

## Schools must benefit children

Written by Fred Easter  
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Nobody asked me, but, there are statements I don't hear in the discussions about "seniority" and "tenure" for K-12 teachers.

Here are a few of the things I haven't heard anyone say:

"The longer teachers teach, the better they get; right up to their retirement day".

"Every veteran teacher is more effective at reaching kids than one with fewer years of experience".

"There is no good reason a less experienced teacher should be kept over a more experienced one".

Before I go any further; let me say that I grew up in a union home. I remember the party my folks gave when the (RWDSU) Retail Workers, Department Store Union won a 40 hour week. It was a blast. It meant my Dad got a day off during the week for working Saturdays; or got overtime for working that sixth day, like on Easter or Christmas week.

I applied for and received provisional union membership when I began pushing a broom around that ladies shoe store at age 15.

I am staunchly pro-union. I am also unabashedly, unapologetically, fiercely pro-child. We already live in a society where the banks are run for the benefit of the bankers and the Congress serves the super rich. If we cannot run our schools for the benefit of our children, we are truly lost.

If you move to a new town or community and your child gets sick or hurt, do you ask your neighbor for the number of the "oldest" or the "best" doctor? If they get a toothache, do you look for the dentist that's been practicing the longest? No, you look for the dentist that works with kids the best. Shouldn't we feel as strongly about our children's education as we do about their cavities?

Some years ago, for a short period, I ran for a seat on the School Board. During that period, I toured some schools with a very nice parent liaison. I remember chatting with four senior girls in the International Baccalaureate Program at Southwest H.S. I asked them "what is the worst thing about going to Southwest?" Without a pause, the answer shot back: "seniority". The young woman said "Because there are few, if any, behavioral issues here; teachers with seniority bid on openings here and then "retire" well before they leave our classrooms". I was stunned that the teacher burnout and fatigue were so readily apparent to these young students.

Back in the Sixties and Seventies, I traveled the country in the service of Carleton College Admissions. Neighborhoods were changing then. School populations were in flux. I was looking for black and brown students. All across the north, many students of color were attending schools that had previously been all-white. In far too many High Schools in places like Gary IN, Oakland CA, Cleveland & Cincinnati OH college counselors told me: "There are no students here who could make it at a Carleton." I'd scour the school for a black teacher. When I found

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one, I'd find students who could and did graduate from Carleton.

The most effective teachers can relate to the students in front of them. They believe in those students's potential. They care about the students. They are not intimidated by the students. They can challenge the students to be the best they can be. They are not pining for the students they had at the beginning of their careers. The faculty at The City, Inc. met those requirements. Paul Wellstone and a host of others met those requirements at Carleton too. These are neither age nor experience related characteristics. These are the necessary requirements for preparing the next generation of healthy, well-informed, life long learners this country, this planet so desperately needs. Identifying and supporting teachers who meet these requirements is the only important thing. Let's focus on our children's future.