

**Jennifer Kirksey**  
**Middle School Principal**

**In support of Senate Bill 247**

April 17, 2019

Dear Senator,

My name is Jennifer Kirksey and I'm a middle school Principal in Jefferson County. I would like to say a few words about the current evaluation system from a principal's point of view. Although I speak for myself, I have had conversations with numerous colleagues who echo my concerns.

Currently I evaluate thirty certified staff (teachers, social worker, counselors, etc.) and ten non-certified staff (secretaries, custodians, para educators, etc). I'm also tasked with approving and reviewing CDE required educator goals for 45 certified staff. This I do along with safety and security, budget, facility management, monitoring student achievement, daily supervision and contact with students, (etc) and the inevitable unanticipated minimum of ten things that come up every day. Although I have limited administrative support, a large majority of these tasks lie with the school principal.

Dale Carnegie states that organizations with high employee engagement are 200% more productive. The school is an organization, and student learning is what we produce.

Employee engagement in a school relies heavily on trust, and conversations between teacher and evaluator that are collaborative. I want to be able to spend time in a teacher's classroom, working together on a common identified goal, and guide my teachers a way that they feel respected. Currently, every certified employee is evaluated at least twice a year, and half are evaluated three times a year—so I complete approximately 70 evaluations a year, not including the ten non-certified staff members, and all this in a *nine-month period*. This is impossible to do with fidelity. When teachers are understandably upset that evaluators are in their room only once or twice a year, it's largely because the evaluation load on the administrator is impossible to manage with integrity.

Sometimes it feels like the current evaluation system assumes teachers need to be monitored in a way that doesn't value their professionalism. Under this system of SEVENTY certified evaluations a year (and that's only 2/3 of the teaching staff), I can't spend time with new teachers who need my support. I can't get into the rooms of the highly effective and effective teachers who yearn to improve their craft.

Back to Dale Carnegie. The part of my job that gives me the most satisfaction are those rare times I can spend time with a new teacher and give tools to help them grow, monitor that

growth, and help them feel supported. It's so satisfying and exciting to watch a non-probationary master teacher confer about a lesson that was perfect, and now is amazing—and have the honor to watch that lesson and the impact it has on student learning.

Alas, there's no time for that. I must get on with my SEVENTY + 10 evaluations. I feel that the most important part of my job, that gives me the most satisfaction, and that directly effects student learning more than anything else, is my time in the classroom with teachers and students—well it doesn't happen—not like it needs to. This is frustrating to me as a school principal—and it ultimately effects MY employee engagement. **I implore you to reduce the number of required evaluations for non-probationary effective and highly effective teachers.**

Principals don't need to evaluate a teacher *three times a year* in order to ensure a great teacher in every classroom. If there isn't a great teacher in every classroom, hold the principal accountable. Let the rest of us have meaningful, respectful, growth producing conversations with teachers, and we will have time to monitor and support their growth.

The resulting product of engaged teachers is powerful student learning...and that's what we're here for.

Thank you.

Jennifer Kirksey, Middle School Principal  
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My name is Alysia Hayas and I am a classroom teacher and, unfortunately, am home sick today, but wanted to share my experience that regarding the current evaluation system the intent is far better than the impact so I am asking for your support of SB19-247.

My extremely dedicated principal simply doesn't have time to do a meaningful evaluation for all of us every year, and so for more established teachers like myself, it becomes rushed and brief, and it's mainly due to the current evaluation system. Our school has over 30 teachers and only one principal to deal with all of the administrative work that comes with a school with 400 students.

Before the current evaluation law, I used to get a full and complete evaluation once every 3 years that was scheduled and discussed thoroughly. My principal was able to do this because she had only 1/3 of the evaluations to complete every year. I'm sure there are a few teachers on our staff who get that treatment now, but it's an opportunity to grow as an educator that's become less available to me because of the mandate to evaluate every teacher every year.

The intent was noble, but due to an ever-increasing load of unfunded mandates, much of our staff ends up doing without meaningful evaluations. There are other proverbial fires that our principal is constantly working to put out.

