Louisiana teacher reviews draw new criticism

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Louisiana’s annual evaluations for public school teachers need to be revised to give principals a bigger voice in the reviews, several superintendents said Thursday.

The superintendent of the West Feliciana Parish school system, Hollis Milton, questioned the wisdom of basing half of a teacher’s annual evaluation on what students learned during the school year.

He said 25 percent makes more sense, with the rest based on classroom observations by principals.

“Anything at 50 percent seems excessive,” Milton said. “We need to fix the imperfections in the evaluation system.”

The issue surfaced during a meeting of the Superintendents’ Advisory Council, which advises the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on key issues.

A change in state law would be needed for any major revamp of teacher evaluations.

However, other superintendents shared Milton’s concerns.

St. Bernard Parish School Superintendent Doris Voitier said that, while state law requires the reviews to be split between student performance and classroom observations, BESE erred by requiring that teachers be rated as ineffective if they get failing marks in either category.

“The ultimate goal should be to put it in the hands of the principal and the district,” Voitier said.

Under a [2012 state law](https://www.gis.state.la.us/home/2012legislation) pushed by Gov. Bobby Jindal, teacher evaluations are linked to their job security, which is called tenure. Teachers who are rated as ineffective face a loss of tenure. Those who receive poor ratings two years in a row can be dismissed.
In the first round of the new evaluations last year 4 percent of teachers were listed as ineffective. Nearly one in three got the top rating.

State law requires that half of the review be linked to the growth of student achievement. The other half of the job evaluation is based on classroom observations.

The superintendent of the Iberville Parish school system, Ed Cancienne, noted that a teacher can get passing marks from the principal, ineffective marks on student learning targets and be out of the classroom if that happens twice.

State Superintendent of Education John White said that, in general terms, he agrees with the idea of giving principals a major voice in teacher job checks.

“If you can’t trust a principal with 50 adults you can’t trust them with 1,000 children,” he said.

But White said he does not anticipate more changes in how the teacher reviews work in the short term.

Comments by Milton and others dovetail with some of the complaints from teacher union leaders when the reviews were overhauled in 2010 and 2012.

They argued that it was a mistake to rely on student test scores for 50 percent of a teacher’s job check since those results can vary for a wide range of reasons.

However, giving principals lots of authority over teacher checks has also prompted concerns.

Critics say that would return Louisiana to its previous system in which 98 percent of teachers routinely won satisfactory job reviews from principals.