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***James V. Shuls is the education policy analyst at the Show-Me Institute, which promotes market solutions for Missouri public policy.***

# TESTIMONY

February 6, 2013

## TEACHER QUALITY MATTERS, SO DO STATE REGULATIONS

***James V. Shuls***

***Testimony Before The Senate Education Committee***

### **To the Honorable Members of This Committee:**

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is James V. Shuls and I am the education policy analyst at the Show-Me Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan Missouri-based think tank that supports free-market solutions for state policy. The ideas presented here are my own. This testimony is intended to inform the committee of the impact of the current proposal regarding teacher quality in the Saint Louis Public School District (SLPS).

In recent years, researchers have been making clear what parents have known all along: teacher quality matters. As President Barack Obama said in a town hall meeting right here in Missouri, the “single most important factor in the classroom is the quality of the person standing at the front of the classroom.”<sup>1</sup> On this matter, the president is correct. He expanded on this point in his 2012 State of the Union address: “We know a good teacher can increase the lifetime income of a classroom by over \$250,000. A great teacher can offer an

escape from poverty to the child who dreams beyond his circumstance.”<sup>2</sup> The president was citing one of the most important and impressive studies of teacher effectiveness, where researchers were able to link tax records to student achievement of more than 2.5 million children.<sup>3</sup> The authors found significant relationships between a teacher’s ability to improve student achievement and their students’ outcomes later in life. Students with highly effective teachers were “more likely to attend college, attend higher-ranked colleges, earn higher salaries, live in higher [socioeconomic status] neighborhoods, and save for retirement.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, students with great teachers were less likely to have children as teenagers. The effect of being in a top 5 percent teacher’s classroom is money in the bank, increasing an individual’s lifetime earnings by \$50,000.<sup>5</sup>

The researchers the president cited are not the only ones to note the importance of effective instruction. Notable economist Eric Hanushek has documented that the difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher is a year’s worth of learning.

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He suggests that by replacing the bottom 5 percent of teachers with a teacher of just average quality, we could dramatically improve our educational system to the level of the highest-performing countries in the world.<sup>6</sup> Hanushek goes on to say “the increase in achievement for the U.S. would, according to historic growth patterns, lift annual U.S. growth rate by over 1%.”<sup>7</sup>

### **STEPS TO REMOVING A TEACHER IN SAINT LOUIS**

The research is clear that teacher quality has a tremendous impact on student achievement and one of the most effective methods for improving teacher quality is removing individuals whose performance is woefully inadequate. Current state law, however, makes removing low-performing teachers in the Saint Louis Public School District a very laborious and lengthy process.

Once a teacher has taught for five years, they earn tenure; essentially, an indefinite contract. Currently, moral misconduct and “inefficiency in the line of duty” are the only causes for dismissal. In the event that an administrator wishes to remove a teacher for inefficiencies, they must present a written notification of the inefficiencies to the teacher and provide that teacher a semester to improve. Dr. Kelvin Adams, superintendent of SLPS, reports that it takes 100 days before he can even remove a teacher from the classroom.<sup>8</sup>

The current proposal would decrease the amount of time a district must give a teacher to improve from one semester to 30 days. This would bring Saint Louis’ regulations more in line with the statutes governing the public school districts in the rest of the region and the state.

### **LAST IN, FIRST OUT**

The current proposal would also change the law governing SLPS regarding a reduction in force (RIF). Currently, when the Saint Louis Public School District must undergo a RIF, district officials must use a last in, first out (LIFO) policy. The LIFO policy means that experience, not quality, is the sole determinant of who remains in the district.

Recent research has documented many disastrous outcomes from LIFO policies:<sup>9</sup>

#### **1. LIFO leads to increased class sizes.**

Less experienced teachers are paid less than more senior teachers. That means a school would have to lay off more teachers under a LIFO policy than it would under a policy that takes quality into consideration. By removing more teachers, the district would be forced to increase class sizes.