I have a personal story to share that I hope will illustrate another troubling aspect of the current evaluation system that this bill would improve. [REDACTED]

Years ago, as a young teacher, I was excited to get a job in a bilingual school where 100 percent of the students received free and reduced lunch. Test scores were routinely below average because, as research shows, the best predictor of test scores continues to be family income, and because students were learning in two languages, where research also shows that while scores may be lower in the younger grades while students are mastering both languages, they end up performing higher than average in the older grades, when they have achieved biliteracy. When I was hired, our school was in danger of being taken over by the state, losing our [REDACTED] program and everyone getting fired in order to "improve" the school. So what were we told to do?

We were told we had to put improving our scores above all else, by focusing on testing skills, and testing practice. Students were put into different groups based on their scores, and taught testing skills and given practice tests for a chunk of each day, for the WHOLE year. Our bilingual program threw out our balanced bi-literacy framework and focused only on the language that they would be tested in. The school did not try to reach out to families, or consider what other factors of support, physical or emotional, should be included in our efforts. And at the end we were lauded for our huge gains. But in my opinion it was to the detriment of my students and their long term learning. I'm actually still in touch with several of those students, and loved working in that community; but for my own integrity I was grateful to find a different district that focused on increasing opportunities for students, encouraging their strengths, building community, and not on high-stakes testing. I went on to get my National Board Certification, 60 credits past my masters, and work part time as a teacher leader while also still working with

a diverse group of students and their families. I'm grateful I found a place where I could do this, but I felt awful to see myself and other talented teachers leaving a school that needed the best of our profession.

If test scores were a smaller part of the evaluation process, they would still provide useful information but they would not dominate the process or force educators to teach to the test. Again, that wasn't the intent of the current evaluation law, but that's what the real impact means.

This slight reduction in the testing requirement would allow professional educators to focus on the unique needs of each class of students, letting teachers use best practices to give their students the kind of rigorous education that builds critical thinking skills and self-efficacy instead of short-term test performance, and still be seen as "effective" teachers in the eyes of the state.

As an idea, we all support achievement for our students and evaluation for ourselves as professionals. But please listen to what is actually happening on the ground, from the perspective of those who work every day with dedication and passion for the success of their students. This bill is an important step in the right direction towards meaningfully supporting Colorado teachers, so that we can meaningfully support our students.

Thank you  
Alysia Hayes  
[hayas6@yahoo.com](mailto:hayas6@yahoo.com)

Dear Senate Education Committee,

I have been a teacher for DPS for 18 years, and have been what is now rated "effective" or "distinguished" for all of those years-no matter which system was used and I have made all of my student growth goals for all those years. Prior to SB-191 my teaching practice was evaluated by the principal and assistant principal only, and these individuals were rated effective by the district. My test scores were discussed and suggestions were given to improve my teaching practice and academic achievement of my students a few times a year, and I felt supported.

Since the passage of SB 191, I have been evaluated by over seven principals-all but one were rated ineffective according to results shared with teachers, three peer observers that I volunteered for, and 4 coaches. Each person gave me feedback that often times was contradicted by another evaluator or was not as researched based as what I was doing for the population I was teaching at the time.

Of those individuals, three evaluators made me feel successful and gave me confidence that I had entered the correct profession-21% of the time of the ten years of the application of the law. The others made me feel inadequate and I often felt that I had entered the wrong profession after my conferences with them even when my students were successful as evidenced by testing data and my rating as a teacher was high-79% of the time of the application of the law.

When I was asked to mentor new to the profession teachers early in my career, the teachers who I mentored prior to SB 191, have stayed in the profession and in some cases have become principals of their own schools. Of the teachers that I have mentored less than part time since the bill has been passed, 100% have left the career in DPS often citing that they made the wrong choice as evidenced by their evaluations. Often time coaching from their evaluators was insufficient and they were frustrated by the lack of time given to help them become better teachers. DPS's claim that teachers love the system and feel that they grow from it, are inaccurate to what I have experienced. Many new and experienced teacher's feel that the stress and punitive effects of DPS's LEAP system is not a reason to stay in the profession or in DPS. The ongoing lack of support from evaluators who are overburdened and unable to spend time guiding the teaching practices of their evaluatees, is problematic, at best. Most teachers feel that they are not supported by the system and are unhappy; the few that feel supported, are are grateful for small amount of people who they work with who are successful at the evaluative process.

