

Reasons behind tenure reform

by Carl Rose

Newspaper headlines shout that teachers' job security is at risk, that teachers are "targeted". The sacred cow of tenure is under attack. News articles contend that school boards want nothing more than to fire teachers and raise the number of kids in each classroom, that administrators are arbitrary bosses who toy with

teachers' careers on a whim. Quotes abound from teacher union representatives.

The question is, "Why would school boards want overcrowded classrooms; why would administrators want to run off good teachers; why would those who govern and manage schools want to beat up the people they have entrusted their children to?" The obvious answer is, of

course, "They don't."

Another question might be, "Why don't members of the media approach the Association of Alaska School Boards and ask *them* for quotes about why legislation is being passed ~~that~~ calls for tenure reform and layoff rights when money gets tight and the payroll can't be met?"

Perhaps it's because the answer

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has to do with responsible adults guaranteeing our kids with a quality education in the face of shrinking budgets; guaranteeing only the best teachers get tenure; guaranteeing that the best qualified teachers are appropriately placed in classrooms if (God forbid) loss of revenue dictate that staff must be cut.

Since our kids don't have a powerful union to speak for them, there are surely no headline grabbers in that kind of answer.

Perhaps the reason we're not asked for our position is because we represent the kids' interests, the parents' point of view, and the public's concerns. And since everyone already knows how the public feels, there's not much that's newsworthy there.

If the media wants to take the time to ask us, we'd be happy to explain that we support the tenure reform legisla-

tion because it addresses three things:

1) ways to improve the quality of instruction for our kids; 2) means to hold costs in line with available revenues; 3) fairness to employees.

The tenure reform bills currently being heard give school boards some of the tools they need to manage schools responsibly, in order to give our kids the educational security they deserve. At the same time they give teachers increased opportunity for professional growth and success, and give teachers on layoff the opportunity to be rehired, rather than permanently non-retained. But how do you make a headline out of that kind of explanation?

We know we're not alone in trying to make things better for kids. We've worked side by side with many outstanding teachers in efforts such as Alaska 2000, which focused solely on school improvement. We recognize

their talents, intelligence and independent judgment. We've heard from teachers who understand and agree with the reasons behind the legislation.

We also recognize the difference between individual teachers and the teachers' union when it comes to addressing how we can best provide our kids with the security of a good education. But now we have one more question to ask...." Which takes priority? The interest of our kids, their parents and their community, or the special interest of an employee union?" If you have an answer to that one, would you please share it with the Governor? He desperately needs to know.

Editor's note: Carl Rose is Executive Director of the Association of Alaska School Boards, a non-profit organization representing the local school boards of Alaska.