

Written Testimony of Christopher McGrew
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Before the Indiana House Committee on Education
February 14, 2017

My name is Christopher McGrew. I am a special education teacher at Haverhill Elementary School, and a Teach Plus Policy fellow. I want to encourage the committee to strongly consider supporting House Bill 1449, the new Teacher Pilot Program.

The need to require newly licensed teachers to participate in a mentorship program would help ensure that schools are able to hire and retain effective teachers. Our students deserve teachers who are able to manage classroom behavior, plan and implement effective and purposeful instruction, collaborate with peers, and analyze and use data to make meaningful and informed decisions that impact student learning.

Entering the profession, teachers face many challenges such as creating guided reading and math groups, using data to drive instruction, and setting high and obtainable student goals. These aspects are not always addressed through teacher prep programs, and may differ from district to district. By using the Teacher Pilot Program, it would allow mentor teachers the opportunity to provide support for new teachers facing these challenges. Mentors can help establish the support system needed when learning the requirements of school districts such as: classroom management systems and discipline, testing schedules, use of 90-minute reading blocks, guided reading and math lessons, and multiple intelligences among many others.

Veteran teachers within those schools are the ones who can be that support system, collaborator, and someone willing to guide new teachers with their “best practices” into the model that is expected within their school district. These mentor teachers are those who are willing and able to commit to fostering successful learning environments for our new teachers and their students.

As a teacher who started my career in 2009 when teacher mentor programs were not required, I felt that I had little support when it came to developing classroom management systems, planning and implementing curriculum, and analyzing student data to help drive my instruction. I felt that when my students were not engaged, assessments came back with low scores, or lessons did not go as planned, I had failed. The truth was that I had failed and I had no one to seek advice or learn from. If I had a mentor teacher to help plan lessons, use multiple teaching approaches, or facilitate better learning environments, I would have seen more success for myself and my students.

This bill would also allow mentor teachers the opportunities for foundational training and ongoing professional development. New teachers will receive instructional feedback regularly for lessons taught and be allowed to observe their mentor providing their classroom instruction. Another benefit of this bill is using dedicated release time for mentors and their mentee to meet and collaborate on the lessons observed and review feedback for improved planning and implementation of instruction.

HB 1449 would be a great way to give that feeling to all of the new teachers entering the profession. Providing those supports and guidance to teachers who are beginning their careers, and learning from high effective teachers would be one way to build our workforce for the future. Our students deserve great teachers, ones who can learn from what already great teachers are doing within their schools. Please consider HB 1449 and support the great things that will come from it. Thank you.