



The State Senate
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THE SENATE TEACHER MORALE STUDY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

DECEMBER, 2000

MEMBERS

Senator Faye Smith, Chair
District 25

Senator Jack Hill
District 4

Senator Richard Marable
District 52

Senator Horacena Tate
District 38

Senator Regina Thomas
District 2

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Charge of the Committee

The Senate Teacher Morale Study Committee was created by Senate Resolution 618 during the 2000 Session of the Georgia General Assembly. The Committee was charged with conducting “a thorough study of the current and potential state of teacher morale... to further

inform the members of [the Senate] concerning this important area and to discover ways to improve” it.

The resolution provided that the Lieutenant Governor appoint the Committee’s chairperson and members. Senator Faye Smith was appointed as Chair. The Senators serving on the Committee were Senator Jack Hill, Senator Richard Marable, Senator Horacena Tate, and Senator Regina Thomas. The legislative staff members assigned to the Committee were Bradford Borum of the Senate Research Office and Cynthia Thomas of the Office of Legislative Counsel.

The Committee held one organizational meeting and three public hearings in several cities across Georgia. The first public hearing was held in North Georgia on September 14, 2000 in Atlanta; the second was in South Georgia on September 28, 2000 in Savannah; and the third was in Middle Georgia on October 12, 2000 in Milledgeville.

B. Background

Georgia’s entire education system underwent massive reform in 2000 due to passage of House Bill 1187, the first major education reform legislation since the Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) of 1985. Many of the bill’s provisions affected teachers directly or indirectly, and public concerns were voiced that elements of the legislation could perhaps negatively impact the overall state of teacher morale in Georgia.

Based on constituent input received during the legislative session, the committee decided to focus on the areas of school discipline, administrative guidelines, and local school board policy as those areas related to teacher morale. Notices were sent to local school superintendents in the areas surrounding the meeting sites requesting that they notify teachers, paraprofessionals, local board members, school principals, and parent organizations and encourage their participation at the public hearings.

During the course of the public hearings, far-reaching discussions were held in which teachers and other education professionals voiced concerns over a much wider range of issues than were planned to be discussed. Participants were requested to put their ideas in writing and forward them to the Committee after the meetings. The Committee is hereby tendering the following brief report to members of the Senate outlining some of the participants’ most prevalent concerns.

II. FINDINGS

A. Discipline

- Many participants expressed a need for teacher notification in instances when they have potentially violent students in their classes. One teacher told of being physically assaulted by a Special Education student, suffering spinal damage and a torn rotator cuff, and the child was back in her class the next day.
- Early intervention with problem students was stressed, as was parental

involvement. Parental involvement is a key concern for many teachers, particularly with chronic disciplinary problem students. Teachers feel that parents are not engaged enough in their children's education and that teachers get blamed for too many problems in the education system.

- Many see the present lack of discipline as an issue of parental accountability. The idea that parents should suffer some sort of punitive measure if they do not come to parent/teacher conferences when requested was expressed. Parents need to be notified by the local board or some other government agency that they can be fined, etc. if they do not attend parent/teacher conferences.
- One participant; however, who is a discipline trainer with a metro-Atlanta school system, stated that any measures designed with parents in mind should be therapeutic in nature rather than punitive since most parents care about their children's behavior, but simply do not have the parenting skills that are sometimes necessary to deal with problem children.
- The need for more alternative education, including alternative schools for elementary level students, was emphasized.
- Some participants stated that there are misinterpretations of federal disability laws. Students with disabilities are sometimes placed in the wrong class(es) and are often allowed to use their disabilities as an excuse for bad behavior.
- HB 605 was criticized because teachers who remove problem children from class more than twice are often placed in professional development programs. Teachers do not believe it is fair that they are looked upon harshly or receive a bad evaluation if they invoke their rights under the law.
- Problem children are seen as holding back the students who really want to learn. This causes low morale for good students.
- Discipline does not seem to be meted out equally. Some students get suspended while others merely receive reprimands because of who their parents are.

B. Mentoring

- Too many new teachers are leaving the profession because they do not have experienced mentors to help them along.
- New programs that allow teachers time to meet with their mentors during the day are needed. The possibility of paid mentoring programs was raised as well as programs utilizing retired teachers.
- It was said that new teachers are given the worst duties and worst classes at a time when they are the least prepared for such details.

C. Workload/Paperwork

- Workloads are considered too heavy and there are not enough paraprofessionals to share the burden.
- All paperwork needs to be streamlined, especially Special Education documents.
- Forms should be standardized so that all systems are using the same documents.

