

■ STAND FOR CHILDREN BALLOT INITIATIVE FAILS TO DELIVER

RECOGNIZING THAT EXCELLENT TEACHERS ARE CRITICALLY IMPORTANT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS, the MTA has long advocated for high standards for those who want to enter and remain in the profession, along with high-quality mentoring and professional development for educators. This past year, the MTA was a leader in developing a more effective and comprehensive educator evaluation system – one that includes a streamlined process for dismissing teachers who receive poor evaluations and fail to improve. This new system is being rolled out statewide over the next three years.

Unfortunately, a national organization with no particular expertise in education – Stand for Children – is seeking to disrupt the implementation of this system through an initiative petition on the November 2012 ballot. This complex question would make changes in the yet-to-be-implemented evaluation system and impose new state mandates on school district personnel decisions.

The initiative is opposed by Massachusetts Education Secretary Paul Reville and a growing number of affected groups, including the Massachusetts Parent Teacher Association, the Massachusetts Teachers Association, the Massachusetts Secondary School Administrators' Association, the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association, the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Reading Association, the Massachusetts Association of College and University Reading Educators, the Massachusetts School Library Association, the Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies and the Massachusetts Administrators for Special Education. And the opposition is growing.

Here are some of the reasons the MTA is opposed to the ballot question:

- **IT'S A DISTRACTION FROM THE REAL ISSUES.** This divisive proposal is a gimmick that will divert time, money and energy away from important priorities for our students such as:
 - Keeping class sizes small.
 - Restoring art, music and other enrichment classes.
 - Supporting initiatives that help attract excellent teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools.
 - Improving access to high-quality early childhood education.

- **IT TAKES AWAY LOCAL CONTROL.** This ballot question would reduce local control over our schools by requiring every district to follow one-size-fits-all state mandates in making transfer and layoff decisions. Those decisions should be made at the community level – by letting districts and employees collectively bargain personnel systems that meet the needs of their particular communities. The teachers’ voice in this process is critically important.
- **IT INVITES FAVORITISM.** The proposal opens the door to favoritism, nepotism and age discrimination – all problems that a more objective system is designed to counteract. An experienced teacher in good standing who is at the top of the pay scale could be laid off to make room for a less expensive teacher with far less classroom expertise. An outspoken, experienced teacher could be replaced by a more compliant novice educator, or one who is well-connected to a local politician or school official.
- **IT’S POLICY BY BUMPER STICKER – NOT COLLABORATION.** Although an SFC representative served on the task force that recommended the evaluation system changes, that representative never once proposed the changes contained in the ballot question. Instead, the organization raised money from wealthy individuals at Bain Capital and elsewhere and proceeded on its own to draft a long and complicated ballot question without conferring with the education and parent groups most affected by it. The summary of this initiative alone is four pages long – far too extensive for voters to read, interpret and make informed decisions on in the few minutes they have to spend in the voting booth. While the bill is long, the campaign simplistically claims that a yes vote is for “great teachers” and implies that those who oppose it are against quality schools. This is education policy by bumper sticker, not by thoughtful collaboration.

The MTA has been a leader in promoting initiatives to help students achieve at the highest levels and promoting the voices of educators with proven expertise in collaborative efforts to help schools succeed. We are currently providing professional services in Holyoke and New Bedford to help those districts implement the new evaluation system in schools that are designated Level 4, or underperforming.

Although Massachusetts schools are already ranked number one on many national and international measures, we are always open to ideas about how to make them work better. We strongly believe that cooperation and discussion among all affected parties is a far better approach than forcing an up-or-down vote on a complicated and deeply flawed ballot initiative.