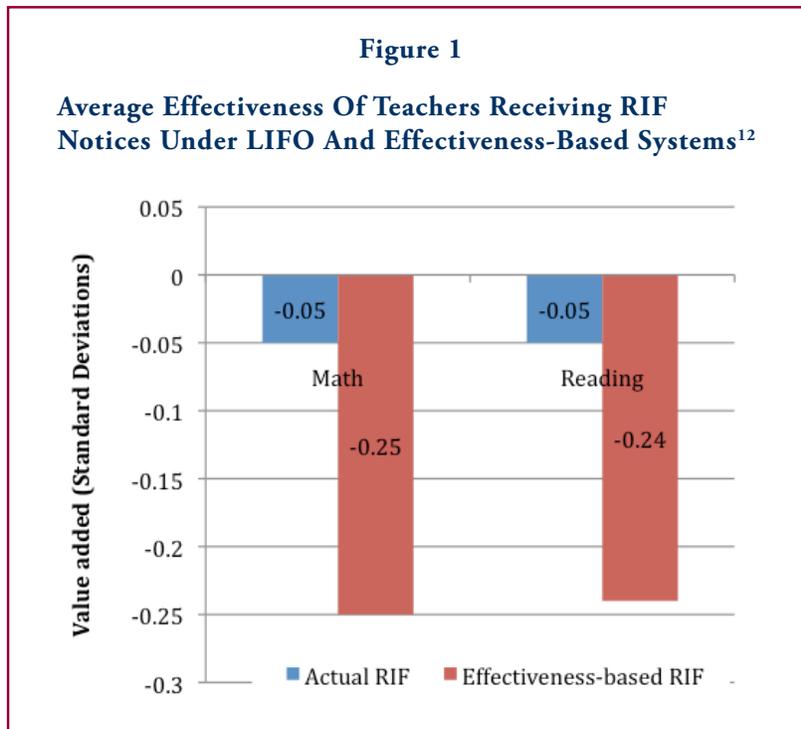
**2. LIFO disproportionately hurts low-performing and low-socioeconomic schools.** Because compensation is often set at a district level and is typically based on a schedule, teachers have no real way of earning a raise within a district. The only thing teachers can do is move to an easier position. That means veteran teachers tend to move to schools with fewer problems and higher achievement. Thus, less experienced teachers are often concentrated at low-performing, low-socioeconomic schools. Those schools will see the most teachers lose their jobs in a LIFO system. This is a well-documented phenomenon in California.<sup>10</sup>

#### **3. LIFO policies often force schools to lay off teachers in high-need subjects.**

Missouri chronically has teacher shortages in math and science fields. As I have documented in other work, math and science teachers often have less experience because they have more job prospects.<sup>11</sup> That means a LIFO policy could potentially target many individuals in subjects that are difficult to staff, forcing the district to lay off much-needed teachers.

**4. LIFO policies are blind to quality.** The most obvious fault with LIFO policies is that they may force schools to remove great teachers.

In a recent study in Washington, researchers noted that teachers laid off under a LIFO policy were only 0.05 standard deviations worse than the other teachers; under an effectiveness-based policy, the teachers that would be laid off were 0.25 standard deviations below the mean. This difference translates into approximately 2.5 to 3.5 months of learning.



## CONCLUSION

The current laws governing the Saint Louis Public School District regarding the removal of a low-performing teacher and reductions in force limit the district from making important staffing decisions. The laws make it onerous to remove a low-performing teacher and do not allow quality to be used in lay-off considerations. The current proposal would ease these restrictions by shortening the time it takes to remove a bad teacher from the classroom and by removing the last in, first out restrictions. Though the regulations that would remain are still more restrictive than those governing schools in the rest of the state, the proposed changes go a long way toward equipping administrators with the tools they need to adequately staff their schools. The result will be improved teacher quality.

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# NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Obama, Barack. (2009). The president's remarks at a town hall meeting in Arnold, Mo. The White House Office of the Press Secretary. View online here: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-arnold-missouri-town-hall>.

<sup>2</sup> Obama, Barack. (2012). President Obama's State of the Union Address. New York Times. View transcript online here: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/01/24/us/politics/state-of-the-union-2012-video-transcript.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Chetty, Raj., John N. Friedman, and Jonah E. Rockoff. (2011). "The long-term impacts of teachers: Teacher value-added and student outcomes in adulthood." National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper, No. 17699. Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.2

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Hanushek, Eric. (2010). The economic value of higher teacher quality. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper, No. 16606. Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 21

<sup>8</sup> Show-Me Institute video (2012). Teacher tenure: time for change. View online here: <http://www.showmeinstitute.org/publications/video/education/716-teacher-tenure-time-for-a-change.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Goldhaber, Dan, and Roddy Theobald. (2011). "Managing the teacher workforce." *Education Next*. 11(4), 78-83.

<sup>10</sup> Sepe, Cristina, and Marguerite Roza. (2010). "The disproportionate impact of seniority-based layoffs on poor, minority students." Center for Reinventing Public Education, May 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Shuls, James V. (2012). "The salary straitjacket: The pitfalls of paying all teachers the same." Show-Me Institute Essay, October 2012. View online here: <http://showmeinstitute.org/publications/essay/education/847-single-salary-schedules.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Goldhaber and Theobald.



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