



Testing may matter less in Michigan teacher evaluations under proposed bill

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Dr. Phil Salah, of Wayne RESA, testifies in front of State Sen. Phil Pavlov and State Sen. Marty Knollenberg, R-Troy, on Tuesday. *(Kyle Feldscher | MLive.com)*

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Clarifications between the bill and current state law have been added to this story.

LANSING -- Teachers could see the importance of standardized testing limited in a bill proposed in the Michigan Senate as the debate about educator evaluation once again heats up in the Legislature.

Senate Bill 103, proposed by State Sen. Phil Pavlov, R-St. Clair Township, would implement new teacher and principal evaluation requirements beginning in the 2017-18 school year. The bill was the focus of the Senate Education Committee meeting Tuesday morning.

Among the changes in the legislation is a reduction in the percentage of a teacher's evaluation based on student growth and assessment data. Currently, state law requires 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation to be based on student growth and assessment data. The bill would make that percentage 25 percent in 2017-18 and 45 percent in 2018-19 based off the state assessment.

Dr. Paul Salah, associate superintendent of instructional services for Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency, said he liked that student growth would be included in the evaluation, but encouraged lawmakers to not increase its importance in the second year.

"We do not have proven methods of measuring student growth," he said during his testimony to the committee. "It would be my recommendation to keep percentage measuring student growth below 25 percent. ... We must be thoughtful in the process."

The bill is another attempt at teacher evaluation reform in Michigan. Last year, two bills passed in the Michigan House of Representatives **died in the Senate Education Committee, which Pavlov chair**

Current law requires: an annual year-end evaluation for all teachers; a mid-year progress report for teachers in the first year of their five-year probationary period, classroom observations; ratings of highly effective, effective, minimally effective or ineffective; and districts to assign mentors to each teacher subject to a progress report.

Teachers can be dismissed if they receive three years of ineffective ratings on their annual evaluations, while teachers who receive consistently highly effective ratings can be evaluated every two years.

The law also states student growth data for individual students can be exempted from a teacher's evaluation upon the recommendation of the principal.

Pavlov's bill would allow local districts to develop their own evaluation system consistent across all their schools provided they meet certain criteria.

The bill would also remove the the \$14.8 million set aside in the state budget set aside for implementation of new teacher evaluation standards and insert it back into the School Aid Fund.

•Read a full analysis of Pavlov's bill from the Senate Fiscal Agency.

Tuesday's hearing was only for testimony and no vote was taken on whether to move SB 103 to the full Senate. The committee will meet again next week and may vote on such a move then.

Kenneth Gutman, superintendent of Walled Lake Consolidated Schools, said he supported the bill because it protects local control and does not require new funding. However, he expressed concern about the measurement of student growth because of the amount of changes in the state's assessments during the last few years.

This year marks the first year of the Michigan Student Educational Program, M-STEP, instead of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, which has been in place for many years. Next school year, Michigan high school junior will take the SAT instead of ACT as a part of their spring testing program for the first time.

"We haven't had consistent assessments," Gutman said.

Salah recommended using local assessments instead of state tests in order to measure teacher effectiveness and student growth. He said state tests shouldn't be used to measure teacher effectiveness until the tests are "valid and reliable."

"If we had state assessments, or if we had vendors, that we knew could provide us with valuable and reliable data on evaluating educators, we should use them," Salah said. "But, we just don't have them."

Pavlov's bill also has serious flaws, said Bob Kefgen, associate director of governmental relations with the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals.

During testimony on Tuesday, Kefgen and Wendy Zdep-Roper, executive director of the same group, said the high school principals their group represents have concerns about the legislation. Kefgen said the bill only focuses on student growth and not evaluating teachers, provides no minimum quality standards for evaluating educators, provides no training or support to principals and strips the funding included in the budget.

Kefgen called some of the requirements in the bill a checklist of how to do parts of evaluations, but said the bill isn't specific enough.

"(You're not) telling them there are minimum quality standards on what that other 55 percent should be based on," Kefgen told Pavlov, referring to the portion of evaluations that wouldn't be covered by student growth and assessment data.

State Sen. David Knezek, D-Detroit, said one of his main criticisms of the bill is there is no room to take into account the poverty and home life of students and how that may affect their ability to grow.

"This legislation doesn't have anything that takes into consideration those factors outside of the classroom," he said.

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