

Founded July 10, 1903

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Monday, June 27, 1977
Dover-New Philadelphia, O.
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Another view on teacher tenure

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Times-Reporter editorially opposes the teacher tenure bill now pending in the Ohio Senate. In the spirit of fairness, here's another view.

There's a lot to say for the teacher tenure bill which is slowly finding its way through the Ohio General Assembly. The legislation (HB 449) is designed to protect teachers from being indiscriminately fired by local boards of education. It would also require local boards to set up a system by which they could evaluate their teachers' effectiveness in the classroom.

This bill has merit and should be passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Rhodes.

Teachers in Ohio have the right to some degree of job security. The proposed legislation sponsored by Rep. Michael Stinziano (D-Columbus) would no longer permit school boards to fire teachers without showing cause.

Students in Ohio have the right to a good education. The Stinziano bill would require their teachers to be evaluated once a year — and then the school board could fire teachers who are found to be failing in the classroom.

Unfortunately, opponents to this legislation have created confusion over the bill by calling it the "instant tenure bill," and by claiming the bill would prevent local school boards from dismissing teachers who are not performing well in the classroom.

These arguments are wrong. The bill is not an "instant tenure bill." It does not lock a teacher in his job for-

ever. It would require instead that school boards hire new teachers under a probationary contract for up to three years. They could be fired — with cause — during the probationary period.

After a teacher enters his fourth year and completes 18 hours of additional education, he would be under a continuing contract.

This means the teacher would have job protection — but only to the extent that he is doing an effective job in the classroom based on his evaluation.

If the board would decide to fire the tenured teacher after a poor evaluation, the teacher could demand a hearing before a third-party referee whose decision would be binding. Either side could appeal that decision to the Common Pleas court, however.

All this makes a lot of sense. Stinziano effectively argues that less than half of Ohio's 617 school districts evaluate teachers.

He also reports that more than 1500 teachers in Ohio have been notified they will not be employed next year — and most were not given reasons.

School board decisions such as these cannot help but give credibility to teachers who say they were fired because they have been outspoken or critical of their school, or because they were making more money than the school board wanted to keep paying.

House Bill 449 passed the House and is pending in a Senate committee. It should be given top priority and should become law.