alternative assessment, teachers would return to the regular evaluation system, and would be required to earn two consecutive "highly effective" ratings before returning to alternative assessment.

Better information and support

- Teachers would earn one of four ratings: highly effective, effective, approaching effective or ineffective.
- The ratings would be based on multiple factors including:
 - A teacher's planning and preparation
 - The classroom environment
 - Instruction and assessment

- A teacher's professional responsibilities and professional growth.
- Teachers rated ineffective, or who desire additional help, would have access to peer support teams of successful teachers who would provide additional support.
- Evaluation would be designed to yield useful information that would allow both teachers and districts to focus on student achievement.
- The objective of evaluation would be to help improve professional practice, to offer targeted assistance where needed and to enhance student learning and growth.

Less emphasis on standardized testing

- Student learning would be an important component of teacher evaluation
- Student learning would be measured through multiple measures
- Standardized testing could be part of assessing student learning, but not the sole or predominant factor
- Other measures of student learning – such as portfolios and other teacher-created assessments – would constitute the larger part of student achievement

3. Teacher Leader Endorsement

NJEA's proposal call for creating a Teacher Leader endorsement in order to ensure that enough teachers are prepared and willing to serve as mentors, coaches, coordinators and other roles requiring exceptional teaching and leadership skills.

Key elements

- An endorsement that authorizes a teaching staff member to serve in certain designated leadership positions within the district, including as mentors, coaches and coordinators.
- Requires the equivalent of at least 12 graduate credits, or 180 clock hours, of preparation in an approved course of study.
- Can only be earned after at least five years of successful full-time teaching.
- Teacher leaders would provide peer assistance, but would not evaluate other teachers. That role would remain with administrators.