

# 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.