

Madam Chairperson, Members of the Committee:

My name is Alanna Purdy and I am a middle school teacher in Gallup, NM who develops and implements culturally responsive STEAM curriculum with Indigenous students. I am not here to endorse any legislation, but rather to express a belief that evaluation is important to my profession as an educator and we have to do it right. The current system has caused a lot of tension in our schools, but more notably it has shaken the public's trust in our policy decisions. In order to regain that trust, we as stakeholders and policy makers need to continue to improve existing systems rather than subject teacher evaluations to inconsistencies by scraping the model we have. As a classroom teacher with five different preps in math and science, two of which are tied to PARCC, I value the current evaluation structure and its demonstrated potential to inform my instruction and professional practice.

I teach special education and regular education students in a rural Title I school. Come to my classroom and you will hear Navajo, Zuni, Spanish, and English spoken in our classroom and see me differentiating for students who are between five years ahead and five years behind grade level. Despite a wide berth of abilities and backgrounds, I am still able to see over a year's worth of growth in both Math and Science by February and receive Effective or higher on my annual evaluations.

Prior to the current evaluation system, I taught in another Title I district in Cibola County where teachers and students did not benefit from reflective and sustained teacher improvement models. My peers and I received no feedback from our principals, no assessment tools or timely data to inform daily differentiation, and certainly no accountability for the content of our lesson plans or student achievement growth. When NMTEACH came was implemented in our public schools, I saw firsthand the frustration of teachers being forced into a performance standard that did not understand nor felt they had a hand in developing.

Much in contrast to the landscape four years ago, we now know based on a survey of teachers from across the state that 82% of participants reported a proficient or higher understanding of the NMTEACH system. Teachers like myself are learning the system and using it to improve our praxis and impact on our educational communities. Nationally, research on states with teacher evaluation systems support the conclusion that teachers have positive impacts on student achievement after the first year of receiving evaluation results, and every year thereafter. We also know based on three years of data from NMTEACH that we are seeing increases in the number of Highly Effective teachers in our state. All the data points toward steady investment in and application of our current system to improve educational outcomes for our students.

That being said, we know the current model is not perfect, but many of the issues posed today have been matters of implementation, not inherent faults within the model itself, which is far more diversified and lower on student achievement than other states. We can work within the current system to integrate alternative assessments to measure student achievement, develop more age appropriate assessments for younger grades, and change portions of the evaluation criteria to empower leaders in our schools. Based on listening to over 1,000 teachers across the state, we know that the current number of allowable absences in NMTEACH is too low and the portion of our evaluations tied to student growth is too high. We recommend increasing the number of allowable absences for teachers to 6 days, decreasing the evaluation percentage for student achievement to 35%, and increasing the percentage from classroom observations to 35%.

We need consistency and trust in our teacher evaluation system. That will only come with listening to our constituents and making continued improvements to the current system that codifies their feedback in policy. Reacting to frustrations by overhauling NMTEACH will only introduce instability into our teachers' classrooms and homes, and ultimately will not help us all use this tool in a manner that will improve teacher quality and student learning outcomes. We should focus on how to obtain a solution that can not only support our shared vision for teacher quality, but can also pass out of both the House and Senate and receive the Governor's signature.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.