



AFT Pennsylvania Position Furloughs, Layoffs and Seniority

AFT Pennsylvania opposes legislative proposals that would let school districts “furlough” or lay off teachers for economic reasons, without regard to seniority, any time during the school year. AFTPA supports maintaining the protections under the state School Code that establish specific criteria for school employee layoffs and require school districts to use seniority to determine the order in which teachers are laid off and recalled to service.

Under the Pennsylvania School Code, school districts can lay off tenured professional employees when student enrollment declines substantially; the district eliminates programs; or when layoffs are necessary after school reorganizations. In such cases, districts must lay off the least senior employee first and call back the most senior employee first. Using seniority to guide layoff decisions creates an orderly, objective system and protects employees and school districts from decisions tainted by favoritism, personal biases, discrimination, patronage, cronyism and nepotism.

Furloughing teachers during the school year hurts students and student achievement. Mid-year staff changes disrupt the education program, increase class size, interrupt essential services to students and make it difficult for districts to comply with federal and state laws requiring mandated services for special needs children and English language learners. Using enrollment projections, retirement forecasts and local tax collection estimates and state appropriations, district officials can make sound program and staffing decisions during the annual budget process and avoid mid-year staff shakeups.

Layoffs should not be tied to teacher evaluations. No one wants ineffective teachers in classrooms, but ensuring teacher quality in public schools should not be driven by economic crisis. Districts should ensure high-quality teaching and learning by setting high standards for recruiting teachers, providing meaningful professional development, developing a robust system of teacher support and evaluation and making retention decisions on an ongoing basis, using valid assessments and due process.

Proponents of expanding the circumstances under which school districts can furlough teachers claim that schools should have the same “flexibility” as private businesses to furlough employees without pay when budgets are tight. But public schools are not private businesses. Public schools have a constitutional responsibility to educate all children. A business under financial pressure can decide *not* to serve particular clients or customers or to close down completely. Public school districts can’t turn away children because of financial problems.

Giving administrators the authority to lay off experienced teachers during the school year because of financial problems could affect school funding adversely. Permitting layoffs based on economic

circumstances might encourage manipulation of tax revenues to justify layoffs and result in inadequate funding for public schools.

Giving districts increased latitude to lay off teachers will not help districts retain qualified, certified teachers and may exacerbate teacher turnover. Successful schools have a mix of new and veteran teachers. Permitting furloughs without regard to seniority will make it difficult for principals to develop experienced, stable teachers who know the school's students and families and advocate most effectively for the resources they need to be successful.