Pro & Con Arguments: *"Should teachers get tenure?"*

PRO Teacher Tenure

1. Tenure protects teachers from being fired for personal, political, or other non-work related reasons. Before tenure, teachers could be dismissed when a new political party took power or a principal wanted to make room to hire his friends. Women were dismissed for getting married, becoming pregnant, wearing pants, or being out too late in the evenings. [1]

2. Tenure prohibits school districts from firing experienced teachers to hire less experienced and less expensive teachers. The threat of economic firing has increased in recent years with so many school districts facing budget cuts. [8] Marcia Rothman, a teacher for 14 years, said at a Dec. 16, 2010 protest in New York, "They don't want old experienced teachers who are too expensive. It's a concerted effort to harass older teachers, so they can hire two young teachers." [9]

3. Tenure protects teachers from being fired for teaching unpopular, controversial, or otherwise challenged cirricula such as evolutionary biology and controversial literature. [10] According to Edison State College teacher David McGrath, tenure "ensures academic freedom to teach important concepts such as evolution, and classic texts such as 'Huckleberry Finn,' 'To Kill a Mockingbird' or 'Catcher in the Rye,' all of which have been banned by some school districts, as recently as this year [2010], in America." [11]

4. The promise of a secure and stable job attracts many teachers to the teaching profession, and eliminating teacher tenure would hamper teacher recruitment. Starting salaries for teachers are frequently lower than other occupations requiring similar levels of education and training. [12] A Mar. 2008 report (1 MB) by the Economic Policy Institute found that public school teachers received 15% lower weekly earnings than workers with comparable education and work experience. [13]

5. Removing tenure would reduce innovation in teaching. Without the protection of tenure, teachers may feel pressured to use the same lesson plans and teach directly to standardized tests. [14] Former California Teachers Association President Barbara Kerr said, "Teachers are afraid to try new, innovative things if they are afraid of losing their job." [3]

CON Teacher Tenure

1. Teacher tenure creates complacency because teachers know they are unlikely to lose their jobs. Tenure removes incentives for teachers to put in more than the minimum effort and to focus on improving their teaching. [8]

2. Tenure makes it difficult to remove underperforming teachers because the process involves months of legal wrangling by the principal, the school board, the union, and the courts. It can take up to 335 days to remove a tenured teacher in Michigan before the courts get involved. A June 1, 2009 study (5.8 MB) by the New Teacher Project found that 81% of school administrators knew a poorly performing tenured teacher at their school; however, 86% of administrators said they do not always pursue dismissal of teachers because of the costly and time consuming process. [2] [4]

3. Tenure makes seniority the main factor in dismissal decisions, instead of teacher performance and quality. [21] Tenure laws maintain the "last-hired, first-fired" policy. On Feb. 24, 2010, the American Civil Liberties Union filed suit against the Los Angeles Unified School District, claiming that basing layoffs on seniority harms younger teachers as well as "low-income students and persons of color." [22] On Oct. 6, 2010, both sides settled to cap or end layoffs at schools. [23]

4. Tenure is not needed to recruit teachers. Sacramento Charter High School, which does not offer tenure, had 900 teachers apply for 80 job openings. [3]

5. With job protections through court rulings, collective bargaining, and state and federal laws, teachers today no longer need tenure to protect them from dismissal. [24] For this reason, few other professions offer tenure because employees are adequately protected with existing laws. [25]

6. Tenure makes it costly to remove a teacher with poor performance or who is guilty of wrongdoing. It costs an average of $250,000 to fire a teacher in New York City. [27] New York spent an estimated $30 million a year paying tenured teachers accused of incompetence and wrongdoing to sit in "rubber rooms" before those rooms were shut down on June 28, 2010. [6]

6. Instead of weakening or abolishing tenure, administrators should create a more thorough and meaningful teacher evaluation process. The existence of inadequate teachers should be blamed on the poor judgment of administrators, not teacher tenure. Administrators are responsible for evaluating teachers before granting tenure and helping to develop struggling teachers. According to a 2008 report by the National Council on Teacher Quality, not a single state has even "partly" developed a "meaningful" tenure-granting process. [15] [4]