As a long time teacher, mentor and DCTA representative of the teachers in my building, I would propose that SB 191 be modified especially in the evaluative sense. Teachers who are "effective" and "distinguished" could be evaluated by the same effective rated person, yearly. The turn around time for evaluations should be 2-3 days, not a maximum of 10 days. Teachers who are probationary should be evaluated and supported more until they are effective, by evaluators who are rated effective. New teachers need more support and coaching in their first five years of teaching than at any other time, give more resources to guide and train them so they stay in the profession. A switch back to the ideals of the previous system would be prudent. I don't believe the passage of this law was meant to harm the teaching profession in Colorado, but it has. It is time to take a look at correcting the evaluation system of the profession that teaches the rest of the other professions in this great state.

If I can testify later, I am happy to-the speech is right at three minutes. I have heard what is in this email from multiple teachers, evaluators, and principals--even a senator or two once, so maybe someone else can say this on my behalf. Good luck!!

Sincerely,  
Diane Major

My name is Corey Brueckner. I am a high school science teacher at Heritage High School in Littleton, Colorado. **I strongly support the changes and revisions to the teacher / special service provider (SSP) evaluation and accountability system Senate Bill 19-247 proposes.**

**Why I support the legislation:** The current teacher evaluation system adopted by Littleton Public Schools to satisfy Senate Bill-191 has been a detriment and hindrance to me professionally since it was fully integrated in 2013. This system, which requires that all teachers and Special Service Provider have a full annual review and rating of teaching practices, has proven to be cumbersome and ineffective for educators. I have taught a variety of science subjects during my career, but mostly chemistry and AP Chemistry. I have been part of different evaluation systems in my 23-year teaching career, so I feel well positioned to comment on this.

I first want to endorse the proposal from SB 19-247 that at least 30% of a teacher's evaluation be tied to student growth. This is a reduction from the current 50% of a teacher's evaluation. I will be honest with you that this part of the legislation would be detrimental to my personal evaluation. The students of Heritage High School and Littleton Public Schools do extremely well on standardized tests for a variety of reasons. My evaluation, when done fairly by an administrator, is relatively easy to achieve a rating of proficient when incorporating the 50% student growth parameter of the evaluation rubric. I know many of my educator colleagues from around the state of Colorado teach in situations that are not as stable and much more challenging than what I have experienced through my career. I do understand academic growth, but not in the way the state of Colorado currently views growth. Growth, to me, is not one group of students completing an exam and then another group of students completing the same exam the next year, and then using the results as a comparative barometer of a teacher or school's success. The reality is the poverty stays in

the community from year to year. The language barriers stay from year to year. Growth to me is determining the individual student's ability at the beginning of the school year and where the ability is at near the end of the year. There are tests like the Measures of Academic Progress (**MAP®**) that are administered by schools in Colorado at the beginning and end of the academic year to measure the academic growth of each student throughout the year. The standard then becomes the student them self.

I know student growth as a parent of a 6<sup>th</sup> grader that has struggled with reading his entire time in school and has been on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) since kindergarten. It is hard to hear as a parent your child is reading at the first grade level when beginning the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. But it has been exhilarating to get progress reports from the wonderful elementary school teachers and reading specialists that he has worked with over the years that he is catching up and nearing grade level. Being an educator and knowing the current system of checks and balances is disheartening because I know that my son could be viewed as a liability through no fault of his or his teachers.

