

## Editorials: For teachers and students, a path to higher achievement

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If you believe that running under-performing teachers out of Michigan classrooms is the surest route to [improving](#)

[education](#), you'll be disappointed by [the proposal unveiled this week by a task force](#) of educators appointed to develop criteria for evaluating the state's 101,000 public school teachers.

That's not because the plan outlined by the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness fails to set a high bar for teachers, or tries to [protect](#)

[ineffective ones](#) from the consequences of consistent failure. But in its [155-page report](#) released Wednesday, the task force led by Deborah Ball, dean of the University of Michigan's School of Education, has wisely rejected the myopic focus of legislators and other public school critics on the prowl for scapegoats.

Instead, the MCEE has offered a list of practical recommendations that promise to make the vast majority of teachers better. If adopted by legislators and implemented conscientiously by school administrators, the council's proposals will promote the culture of high expectations and relentless [improvement](#)

[that Michigan schools](#) so desperately need to cultivate.

There is broad consensus among educators, parents and public policymakers that quality teaching plays a crucial role in successful learning. Nearly seven of 10 Michiganders interviewed for a 2012 poll by the nonpartisan [Center for Michigan](#) said it was important or crucial to hold teachers more accountable for learning outcomes.

We share that view. But we reject what has at times been a concerted campaign by Republican elected officials to vilify teachers for lackluster student achievement. The majority of teachers are professionals who take pride in what they do, care fiercely about their students and actively pursue opportunities to make themselves more effective educators.

The same convictions under-gird the MCEE's recommendations for improving the way Michigan school districts monitor what is happening in classrooms, identify specific opportunities for improvement, and provide teachers with the resources they need to improve their performance in the classroom.

In place of a status quo in which many teachers receive only irregular or irrelevant feedback from principals who rarely visit their classrooms, the MCEE plan would mandate regular observation by supervisors trained to use one of four evaluation protocols field-tested in pilot studies in 13 Michigan districts. In addition to evaluating a teacher's classroom performance, observers would be responsible for establishing goals for improvement and providing the training and support required to achieve them.

About half of every teacher's annual report card would depend on the assessment of such trained observers. The other half would be based on students' year-to-year growth as measured by standardized test scores, with adjustments made to compensate for factors, such as attendance, that are beyond the

teacher's control. The council also recommends that a small portion of every teacher's evaluation be tied to an aggregate measure of student growth in the teacher's school, giving every teacher a stake in the success of every student.

State Sen. Phil Pavlov, a St. Clair Township Republican who chairs the Senate Education Committee, has accurately identified the prompt and careful consideration of the teacher evaluation recommendations as one of the Legislature's most urgent priorities. But it will be impossible to implement the proposal by the 2015-16 school year unless legislators stop dragging their feet and endorse the Common Core curriculum standards that more than 90% of the states have already embraced.

The longer the ideological fringe presses its argument that the rigorous standards enshrined in Common Core represent some insidious federal plot, the longer it will take for school districts to determine which student competencies to measure and to implement the testing tools needed to measure them.

In its proposal to improve teacher evaluation, the MCEE has left plenty of key choices to legislators. It will be up to lawmakers, for example, to decide which of the four evaluation tools educational experts judged effective in the 13-school pilot program should be designated as the default protocol for which the state will pay most costs. (Under the MCEE's proposal, districts would be free to adopt any of other three qualified tools at their own cost.)

State lawmakers could also elect to make more substantive changes to the MCEE's expert recommendations. But they should take care to make sure any such legislative tinkering is informed by the same thoughtfulness and empirical rigor apparent in the council's work.

By making student growth and teacher improvement the lodestars of their recommendations, the MCEE has elevated a conversation Michiganders have been eager to have on the subject of teacher accountability. Now the Legislature must advance that conversation on the same high plane — and provide the tools that teachers and schools need to serve students better.