



# FACULTY ADVOCATE

IFT Higher Education Council

**Dave Delehanty** (deledavi@isu.edu), **Randy Berriochoa** (berrioch@csi.edu)  
**Bob Dickow** (dickow@uidaho.edu), **Joyce Lider** (joyce\_lider@nic.edu) **Craig Steenberg** (csteenb@lsc.edu), **Lynn Lubamersky** (llubame@boisestate.edu)

**Kim Johnson, Vice-President** (kajohnso@nic.edu)

**Nick Gier, President** ([ngier@uidaho.edu](mailto:ngier@uidaho.edu))

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**Editor's Note:** What a contrast to how Luna went about it! All the stakeholders in Illinois got together and produced the most creative education reform bills in the nation. Key provisions are local control (Luna's bills shift control to Boise) and teachers earn tenure on the basis of merit, the same way that college professors do.

## Illinois Leads Education Reform

Reprinted from *Education Week*, June 17, 2011

By John Luczak (Joyce [Education] Foundation), Dan Montgomery (AFT), Darren Reisberg (Illinois State School Board), and Ken Swanson (NEA)

Earlier this week, Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn signed what might be the boldest and most important piece of education legislation ever passed in the state. For the first time anywhere, a state's key teachers' unions helped draft dramatic changes in how teachers earn tenure, how layoff decisions are made, when teachers can be dismissed for poor performance, and what's necessary for them to strike. The bill drew tremendous bipartisan support; it passed 59-0 in the Senate and 112-1 in the House.

Over the past few months, we, the authors, have been asked the same questions countless times. First, how did a state like Illinois, which was not known for being in the forefront of educational change, pass this law? And second, if there was so much agreement, is that a signal that the bill lacks transformative power.

Senate Bill 7 passed because of a broad consensus in Illinois that it is time to do something different. Stakeholders of all persuasions have been engaged in dialogue for several years about what it would take for our state to become a national leader in education. The final legislation does not represent the victory of one set of interests over another. It is a

collective blueprint for ensuring that Illinois has among the highest standards for classroom instruction in the country, with accountability for all. At a time when many teachers understandably feel under attack, this bill celebrates effective teachers, recognizes their accomplishments, and helps keep them in classrooms.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and the presidents of both national teachers' unions, Dennis Van Roekel of the National Education Association and Randi Weingarten of the American Federation of Teachers, have issued public statements of support, praising both the process and the content of the legislation.

Duncan has addressed how Illinois has steadily built consensus among the state's key stakeholders toward meaningful change. He issued a statement after the bill passed the legislature saying: "Illinois has done something truly remarkable and every state committed to education reform should take notice. ... For some time now I have been saying that tough-minded collaboration is more productive than confrontation, and this is the proof."

Our ability to cooperate is a result of our near-constant dialogue. Representatives of labor unions, the state school board, major urban districts, and nonprofit organizations worked closely on both rounds of the state's Race to the Top applications last year.

With the help of elected leaders and the Illinois State Board of Education, the state passed five education laws in a 15-month span during 2009-10, addressing significant issues, including strengthening principal-preparation programs, expanding the charter school cap, and modernizing teacher and principal evaluations. Importantly, all those laws were also built in a bipartisan, collaborative style. . . .

Even so, SB 7 did not come about easily: One of the state's Race to the Top legislative leaders, Sen. Kimberly Lightford, D-Maywood, and the state

board led four months of negotiations among union, management, and reform groups. Those discussions, though heated, were always respectful. We believe SB7 is more likely to enhance teaching and learning in Illinois because the unions were at the table advocating for students as well as their members. All of those who have been involved in this process share the opinion that the bill's goal is to elevate classroom instruction.

With this bill, teachers will no longer earn tenure based only on years of service; they must demonstrate a high level of proficiency during their first four years of teaching. And although experience still matters, teachers will no longer keep or lose their jobs based on their number of years in the classroom. An improved evaluation system with performance-based measures, including student-growth indicators and more-robust teacher observations, will allow school districts that are struggling financially to hold on to great young teachers in spite of their few years on the job. And ineffective teachers who have not demonstrated improvement within 90 days will be dismissed through a streamlined hearing process.

The legislative process in Illinois differed from those in other states this year. Gov. Quinn and Sen. Lightford ensured that, unlike our neighbors in Wisconsin and Ohio, Illinois education stakeholders would work together to craft an aggressive bill that could make our state the nation's new leader in education reform, provided the reforms are well implemented. The experience was not reduced to realigning power or curtailing the influence of any group. Teachers were not painted as overprivileged burdens on the state economy. The collaboration was done patiently through shared work. We feel that this path positions Illinois especially well for the bill's implementation, as the groups have emerged with a greater commitment to working together. . . .

Some have questioned whether the bill is "tough" enough. If tough is taken to mean "rigorous," we are quite confident it will hold up to the most important scrutiny-implementation. What matters about policy is how it is played out in schools. In contrast to other states, especially those that have passed similar reform laws opposed by the teachers they're supposed to support, we believe Illinois has several advantages:

○**Local control.** While experts will help state officials create evaluation options, teachers and

administrators in each Illinois district have the flexibility to tailor their educator evaluations to address local needs.

○**Structure.** Groups are working together to implement past legislation, and channels exist for cooperative design, issue resolution, and results sharing between practitioners.

○**Communication.** The state is developing communications materials so districts, school boards, interested parents, and legislators can better understand how the reforms will be carried out. . . .

Through a collaborative process that is deservedly getting national attention, Illinois education stakeholders accomplished something remarkable. Now, it is time for the focus to shift from the Statehouse to public school classrooms across Illinois. Our students deserve the best we can deliver.

*John Luczak is the education program manager at the Joyce Foundation, in Chicago, and advised Gov. Pat Quinn's office on Illinois' phase-one Race to the Top application. (The Joyce Foundation supports coverage by Education Week and edweek.org of policy efforts to improve the teaching profession.) Dan Montgomery is the president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers. Darren Reisberg is deputy superintendent and general counsel of the Illinois State Board of Education. Ken Swanson is the president of the Illinois Education Association.*

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