I know growth as a teacher of a challenging Advanced Placement course at a high achieving school. The course I teach, AP Chemistry, is statistically one of the lowest scoring AP exams and incredibly challenging. One of my best memories as a teacher came from an exchange with a student that was in my AP Chemistry class the prior year. Upon meeting her in the hallway the following August, I congratulated her on getting a 2 on the AP Chemistry exam. You could tell by the smile on her face she was happy with her results. A 2 on any Advanced Placement exam is considered not passing. A 2 to this student was climbing and summiting Mount Everest. A 2 meant she learned something from the course. We lamented on the struggle that the class was and how hard she worked and stuck with it. I know my subject well and where it fits into the training for many technical jobs that the state of

Colorado so desperately needs from its workforce. I know completing the AP Chemistry course and earning a 2 on the AP Chemistry exam offers a statistical advantage to the student I am referencing and others like her for succeeding when entering post secondary school training in a technical / science related field. To the outside world, she was a negative to my pass rate on the exam. But when I factored in supporting academic parameters such as her math level and ability, she achieved just as much as a student scoring a 4 or a 5. What I want to convey is growth is relative to the unique situations and challenges that individual educators and students face.

I support Senate Bill 19-247 because it will allow a group of stakeholders from across the spectrum of education and industry in Colorado to re-examine the criteria for educator evaluations. The current educator evaluation system dictated by Senate Bill 191 has personally robbed me of the most important commodity as a teacher, and that commodity is time. Time is at a premium for all teachers. My own professional experience shows me this daily. For my AP Chemistry course, I operate on a nine-month schedule that cannot be off by more than one day or I have difficulty bringing the course to an appropriate conclusion. The necessary course conclusion involves reviewing for the AP test that has outcomes tied directly to students having the opportunity to earn college credit. That's why, during April and May, I offer structured time outside of the school day to help students prepare for the AP Chemistry exam. I voluntarily extend this extra "time" because I want to offer the students the best chance possible to have test results that match the immense amount of work that each student puts in throughout the school year. This crucial time frame is the same time of year during which I am, by virtue of the current teacher/SSP evaluation system, required to spend a significant amount of time gathering and providing evidence for an annual review proving that I am capably performing this day-to-day work. Teaching chemistry to high-school-aged students is my sphere of responsibility and personal mission. Though it may seem small, when thinking

about public education in Colorado as a whole, it is what I contribute to the system. So I take it seriously. The same can be said for teachers and special service providers (SSPs) at every public school in the state. We all contribute our little part to the system, to the best of our ability. It is a time-consuming endeavor to do it properly.

**Why this all matters:** Under SB-191, requiring annual evaluation for veteran teachers and SSPs previously rated Effective **unnecessarily robs professionals like me of time we should be allowed to dedicate to our students in the classroom.**

Again, my own experience is illustrative. For years, I have been a highly respected teacher. In 2014, I was named *Colorado Physical Science Teacher of the Year*. I was also honored by *Boettcher Foundation Scholarship* winner Marc Thomson (of Heritage High School) with the foundation's *Teacher Recognition Award*. My students (with an open access policy to all AP classes in LPS) have a historic pass rate and average score on the AP Chemistry exam above the national average.

Please consider this background when I tell you that, three years ago, I was initially rated by my evaluator overall as only *Partially Proficient* in my duties as a teacher. I'll be transparent in saying that I had a personality conflict with my evaluator. I also take issue with certain practices in teacher evaluation that the administrative team at my school believes in. Regardless, the end result was that I had to spend roughly ten to twelve hours in the spring of 2016 collecting evidence to support *Proficiency* in the areas of the rubric in question.

2016 was an extreme scenario. Other years, however, have also been labor-intensive. Each year, I have spent no fewer than three to four hours performing self-assessments, collecting evidence to meet *Proficient* on the rubric, preparing to meet with my evaluator, and having a sit-down, face-to-face meeting with the evaluator. While to some this may not sound terrible, please remember that teachers' schedules are literally run on a time clock. There is no extra time in our workdays or even our evenings (often spent

reviewing student work) for such work. Unfortunately for me, the majority of the time spent collecting evidence to defend my teaching practices has come at the expense of time spent with my family.

I'm not alone in this experience. Teachers across Colorado are suffering from these constraints on their time. I know this because I have heard similar narratives over and over from numerous educators in LPS and from across the state through my involvement with the *Colorado Education Association*.

