

## Teachers can make their case about reform to policymakers

Published: Dec 3, 2010

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In the Nov. 28 Star, Matthew Tully contributed an insightful piece highlighting a significant disconnect between education reformers and those who will perhaps be most affected by reforms -- teachers ("Teachers hear something else in reform debate"). The article begs us to contemplate the forces underlying educators' distrust of state-directed education reforms. Teachers will be instrumental in implementation of these reforms. As such, the fracture between policymakers and practitioners demands our attention.

Tully captured the gestalt of the problem when noting that many good teachers think those of us pushing for education reform blame them for their schools' failures. We're not. We're actually making the opposite case: Good and great teachers are responsible for their schools' successes.

While we understand that some educators are intimidated by the proposed changes, we feel that upon closer examination many of these same educators will look forward to the coming reform.

Reform has the potential to acknowledge effective educators within schools and reward them in a variety of ways. For instance, more than 95 percent of teacher evaluation systems currently used across the state rate teachers on a binary scale (effective or ineffective, satisfactory or unsatisfactory). Using this model, more than 95 percent of teachers are rated as effective. Clearly, such a system is unfit to recognize outstanding educators, identify those in need of coaching and counsel out the lowest performers.

Rather than being designed to blame teachers, a reformed teacher evaluation system will be useful in identifying and celebrating talented educators as well as providing teachers with useful quantitative and qualitative data on how they can improve their practice. Instead of being demeaning, we believe this brand of education reform professionalizes the teaching institution.

While some teachers are cautious about reform, we know many who are actively seeking ways to provide a teacher's perspective to evolving local and state education policies. When policymakers include teachers' voices in the reform dialogue, they will find that educators want to know their impact on student learning. Educators know that the student assessment data must come from tests that are appropriately aligned to state standards, measure students' growth and achievement, and are delivered at multiple points during the year. Teachers also want immediate feedback from assessments and time to analyze data in order to improve their instruction.

If you are a teacher who is interested in learning more about how to contribute your voice to education reforms, we encourage you to visit the Teachers Want To Know website (<http://www.teacherswanttoknow.org>). By becoming a signatory to this initiative, as we are, you are joining a chorus of other educators who are demonstrating to policymakers that teachers want to be part of the solution to our profession's greatest challenges.

We also encourage educators to attend regional meetings organized and facilitated by teachers in the Indiana Department of Education's Education Reform Cabinet. The second round of meetings, in January and February, will focus on teacher evaluations. Often teachers express feeling left out of the conversation; this is our opportunity to ensure that isn't the case. These meetings are a conversation among the IDOE, educators, school leaders and community members about current education reform initiatives.

Change is coming to our state's system of public education. Policymakers need to hear from Indiana educators who understand that the status quo is untenable and are eager to participate in efforts to improve their profession and the ways we shape the lives of young people.

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