



As mandated costs continue to outpace revenue, furloughs have become an unfortunate annual rite for school boards. If furloughs are necessary, what is the fairest way to determine which teachers should be retained?

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METHOD

## *Seniority*

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THE CASE FOR...

- + Objective measure
- + Places value on experience
- + Strong support from teachers unions

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THE CASE AGAINST...

- Disproportionately affects highest-needs schools
- Forces some effective teachers out of the classroom
- Research shows that there is not a direct correlation between experience and classroom effectiveness
- PA is one of only six states to rely solely on seniority
- Polling shows consistent and strong support for basing layoffs on performance
- Court in CA ruled seniority and tenure unconstitutional

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METHOD

## *Complete flexibility to local districts*

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THE CASE FOR...

- + State should not mandate how districts manage workforce
- + Successful, private sector business leaders have full autonomy to build their team

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THE CASE AGAINST...

- School boards are political entities
- Administrators are human and therefore prone to bias and error
- Unless the state mandates that decisions are grounded in objective data, we risk high stakes personnel decisions being influenced by nepotism, cronyism, racism, ageism, etc

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METHOD

## *Teacher performance with seniority as the tiebreaker*

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THE CASE FOR...

- + Ensures that school boards place value on both experience and classroom effectiveness
- + Guarantees that an exceptional young teacher is able to stay in the classroom
- + Combines objective (seniority, test scores) and subjective (principal observations) measures
- + State law includes protections to ensure that school boards can't manipulate evaluations
- + Explicitly bars school districts from using teacher compensation as a factor in layoffs

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THE CASE AGAINST...

- The teacher evaluation system is still very new to administrators and teachers.
- Implementation hiccups may lead to some invalid ratings
- Absent a perfect system, seniority is the least bad method

Addressing the concern  
that the teacher  
evaluation system is not  
ready to inform staffing  
decisions...

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SOLUTION

## *We can have confidence that a “failing” teacher is actually failing*

Below is the rating system used to determine a teacher’s effectiveness status based on classroom observations and multiple measures of student achievement, as presented in the Chapter 19 regulations.

To receive a failing rating, a teacher needs only .49 points out of 3. To be considered in need of improvement, a teacher needs 1.49 points out of 3. So a teacher who gets half of the total allotted points is rated “proficient.” To get a failing rating, a teacher must earn less than 16 percent of the possible points. This means that a principal must observe a teacher twice and give them a failing rating *and* the multiple measures of student achievement affirmed that rating.

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CONVERSION TO PERFORMANCE RATING

Total Earned Points	Rating
0.00–0.49	Failing
0.50–1.49	Needs improvement
1.50–2.49	Proficient
2.50–3.00	Distinguished

Source: 22 Pa. Code § 19.1

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SOLUTION

## *We can have confidence that the new evaluation system will yield few failing ratings*

Some argue that the evaluation system will not accurately rate a teacher’s performance in the classroom resulting in some effective teachers receiving poor scores. We know that this is not true due to the results of other state evaluation systems that are similar to Pennsylvania’s system.

In other words, as principals adopt this new system, they err on the side of “inflating” teacher ratings. The fear that all of these effective teachers may end up getting poor ratings is unfounded by both the data from Pittsburgh and the data other states, as well as by the design of the system itself.

STATE	PERCENT RATED EFFECTIVE OR HIGHLY EFFECTIVE
Michigan	98
Rhode Island	95
Florida	97
Indiana	87
Massachusetts	93
Pittsburgh	97

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CONCLUSION

An imperfect evaluation system will err on the side of INFLATING teachers’ ratings. Since seniority serves as the tie-breaker within each performance rating, if the new system identifies nearly all teachers as proficient, then seniority will be the default mechanism for determining who to layoff. But as data from other states demonstrates, the system will still succeed in identifying the outliers, which means we’ll be able to make sure the best teachers get immunity from layoffs.