D. Respect/Image

- **Most teachers feel that the profession has lost respect from the community at large and government needs to help restore its image, including working with the media to get better coverage of the successes in the public school system.**
- **Teachers feel they are not given the proper respect by parents, students, or administrators.**
- **Teachers believe they should not need either a doctor's excuse to take a day off or permission to leave campus on breaks, etc. Since they are not paid for the extra time they put in, their pay should not be docked if they are a few minutes late for work.**
- **More teachers should be included on various committees dealing with education system, including the Governor's Education Reform Study Commission.**
- **Teachers should be treated just like other professionals, not like "tall children."**

E. Salary/Benefits

- **Salaries are too low for the amount of work and educational background that is required.**
- **Teachers must spend their own money in order to buy necessary supplies for their classrooms. No other professional is expected to incur out-of-pocket expenses with their jobs so teachers should not be required to do so either.**
- **Pay scales need to be reviewed and steps added. Currently the pay scale stops at 19 years, but it should be raised to thirty in an effort to keep experienced teachers from retiring early when their salaries top out, or people should be allowed to max out earlier.**
- **Student loans should be forgiven in order to attract more people to the profession, as in the medical field with doctors and nurses.**

F. Administrator Training/Evaluations

- **Some teachers receive poor evaluations because they are unable or unwilling to supervise extracurricular activities. Administrators require them to do too much off-the-clock work or else suffer retaliation.**
- **In light of the above, as well as the technical problems alluded to earlier, something needs to be done about the HB 1187 provision that requires non-renewal for teachers with two unsatisfactory evaluations in a row.**
- **Administrators were criticized for not having good interpersonal skills and trying to intimidate their staff.**

G. Lack of Input

- **Teachers feel they are not included in decision making processes at any level.**
- **It is said that government makes decisions without enough information as to their possible impacts.**

H. Paraprofessionals/Class Size

- **Paraprofessionals are still sorely needed.**
- **Discipline would be improved if para-pros were allowed back into the classroom.**
- **Para-pros need more tuition help so that they can get teaching degrees.**

I. Work Environment/Technology

- **Teachers need access to telephones, computers, technical support, etc.**
- **The equipment they do have, however, does not always work.**
- **They need a technical person on staff just like they need media specialists.**
- **The statement was made that it is unfair that technology equipment often does not work, yet teachers will be evaluated on their technical skills.**

K. Test Scores

- **“We chase test scores too much. We should teach kids the basics and not make life a race for children.”**
- **“Why do we measure so much?”**
- **“We test too much, too often.”**

L. GAE Comments

- **Teachers feel unduly criticized and underappreciated.**
- **Teachers understand HB 1187 and know that its implementation is wrong.**
- **They need significant pay increases (10 percent) with an incremental increase from 3percent to 5percent.**
- **Differential pay is a bad idea since it rewards mediocre teachers who happen to be in shortage areas (i.e., math or science) and does not reward outstanding teachers in the lesser demanded fields.**
- **Master teachers need incentives to become involved in mentoring programs.**
- **An improved evaluation system is needed.**
- **Teacher dismissal should be based on evaluations and not administrative whims.**
- **A Teacher Academy similar to North Carolina’s should be instituted (a paid, weeklong institute operated by teachers.)**
- **Teaching should be professionalized and non-teaching duties removed.**
- **A “Master Teacher” status should be established.**
- **National Board Certification should be encouraged and the \$2300 fee should be paid up front by the state rather than forcing a teacher to wait for reimbursement.**
- **Respect should be restored to the profession.**
- **More cooperative efforts are needed, and teachers should be included in decision making processes.**
- **Most importantly, all negative political rhetoric should end.**

M. PAGE Comments

- **Steps should be added to the salary scale (30 instead of 19).**
- **Funding for staff development should be raised.**
- **Mentoring programs should be funded.**
- **Planning periods should be funded.**
- **The Constitutional Amendment for the special teacher license plate should be promoted, the proceeds from which go to indemnify teachers injured by school violence.**
- **Support from principals, school boards, superintendents, parents, and the community at large should be increased.**
- **Teachers should be notified of violent students in their classes.**
- **Access to telephones, computers, etc. should be provided.**
- **Teachers should be included in decision making.**

N. Miscellaneous

- **Physical Education is still a necessary part of the curriculum and does not need to be cast aside.**
- **Recruitment in critical shortage areas would be helped if education students who have not yet passed the PRAXIS were allowed to go ahead and teach while they are studying for the test.**

III. CONCLUSION

The Committee believes that it was successful in adequately identifying the bulk of teachers' current morale issues. However, the Committee believes the teachers' concerns to be so far-ranging that they must be dealt with over the long-term.

These findings are being made to the Senate in the hopes that its members will be informed of the many aspects of current education reform that are affecting the morale of teachers in our state, and to provide members much needed information to assist them in addressing these issues through the legislative process.

This report was adopted by members of the Senate Teacher Morale Study Committee in December 2000.

Respectfully submitted:

**Honorable Faye Smith, Chairperson
Senator, 25th District**

**Honorable Horacena Tate,
Senator, 38th District**

Honorable Jack Hill

Honorable Regina Thomas,

Senator, 4th District

Senator, 2nd District

Honorable Richard Marable
Senator, 52nd District