



California Federation of Teachers
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Friday, August 31, 2012

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CFT Statement on the demise of AB 5

The failure of AB 5 to make it out of the California Legislature is a setback for the education community and all those who believe education reform requires a truly collaborative effort.

AB 5, A Best Practices Teacher Evaluation System (Fuentes), provided a much needed step forward in improving the teacher evaluation process by incorporating best practices, community member engagement, and local negotiations, thereby moving away from a top-down, one size fits all approach.

The CFT welcomes a rigorous debate on all aspects of public education, including the best approach to training and evaluating teachers. For that discussion to be meaningful it should be research-based, and, most importantly, respect the concerns of practitioners, students and parents.

Unfortunately, within the oppositional din to AB 5 can be heard the unmistakable effort to scapegoat teachers and teacher unions for the crisis in public education. When supporters of AB 5 marshaled research from a broad spectrum of individuals and organizations that challenged the accuracy and value of evaluating teachers based on test scores, AB 5 opponents shamelessly suggested that even invalid test measures should still be used.

“It is revealing that the opponents of AB 5 scorned the idea promoted by the leading educational research institutions in our country that test results, to be of any use in evaluation, must be based on valid and reliable tests,” said Joshua Pechthalt, president of the California Federation of Teachers.

AB 5 included language that brought parents and community into the evaluation process but left the final decision to the local self-determination represented by the bargaining table. Across the country local teacher unions and school districts negotiate for the specific interests and concerns of those individual

communities. These ideas work because they incorporate the trust building and legal guarantees of collective bargaining.

The attack on teacher unions during the AB 5 debate is part of an on-going effort to shift discussion away from the real issue confronting public education—namely the massive underfunding of public schools.

“As a parent, I see the lack of adequate funding for our schools as the single biggest problem that needs to be solved, not how to get rid of bad teachers,” says Pamela Hall, a member of the community group ACCE whose daughter attends John Muir Middle School in San Leandro. “At the same time, I’d like to see more help available for teachers who are struggling, and better ways to ease out the ones who shouldn’t be teaching, and AB 5 offered those tools. But that problem pales in comparison to the lack of supplies, the overcrowding of classrooms, and the many other problems caused by the underfunding of the public school system.”

Over the past year the CFT has participated, along with most key stakeholders in California, in Superintendent Torlakson's Educational Excellence Task Force, which will soon produce a set of recommendations “collaboratively developed with stakeholder input,” reflecting the best research on what constitutes quality evaluation methodology.

The CFT welcomes a discussion on how we improve public education for all of our children. Ending the attack on teachers and their unions would be a step in the right direction.

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