

Testimony of Jenny Campbell
April 22, 2010

Mr. Chair and members of the Senate Education Committee:

I am Jenny Campbell. I am a teacher in Colorado and speaking against Senate Bill 191. Being an effective teacher is more than test scores; quality instruction depends on a system that is focused on supporting teachers.

I find myself arriving at school at 6:30 every the morning to begin preparing for the day in my busy classroom. I spend my early mornings planning the lessons for each individual student in my classroom, because not one of them are on the same lesson nor learn the same way.

I create meaningful learning experiences for my 10 students with severe needs in grades K-5. In the mornings, I am updating behavior logs, working on Individualized Education Plans, pulling resources needed for a less, and reflect on the successes of lessons taught the day before through individual data sheets for each individual activity for each individual student on a daily basis. I re-work ideas until I feel confident that they will meet the needs of my diverse learners.

I greet the smiling faces of my students every morning as parent drop them off at the steps of the school. I talk with individual parents about behavior, outside therapies, new medical plans, or even to just ask the parents how THEY are doing. I reach out to my students and parents from every angle possible. If my students come in hungry—I feed them. If my students come in angry—I counsel them. If my students come in defeated—I encourage them. And this is all before the bell rings.

I am a teacher in Colorado.

My students view the world differently and show us that not every child should be molded to fit a standard one-size-fits all test score. Never mind their learning discrepancies, their unstable home lives, their prior learning experiences, their family's economic status, their medical needs, or their behavioral and emotional state. In the spring, they are all assessed with one measure and if they don't fit, I have failed.

I spend 3-4 nights a week, plus Saturdays, taking professional development classes to find new ways to teach my students and what I can do to become a better teacher. Often times, my classes go until 8pm. I have to pay for these classes out of my own pocket in order to improve my teaching skills.

I am a probationary teacher in Colorado, and frankly I am nervous about speaking here today.

As a probationary teacher, our district uses the evaluation process to determine our entire teaching year. It is additional paperwork for both teachers and principals. In our district, principals are required to go into our classrooms for two formal evaluations in each of our probationary years. During each formal evaluation, one per semester, the principal spends 2 hours in our classrooms, for a total of 4 hours a year. Is that a fair way to determine how our teaching has improved? Is that a fair way to determine how a whole entire year is conducted? Is that a fair way to see the adequate progress our students have made? How can you spend 4 hours in a classroom of students with severe

needs to see the true growth they have made throughout the year? How is it adequate to judge and evaluate the effectiveness of a teacher based on just 4 hours spent in a classroom?

I have students who are self-injurious and will slam their heads on a brick wall when they become overwhelmed or anxious. With constant interventions and a caring environment, we have not seen this behavior in over a year. That is growth.

I have students who are non-verbal, yet with the use of assistive technology, have learned to navigate their way throughout their day independently and are able express their wants and needs. That is growth.

I have students who take their out their frustration by throwing chairs, falling to the floor, or injuring others. Through behavioral interventions, the student is able to use calming strategies to help stabilize their emotional state. That is growth.

I have student who, after months of intensive Instruction with environmental print are able to make a grocery list and know the strategies needed to find their items at the store. That is growth.

I have students who walk into my door without knowing letters or sounds in 3rd grade, but by the end of the school year, they can independently read and comprehend 1st grade texts. That is growth.

I want my students to take what they learn in my classroom and be able to apply it to real world settings while being able to function independently in society. Yet all the progress that we see in our classrooms on a daily basis, from the academics to behaviors, aren't always measurable and easily transferable to data charts.

I am a special education teacher in Colorado.

I earned my Bachelor's and Master's degree in Special Education, with an emphasis on Autism and Severe Needs. I know what effective teaching entails, and I know how to manage the curriculum and needs of the diverse learners in my Integrated Learning Centers classroom. I entered my first year of teaching confident and equipped to teach effectively. Sadly, I am told what I am to teach and when, regardless of the makeup of my students, by decision-makers far away from my classroom or even my school. My expertise is often waved away, disregarded, and overlooked as I am required to follow the steps mapped out for me, rather than blaze a trail that I deem more appropriate and effective for my students—students these decision-makers have never met.

I am a teacher in Colorado, not for the pay or the hardships, the disregard or the disrespect; I am a teacher in Colorado because I am given the chance to change lives for the good, to educate and elevate the minds and hearts of my students, and to show them that success comes in all shapes and sizes, both in the classroom and in the community.

I am a teacher in Colorado, this bill is titled Concerning Quality Instruction Through Educator Effectiveness.....but as I watch many of my incredible, devoted coworkers being scripted, focused on tests, and accountable to data that isn't in the hands of teachers.....quality instruction is lost. It's not only about increasing the effectiveness of teachers, but also supporting the ones you already have. Teachers know their students, listen to them.