

## **Ken Page's Testimony for amending Title 16 Section 243(c)**

### **Existing Language:**

**" A principal who has been continuously employed for more than two years in the same position, has the right to have his or her contract renewed or to receive written notice of nonrenewal at least 90 days before the existing contract expires. Nonrenewal may be based on elimination of the position, performance deficiencies or other reasons."**

**Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. I come before you today to speak in favor of S. 304, a bill relating to the nonrenewal of principal contracts. Principals are simply teachers in leadership positions. We are people who became so interested in affecting the big picture of education that we wanted to be in a position to affect more change than just their own classroom. When we moved from teaching to the principalship, all of us gained a greater perspective about teaching, learning and the change process. We learned that it is far easier to make changes in your classroom than to get everyone on board with a new idea or initiative. We also lost something. For one we lost the ability to have what most teachers have-the ability to have a second chance if things are not going well. Of course, as you know, principals have lots of constituents they serve. They sit are at the crossroads of board members, staff, parents, and the superintendent. So, moving into a position of more responsibility where people look to you to be the instructional leader, chief counselor, mental health case worker, budget implementer, interpreter of the master agreement with teachers and much more, we now have principals who can lose a job at the drop of a hat or because we have made a decision that is unpopular with a majority of our board or our superintendent.**

**I am not surprised that my partners, the School Boards Association or the Superintendents Association are not in support of this bill. They do want to make it easy to move principals out of jobs. But, since leadership is a great investment, I would argue that it is their responsibility to work with and to help our leaders to overcome the rough spots of their very demanding positions.**

**Essentially, this bill proposes two changes from their current law:**

## 1. It proposes to roll back the date that principals receive employment contracts from April 1 to February 1<sup>st</sup>

**TEXT TO BE ADDED (IN italics):**

***“ A principal who has been continuously employed for more than two years in the same position, has the right to have his or her contract renewed or to receive written notice of nonrenewal on or before February 1st.***

**RATIONALE:** 90 days before the existing contract expires (typically this is at or near the beginning of April) is far too late for the school or for the principal. It does no good for a school district to be looking for to principal on April 1. Likewise, it does no good for a principal to learn on April 1st that s/he does not have a job for the upcoming year. If we recognize value and worth of principals, and if we want to assure that schools hire high-quality leaders, we must hire early and convey the message that the leader matters. If a change needs to be made, it is in everyone’s interests that this happen before other staff vacancies are filled.

## 2. It proposes to delete the general or catch all words “or other reasons.” It also proposes to allow a period of remediation if performance deficiencies have been cited.

**TEXT TO BE ADDED (in italics) A written notice of nonrenewal shall recite the grounds for nonrenewal. Nonrenewal shall be based solely upon the elimination of the position, or performance deficiencies. If nonrenewal is based on performance deficiencies, *then the principal shall have had the opportunity to correct deficient areas and the written notice shall be accompanied by an evaluation by the superintendent.***

### Resources and Support

1. Our new Secretary of Education Rebecca Holcombe has spoken about the alarming turnover of principals. At its high a couple of years ago, over 100 principals have changed jobs. If you count all of the names of principals and assistant principals in this book, you will come up with over 400 school leaders. Quick math would tell you that this is one fourth of the total leadership positions. The State Board of education has made leadership development one of their goals.
2. The newly adopted Vermont Guidelines for Teacher and Leader Effectiveness. “When an educator’s performance is found to be ineffective at the end of an evaluation, an improvement plan will be developed. “The intent of this process is to provide constructive assistance in targeted areas. It is superintendent’s responsibility to support principals in the execution of their job duties.
3. The principal mentoring law (Title 16, section 245) is an effort to support new leaders with mentors.
4. The new Educational Quality Standards and the previously published Roots of Success study recognize the value and contribution of the school leader in keeping the focus on student learning. So, it only makes sense for underperforming principals to be treated as we now treat underperforming teachers by giving them an opportunity and time to make improvements.

5. I have also provided a brief review of the literature about principal turnover. In general it states the following:

1. Leadership matters
2. Rapid principal turnover has a negative effect on school culture and on student achievement
3. Principal turnover is detrimental to school performance. Frequent turnover of school leadership results in lower teacher retention, and lower student achievement gains. Leadership changes are particularly harmful for high poverty schools.

So although school boards and superintendents do not want to change the system for nonrenewal of principals because they believe that "All students suffer when a school is really in trouble and there are barriers to action," I would argue that they are suffering now with such rapid turnover, and it is having an effect on students and school improvement efforts in Vermont.

If we value leadership and if we are going to attract teachers into the principalship, then we have got to make this a doable job. The fact remains that principals are turning over at a rapid rate and therefore the message becomes clear that if you step out of your teaching position to be a school principal, you may be entering a profession where you have to perpetually look for a job or be using up your valuable time just trying to retain your position rather than leading your school forward.

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