

Union backs California bill expediting teacher dismissal

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California Democrats are once again pursuing their attack on teachers with Assembly Bill 215. If passed, AB 215 will expedite the process of firing teachers, clearing the way for the mass removal of more experienced and better-paid workers. The bill is being backed by the California Teachers Association (CTA), which has released a joint statement with the right-wing anti-teacher lobbying group EdVoice declaring its support for the measure.

Sponsored by Joan Buchanan, AB 215 is being sold as a way to oust teachers who are accused of “egregious crimes,” in particular sexual abuse, with politicians seizing on a series of alleged incidents in Los Angeles-area schools.

However, language in the proposed bill proves that protecting students from sexual abuse is not the true aim. Section 2 of the bill states that a teacher may be dismissed for any of a number of causes, including “dishonesty, unsatisfactory performance, [and] evident unfitness for service.” There are no guidelines for determining what constitutes any of these three charges.

The bill proposes a “hearing process” in which the accused employees are allowed to “defend themselves” against accusations. Section 11 outlines the specifics of this process. After school authorities send a written notice to the accused employee, he or she must request a hearing in 30 days to respond to the charges; failure to do so could result in an immediate dismissal. The legislation would impose a “Commission on Professional Excellence” to decide the fate of the employee. This body would consist of an administrative law judge, a person picked by the governing board of a school district, and another picked by the employee.

The bill allows charges to be filed based on alleged misdeeds that occurred at any time during the

employee’s tenure. While the bill guarantees that proceedings must begin no longer than six months after the charges are brought against the accused, they must be completed no longer than *seven* months after the employee requests a hearing. This could result in a mere month-long hearing process.

While Assemblywoman Buchanan has attempted to sell this as a way to “protect our kids” from “sexually deviant” adults, her collaborator, Laura Preston, with the Association for California School Administrators, has been more open about the authors’ ultimate ends. In an interview with Capitol Public Radio News, Preston said that the bill did not go far enough in removing “poor teachers” from the classroom.

Last year, Buchanan sponsored a similar bill, AB 375. Democratic Governor Brown vetoed it, saying that it was “too rigid and could create new problems.” In February of this year Democratic State Senator Lou Correa tried to pick up where the previous measure failed with SB 843. While Brown did not comment on this measure, he has since supported Buchanan’s new bill.

Numerous organizations have endorsed the bill, including the reactionary private advocacy organization EdVoice. Headed by CEO Bill Lucia, EdVoice had recently focused their efforts on getting their “Stop Child Molesters, Sexual Abusers and Drug Dealers From Working In California Schools Act” on this November’s ballot. The group has since issued a statement endorsing Buchanan’s bill, stating that they would drop their measure.

The episode reveals the control the state’s billionaires wield over the unions through the Democratic Party. An article posted on the web site of the CTA boasts of the collaboration among EdVoice, which is dominated by multi-millionaires, Democrats, and the union. “Asm.

Joan Buchanan (D-Alamo) [has] brought the California Teachers Association and the school reform group EdVoice together on an issue that's split the education community for years," the article states. "How to allow districts to quickly fire teachers accused of sexual abuse, child abuse or serious drug crimes."

Meanwhile a lawsuit is underway in Los Angeles, which seeks to tear up teacher tenure on the claim that it violates students' civil rights. The lawsuit, which is backed by several billionaires, including the Walton family (Walmart), would get rid of the teacher dismissal process altogether and give administrators the power to fire older, more experienced teachers without constraint.

Given the roll-out of federal Common Core standards and the multitude of state standard examinations, "poor performance" of students on tests is meant to be a reflection of a teacher's performance in the classroom. This is setting the stage for an attack on higher-paid teachers, who are increasingly the targets of unsubstantiated charges.

The majority of California teachers receive wages based on a salary schedule. A typical unified school district teacher is hired at approximately \$38,000. For every year of service his or her pay generally increases by a certain amount. Veteran teachers make on average of only \$72,000 in California, a state that is home to more billionaires than any other.



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