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Heeding criticism from educators, Aument takes another swing at teacher evaluation reform



ALEX GELI | Staff Writer 1 hr ago

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Meeting LNP and with state Sen. Ryan Aument, Pennsylvania State Education Association President Rich Askey, Lancaster City school teacher Bryan Hower and Elanco Superintendent Bob Hollister to discuss Pennsylvania teacher evaluation reform legislation. Tuesday, October 15, 2019

DAN MARSCHKA | Staff Photographer

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State Sen. Ryan Aument has a confession: He missed the mark on teacher evaluations.

But now, with the help of local educators, the Republican senator from Landisville is trying to correct a 2012 reform he authored that fundamentally changed how teachers are evaluated in Pennsylvania.

He introduced his latest proposal, which tweaks the 2012 measure to de-emphasize the role standardized tests play in evaluations and account for poverty in student achievement, in June. It passed the Senate less than two weeks later and now rests in the House Education Committee.

A companion bill was introduced in the House by Rep. Jesse Topper (R-Bedford).

Aument, Eastern Lancaster County Superintendent Bob Hollister, McCaskey High School teacher Bryan Hower and Pennsylvania State Education Association President Rich Askey [sat down with the LNP Editorial Board](#) Tuesday to discuss the proposal.

Here are four takeaways from the conversation.

Back to the drawing board

Aument admitted that it was difficult at first to swallow that his 2012 reform had not worked as intended. Criticism surged after a 2017 state law that required schools to consider performance, not just seniority, when laying off teachers, [passed without the governor's signature](#).

After hearing concerns regarding an over-reliance on standardized test scores from several educators in the area, he decided a change was necessary.

"I've learned that humility in authorship is more important than pride of authorship," Aument said.

New legislation

Currently, 50% of an evaluation is based on observation. The other 50% is based on student and building-level outcomes, such as standardized test scores.

That ratio would shift to 70% and 30%, respectively, under Aument's legislation, [Senate Bill 751](#). Student poverty would also be factored into the 30%, which Aument said was a "groundbreaking" addition.

How do we evaluate teachers?
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Poverty plays a part

Because evaluations now are closely tied to test scores — and test scores are typically lower among low-income students — this deterred some teachers from joining school districts in high-poverty areas. For example, Hower said he initially questioned whether working at School District of Lancaster, where 90% of students are economically disadvantaged, was the right decision.

“I am a better educator and a better person for making that choice,” Hower said. “It’s not a coincidence that one of the first things I did as a teacher at School District of Lancaster was contacting Sen. Aument.”

Hollister, who in addition to his chief role at Elanco [served as Columbia Borough School District’s superintendent](#) in the 2016-17 school year, said he noticed high-quality teachers with scores “nowhere close” to their suburban counterparts.

“Clearly the poverty issue was masking some realities in terms of performance,” Hollister said.

Teaching to the test

Aument’s proposal seeks to de-emphasize the role standardized test scores play in evaluating teachers in part because curriculum, critics say, has morphed to match the content on standardized tests.

“The focus started to be, ‘How do we make our students pass this test?’” he said, adding that teaching has become too regimented and less creative.

Aument said he hopes his legislation will fix that.

“I think this strikes the right balance between holding folks accountable and unleashing innovation, entrepreneurship, creativity in the classroom and in our schools,” he said.

[SB751](#) by [Alex Geli](#) on Scribd

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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. **751** Session of
2019

INTRODUCED BY AUMENT, BROWNE, MARTIN, MENSCH, KILLION AND F
JUNE 13, 2019

SENATOR BROWNE, APPROPRIATIONS, RE-REPORTED AS AMENDED,
JUNE 24, 2019

AN ACT

1 Amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), entitled
2 act relating to the public school system, including cert
3 provisions applicable as well to private and parochial
4 schools; amending, revising, consolidating and changing
5 laws relating thereto," in professional employees, furth
6 providing for rating system and for persons to be susper
7 and providing for a revised rating system.

8 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
9 hereby enacts as follows:

10 Section 1. Section 1123 of the act of March 10, 1949
11 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, :
12 amended by adding a subsection to read:

13 Section 1123. Rating System.--* * *
14 (g) This section shall expire June 30, 2021.

15 Section 2. Section 1125.1(a) and (a.1) of the act are
16 amended to read:

17 Section 1125.1. Persons to be Suspended.--(a) Profess:

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