

Oral Testimony of Ronak Shah
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Before the Indiana House Committee on Education
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Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of this committee for allowing me an opportunity to speak on behalf of the House Bill 1499. I will never forget my first day of teaching. I walked into my 6th grade classroom, facing a room full of students. I remembered my training, my best practices, my texts, everything you rehearse in your head before stepping into a class of children who deserve an excellent educator. On day one, I was not that educator.

I floundered for eight straight hours with those 6th graders, doing my best to teach math, science, literacy, and history, but coming up short. The students could tell I was green, and they weren't surprised. In low-income urban schools, most students and their families have grown to expect the unjust reality that their teachers are more likely to be inexperienced and transient than those of their suburban peers. I worked hard each day to be the best I could be for them, but the fact was that I simply didn't know what I was doing.

Two weeks into this disaster, just as I was thinking of quitting, I was handed a lifeline that single-handedly transformed my prospects as an educator. A math support position opened at my school. In this role, I would teach small groups of students in the classrooms of other teachers, all of whom were far more seasoned and skilled than me. These educators were generous with their time and attention, observing my mistakes and responding to them with ideas and suggestions grounded in their own experience.

I'm now in year five. I still have plenty of growing to do as a teacher. But the single greatest factor that sustained me in the classroom through the most challenging years of teaching was the opportunity to spend a year in the classrooms of master teachers. That year gave me the mentorship and feedback I needed to grow and develop as an educator in a way that no coursework ever could.

This is an opportunity all first-year teachers need and deserve before diving into the classroom. More importantly, it's what Indiana's students deserve, especially those who've been forced to expect inexperience and turnover as a part of their K-12 education. Teachers who are well-mentored and receive rich feedback early on are more likely to stay in the classroom and become excellent educators, thus having the capacity support other new teachers later in their own careers.

Representative Dale DeVon, author of House Bill 1449, underscores the importance of this early career support. If all Indiana students are to receive the educational opportunities they are entitled to, it is essential to support and develop new teachers. In recent years, we have increasingly relied on tests and emergency licenses to get teachers into the classroom, which only exacerbates the revolving door in our most vulnerable schools. The experience that comes from well-mentored direct practice is the best pre-requisite to developing an excellent career educator. I strongly support the teacher induction program, and believe new educators should be required to complete such a program before receiving a practitioner license. I want to thank Representative Dale DeVon and this committee for their work on this legislation, for listening to educators across the state.