Completing the formalized evaluation process -- year in and year out at the end of the school year, which is already a hectic time for teachers -- is both draining and demoralizing.

School administrators need to be considered in this discussion also. For principals and assistant principals, having to evaluate every staff member, every year is a daunting task. The following is a brief description of the observation process from my perspective for both a teacher and administrator: The administrator responsible for my evaluations comes in to my classes four times during the school year to perform 5- to 10-minute informal evaluations. The administrator then writes a brief narrative about the short evaluation in RANDA, the web-based system the state uses for educator evaluations. I have the option of responding to the narrative or simply acknowledging that I read the administrator feedback.

Part of the reason, at least at Heritage High School, for teachers having to invest time to supply evidence for a Proficient rating on the teacher rubric is that the administrator will mark "Not Observable" for any given part of the rubric, giving a Basic rating, for anything they do not feel they have had sufficient time to observe. With an administrator spending a total of 20 to 30 minutes informally observing a teacher per year, it is no wonder "Not Observable" is used quite often on the teaching rubric. Technically, the administrator is correct to not rate me for something that they have not witnessed or do not have evidence for. But annually putting the onus on the teacher to supply the evidence for anything that wasn't observable is a burden and, in my opinion, not fair.

It is my hope the committee SB 19-247 creates comes to the conclusion that veteran, Effective rated teachers are evaluated once every three years. If this is adopted, requiring the teacher to supply evidence of teaching practices is more reasonable. Based on my experience with teacher evaluations prior to the adoption of SB-191, being evaluated every three years is indeed more beneficial to both teacher and evaluating administrators to have a formal procedure that involves (1) having a pre-observation meeting with an administrator; (2) having the administrator be present for and evaluate an entire lesson (one full class period); and then (3) having a post-observation meeting between the teacher and administrator. This procedure allows extra time and interaction between teacher and administrator, helping administrators develop a more thorough understanding of what a teacher is trying to achieve in the lesson and with his or her teaching practices in general.

**To be clear, the process I just described is quite time- and labor-intensive for both teacher and evaluator.** That's why there'd be a need to by administrators to evaluate only one-third of veteran teachers in a given year. Probationary teachers, and any veteran about whom an evaluator had a concern, would still be thoroughly evaluated every year, giving the evaluator the chance to differentiate and meet each person's needs.

Opponents may say that a three-year cycle does not provide for ample observation. This assumption is incorrect because:

- **Veteran teachers don't measurably change their practices from year to year.** Under the old evaluation system used prior to SB-191, I never witnessed a teacher or SSP change his or her professional practices on off-cycle years. What is acceptable for one year should be acceptable for the remaining two years of the three-year cycle.
- **Teachers meet frequently to discuss teaching practices with their cohorts.** In addition, most schools have teaching cadre groups to promote equity in instruction for the entire staff. These cadre groups promote interaction among staff members teaching at the same level

or subject matter; this ongoing interaction should give all educational system stakeholders reasonable assurance that teaching practices remain constant from year to year.

- **Teacher evaluation is already happening naturally every day of the school year.** In addition, the fact is that the unofficial evaluation process for educators is already a continual process. An educator is constantly answering to fellow staff, students, and parents. (Again, I'll use myself as a representative example: I usually respond to student or parent needs or concerns via email five to ten times per month.) If those concerns add up for a particular teacher or SSP and there is a reasonable foundation indicating that the actions of the staff member should be scrutinized, there will still be mechanisms in place to address the effectiveness of the teacher or SSP in off-cycle years.

**And again, the most important thing for teachers to be focused on is the work they do to support the students in their classrooms.** As part of my responsibility to be an effective teacher, I need to respond in real time to any student who is struggling in my class. If I wait until the next official reporting cycle, the timing to properly address the issue will have passed -- and I will have not done my job as a teacher to create the best student outcomes. And anyway, real-time evaluation for teachers and SSPs will still hold true in extreme cases, with the assurance it will be done in a fair and equitable manner.

Members of the Senate Education committee, it is my hope that I have given you insight on why the current educator evaluation system needs to be changed. Thank you for listening to my testimony today.

Corey Brueckner