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Indiana Department of Education
SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents and Principals
FROM: Dr. Tony Bennett, State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Indiana Department of Education
DATE: March 13, 2010
SUBJECT: Response to Teachers' Protests

On Thursday, March 10, the Indiana Department of Education decided to make the decision to begin to listen to the thousands of teachers who have voiced their concerns over collective bargaining limitations, voucher programs, and evaluations based on merit-pay rather than seniority.

Any plan aiming to dramatically improve our system of schools must be negotiated with input from teachers, administrators, superintendents, parents, union leaders, and politicians from both sides of the aisle. It must also take into account the real value of collective bargaining agreements between school corporations and unions. We have realized that teachers and their unions are the biggest influencers driving student success in our schools; SB 1 and SB 575 are obviously only the vision of a few and will not transform public school districts for the better—especially in urban districts.

Serious problems related to SB 1 and SB 575 have been brought to our attention by parents, teachers, and union leaders. SB 1 will create job insecurity for teachers who will be evaluated on factors outside of their control. SB 575 will limit the scope of teachers' contracts while compromising the professional protections teachers need. Like SB 1, SB 575 will reduce democracy in schools, putting control in the State's hands rather than in local communities.

Indiana's educators deserve respect and gratitude for dedicating their lives to preparing children for success. They are not the problem in our current system of schools. The organizations that represent them are necessary for their democratic voices to be heard in their workplaces. This legislative session, these organizations have convinced us at the Indiana Department of Education that there is only one road that will lead to success: the democratic process of negotiation.

I am encouraged that our Republican lawmakers have newly resolved to fully consider the vocal Democratic minority opposition, which we now understand represents thousands of voices. If we are able to turn a new leaf and work together, Indiana will emerge from this legislative session as the nation's leader in education which puts students at the center of every decision.