



The Education Trust—Midwest

Good morning. I am Brian Gutman with The Education Trust-Midwest, a nonpartisan nonprofit education research, policy and advocacy organization based in Royal Oak. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss educator evaluations and to voice our opposition to Senate Bills 122 and 202.

Passed with near-unanimous support four years ago, Michigan's current evaluation law began with the example of leading education states, including Tennessee, and resulted from broad compromise within the education community. Without further action, the promise of the evaluation law enacted in 2015 remains in full effect. It means that this school year ends without changing the nature of evaluations that have almost all already occurred.

Yet we recognize the nature of the challenging questions you are facing, and time pressures being applied by some.

Despite the perception of deep division, Michigan actually arrived at the current law through broad compromise and consensus. In a June 2015 op-ed, then Oakland Schools Superintendent Vickie Markavitch and MAPSA president Dan Quisenberry jointly wrote, "it seems Lansing has finally crafted a solution that recognizes the importance of a quality evaluation, local control and flexibility in implementation. It's time for the Legislature to wrap up the debate, pass teacher evaluation legislation and provide certainty to local schools so they can help good teachers become great."

Following passage that fall, then MEA president Steven Cook said, "[i]nstead of punishment, the goal of evaluations is now aimed at improving classroom instruction" and in a statement, MASSP noted that "educators finally have a clear target: implementing improvement-focused evaluations and growing the quality of all educators."

As we discussed a few weeks ago, circumstances surrounding Michigan's evaluation system hold back its promise to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and create unnecessary administrative burdens.

When the committee returns to this important issue this fall, I sincerely hope that we can move beyond the question of whether student learning data should be used, and instead focus on ways to strengthen the system that we have, and make continuous improvement the primary goal of evaluations:

- Future conversations on evaluations should begin with connecting feedback based on observations and data to high-quality professional development and career advancement.
- Evaluators should be well-trained to observe and provide thoughtful, actionable feedback in a regular and prompt manner.