

HF1718, Demmer Bill Restricting School Board's Ability to Negotiate Labor Contracts

Testimony: Carla Bates, Minneapolis Public School Parent

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Good Morning, Mr Chair and Cmte Members:

My name is Carla Bates and I am here today to voice my concern regarding HF 1718. From my perspective as a parent, this bill would hurt rather than help our school board's ability to make sure the right teachers are in the right schools to best educate our children.

I am a parent of three children – first, third, and sixth grades – who attend Seward Montessori, a public Montessori school within the Minneapolis Public School system. This is my second year as the chair of Seward's parent group and I have served on the Site Management team for the past five years. Seward's test scores are great – and the success of our school is due to the passion of the parents, the energy of the kids, and the professionalism of our teachers.

For many reasons, many MPS have endured awful turnovers in staff. We've had funding problems which have led to layoffs, but you are helping us with that by increasing education funding. We've had problems with planning for declining enrollments, but we're now closing schools and focusing our resources. And we've had problems because of labor agreements that have become outdated and need to be re-negotiated. And you're helping us with that by considering HF 1180 that would make it very clear to everyone that even seniority is now on the table.

MPS parents are organizing to demand more teacher stability, more site-based control. MPS parents are organizing – writing our school board, lobbying our legislators, pushing our principals, holding public forums – to demand that the District and the union negotiate a contract that will change the rules regarding staff assignments and seniority. The contract must insure that not only are the best teachers recruited but that they are teaching in the right schools and that they are retained.

If there are teachers who are doing a great job at one of our high poverty schools, they should not be laid off in favor of someone who happens to be more senior. If a teacher has Montessori-certification and is doing a great job, they should not be bumped from our Montessori school by a more senior staff person with no certification. If a team of third-grade teachers are working wonders with a group of struggling readers, the team should not be broken up because one of them is not senior enough to be retained.

The single most important factor to me about my child's education is who their classroom teacher is. Our school board with the guidance of our superintendent and our teacher's union can forge a contract that insures staffing stability and that provides principals with the staff they need to get the job done for all of our children.

We need the Legislature to not tie the hands of parents by tying the hands of our elected representatives – the school board – to forge contracts that meet the needs of kids and respect the professionalism of the teachers.

Hold off on HF 1718 until parents and teachers – truly, the most important people in a kid's life – have a chance to work it out in our daily lives and at the bargaining table.