7. Eliminating tenure will not reduce class sizes or make schools cleaner and safer. [16] Tenure has become a scapegoat for problems facing education. If tenure is abolished, problems of underfunding, overcrowding, and lack of control over students' home lives will persist. [10]

8. Tenure allows teachers to advocate on behalf of students and disagree openly with school and district administrators. [14] Award-winning history teacher Kerry Sylvia said that without tenure, she would be afraid of being fired because of her public opposition to initiatives by administrators. [17]

9. Contrary to public perception, tenure does not guarantee a teacher a job for life. Each state's tenure laws establish strict requirements and processes for removing a tenured teacher. Tenure also guarantees teachers a termination hearing before the board of education or an impartial hearing panel. [18]

10. Tenure protects teachers from being prematurely fired after a student makes a false accusation or a parent threatens expensive legal action against the district. After an accusation, districts might find it expedient to quickly remove a teacher instead of investigating the matter and incurring potentially expensive legal costs. The thorough removal process mandated by tenure rules ensures that teachers are not removed without a fair hearing. [14]

11. Tenure encourages the careful selection of qualified and effective teachers. Since it is difficult to remove tenured teachers, tenure encourages school administrators to take more care when making hiring decisions. Additionally, tenure prompts administrators to dismiss underperforming teachers before they achieve tenure and cannot be removed as easily. [19]

12. The formal dismissal process guaranteed by tenure protects teachers from punitive evaluation systems and premature dismissal. It allows under-performing

7. With most states granting tenure after three years, teachers have not had the opportunity to "show their worth, or their ineptitude." [28] A Nov. 21, 2008 study (2.5 MB) by the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education found that the first two to three years of teaching do not predict post-tenure performance. [29]

8. With the emphasis on standardized testing after the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, academic freedom has largely disappeared, and therefore a primary argument in favor of teacher tenure has become moot. [10] According to an Oct. 1, 2006 survey (90 KB) published in *Planning and Changing*, 56% of school board presidents disagreed with the statement that teacher tenure ensures academic freedom. [18]

9. Tenure at the K-12 level is not earned, but given to nearly everyone. To receive tenure at the university level, professors must show contributions to their fields by publishing research. At the K-12 level, teachers only need to "stick around" for a short period of time to receive tenure. [30] A June 1, 2009 study by the New Teacher Project (5.8 MB) found that less than one percent of evaluated teachers were rated unsatisfactory. [2]

10. Tenure is unpopular among educators and the public. An Apr.-May 2011 survey of 2,600 Americans found that 49% oppose teacher tenure while 20% support it. Among teachers, 53% support tenure while 32% oppose it. According to a Sep. 2010 report, 86% of education professors favor "making it easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers - even if they are tenured." [31] [32]

11. Teacher tenure may benefit some teachers, but does nothing to promote the education of children. Former DC Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee said, "Tenure is the holy grail of teacher unions, but it has no educational value for kids; it only benefits adults." [27]

12. Teacher tenure requires schools to make long-term spending commitments and prevents districts from being fiscally flexible. Teacher employment contracts generally lack provisions for declining enrollment and economic turmoil. [33]

13. Public Agenda President Deborah Wadsworth argues that because senior teachers will choose to teach more resource-rich and less challenging populations instead of the classrooms that would benefit the most from experienced teachers, teacher tenure leads to "a

teachers a chance to improve their skills rather than be hastily fired. [4]

13. Many teachers work better when they do not have fears of being fired. [19] Without the anxiety and fear of losing employment, teachers can focus their efforts on providing the best education for students.

distribution of talent that is flawed and inequitable." [34]

14. School board presidents believe that teacher tenure makes it more difficult to improve education. In an Oct. 1, 2006 survey (90 KB), 91% of school board presidents either agreed or strongly agreed that tenure impedes the dismissal of underperforming teachers. 60% also believed that tenure does not promote fair evaluations. [18]

Background: *"Should teachers get tenure?"*