



Senate Press Office

COLUMN

For Immediate Release:
March 12, 2010

COLUMN

For Information Contact:
Raegan Weber, Director
Raegan.weber@senate.ga.gov
404.656.0028

Heath: Piecing Together a Puzzle for Success

By Sen. Bill Heath



When it comes to our youth, Georgians can all agree that we want what's best for our students and to improve their education. The opportunity we have to improve education by measuring the positive impacts on individual students is extraordinary. The enhanced pay for teachers bill is a proposal to take advantage of this opportunity and is worthy of discussion. Current methods of student evaluation should be updated and who better to participate in the discussion than educators? As legislators, parents, and teachers, we must put self promoting notions aside and work together to improve education for Georgia's children.

When we first broached the subject of enhanced teacher pay, several ideas were laid on the table as to the most effective measurement tool for monitoring student improvement. Some of my colleagues, teachers and others in the education arena have misinterpreted this to suggest that standardized test scores will be the only link to teachers' and administrators' paychecks. I agree that standardized testing is *only one* method of measuring academic success, and not usually the best method. As a matter of fact, every form of enhanced pay that has failed, failed because it was based on standardized tests.

We must stop looking at student achievement through the narrow peep hole of standardized tests so we can see the variety of ways students grow, learn and achieve success. Tests are snapshots and we must expand the scope of our lens. When properly designed, longitudinal tracking methods can be effective measurement tools encompassing all factors which can be proven to directly measure student achievement. Longitudinal studies simply track information over a period of time; in this case it would be a student's educational career. Some states are already using this method, which provides information on student achievement, program effectiveness, student retention and persistence, and enrollment behavior. It should include tracking from kindergarten through high school and possibly into their collegiate experience.

When evaluating student success, we must also consider the highs and lows of an educational career rather than one snap shot in time. Standardized tests could be *one* of the tools to help us see advancements in our children's education, but the test should be modified periodically to keep pace with education improvements. We also need the valuable input of our teachers on

whether the students have the basic prerequisites needed to succeed in the course. Designed properly, a teacher should not be able to teach to the test. This philosophy breeds complacency and complacency is something our children cannot afford.

Measurements should be continually evaluated to ensure that they are working properly, are effective and held to the highest standards of integrity. This is the earliest stage of developing a new student achievement tracking system and no final decisions have been made as to the best way to do this. With valuable teacher input, class room performance goals, and tracking, we can build a road map for success for all Georgia students.

The proposed legislation does not take anything away from teachers. It is not a form of punishment. I want to reward each teacher for the positive influence they have on each student. This could very well include advanced degrees and teaching certificates. When the degree or certificate proves to have a greater influence on a student's education, then the teacher should be rewarded. For example, additional training in advanced math skills or in special education could absolutely have a positive impact on certain students.

Successful teachers, when allowed to work to their full potential, can tap into the core of every student's learning abilities and develop a mutually beneficial relationship for success. I want to allow educators to work in areas where they already excel and match students with those teachers who have the skills necessary to advance each student in the most effective way possible.

We must look at individual student achievement by looking at the big picture of an educational career, not merely from one test score to another or one class at a time. I am committed to advancing education in Georgia. I am an advocate for our teachers and the positive influence they have on each and every student. If the longitudinal tracking system is properly developed, educators will want to participate. This is why I've reached out to and met with several groups of teachers to further this discussion. I am gathering a group of teachers, education administrators, legislators and parents to work through this issue and find better ways to track individual student progress *and* reward teachers for their role in that progress.

If you are willing to participate in this process and you have suggestions for measuring student achievement, please let me know. I look forward to your input of how we can improve education by implementing a positive reward system for our students and our educators.

###

Sen. Bill Heath serves as Chairman of the Retirement Committee and Governor Sonny Perdue's Floor Leader in the Senate. He represents the 31st Senate District which consists of Haralson and Polk counties and portions of Bartow and Paulding counties. He may be reached at 404.651.7738 or by email at billheath@billheath.net.