



SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS  
OF  
MONTANA

SENATE EDUCATION

EXHIBIT NO. 10

DATE 1-21-05

BILL NO. SB-227

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1130 Butte Avenue  
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Friday, January 21, 2005

Senator Ryan and members of the Senate Education and Cultural Resources Committee,

For the record, my name is Darrell Rud, Executive Director of the School Administrators of Montana.

I would like to convey my opposition and that of the School Administrators of Montana against SB227 that would reduce the nontenured teacher probation period from 3 years to 2 years.

My opposition comes from two perspectives:

- Personal
  - 26 years as a Principal, the last 23 in Montana;
    - Glendive, Lockwood-Billings, School District #2-Billings
  - Past-President of the 30,000 member National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001-2002
- Voices from the field
  - I work for and represent more than 800 school superintendents, principals, county superintendents and special ed directors and have asked their representatives for feedback;

Personal

The teacher is the key in the classroom to strong student achievement, just as the Principal is the key to learning growth in the school building and the Superintendent is the key in the district to these high levels of success! **Teaching is a very challenging profession!** In addition, it is getting more so every year in this current climate of heightened accountability, higher standards and a federal "non-optional" *No Child Left Behind* requirement to have all students make *Adequate Yearly Progress* and be "caught up" by 2014! You cannot have quality schools and strong learning taking place without an effective, highly qualified teacher in front of each Montana classroom! The children deserve nothing less than our best efforts to train strong teachers in our teacher preparation programs and then allow highly qualified principals and other administrators to help these teachers become even more successful through solid instructional leadership and quality professional development! **This takes time.....in differing amounts!**

Just as all children (and adults) learn at different paces, similarly all of us acquired the skills to walk at different times, so it is with new teachers. I have personally been a part of hiring some teachers who fit the adage...."they were born to teach"! They hit the ground running and are able to activate learning for most students very early in their career. On the other hand, many graduates that I have personally been a part of hiring have the skills and initial training but need more time and guidance in order for them to be "the best that they can be"! In most cases that I have directly been a part of, the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of their placement proves to be just the start of high quality instruction that generally keeps getting even better! Unsuccessful acclimation to the job and profession, according to research that I have read, is one of the biggest reasons that young educators leave the profession. It wasn't what they thought it was going to be and they didn't successfully mesh with the school and district in the relatively short time that they were there.

Year 1 of a new teachers experience tends to be one characterized by relative insecurity about how they will do as a teacher and a journey to apply the instructional theory that was such an integral part of their undergraduate work and put it into practice. Classroom management, activation of learning for all students, getting the community (including parents) engaged with their classroom, working effectively with school staff, time management (professional and personal) and a myriad of other opportunities for learning face these novice professionals. Many do it superbly, but I have found that quite a significant amount needs additional professional development, guidance, and "mid-course corrections" to varying degrees. That is why years 2 & 3 are so important! The instructional leadership from a principal, by this time, has helped the teacher recognize, be made aware of, accept, and apply the improvements as needed and directed! Help from colleagues from a shared leadership perspective can also be invaluable at this time! For some, this improvement in instructional skills happens rapidly, others still need additional time.

When Years 1 & 2 have gone reasonably well, year 3 can normally be a chance to shine and show, over a longer period of time that this novice professional educator has the skills, on a consistent basis, to activate learning for all students, be an integral part of a school faculty, communicate with and connect with parents and other community members, and do their part to develop and maintain the high quality Montana education that we have become accustomed to!

#### Voices from the field

In spite of the fact that some of my member principals could benefit from this change in statute, an overwhelming number clearly stated....."two years is not long enough"!

In addition, I found that given this extremely small window of time, it is likely, according to several school and district leaders, that the potentially strong teacher who, at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, hadn't yet fully demonstrated their effectiveness, would likely be terminated! The 3<sup>rd</sup> year is viewed by so many administrators as critical to confirming the likelihood of long-term success! This premature but necessary termination of a 2<sup>nd</sup> year potentially effective teacher would be a very unfortunate and likely unintended

consequence of this law change. I can't help but feel that it would also have an adverse impact on our already complex recruiting and retention woes! With districts facing a **VERY** shallow pool of applicants, wouldn't there be a disincentive to apply in a district or state where there is a fairly good likelihood that 2 years could be your maximum length of stay?

Administrators from the field are also concerned about the possibility that substitute teachers who had done "long-term stints" could be given tenure if this bill passes with, in some cases, as low as 70 days of teaching! After a person has taught for 35 days, they are given a contract, under current law! After two such contracts, conceivably tenure could be their next step if they were awarded their 3<sup>rd</sup> contract! In many cases, that would be an unintended but real negative consequence if this law were passed! In many communities, both large and small, substitute teachers are at a premium and it would be unfortunate if this additional unintended consequence deterred their chance of getting long-term employment!

Thank you for your consideration of this request to vote against SB227! I would be glad to answer any questions about my testimony!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Darrell Rud".

Darrell Rud  
Executive Director  
School Administrators of Montana