

Governor's Tenure Proposal from his 2-8-12 State of the State Address

I'm a Democrat. I've been told that I can't, or shouldn't, touch teacher tenure. It's been said by some that I won't take on the issue because it will damage my relationship with teachers.

If the people in this chamber — and those watching on TV or online, or listening on the radio — if you've learned nothing else about me in the past 13 months, I hope you've learned this: I do what I say I'm going to do, and I do what I think is right for Connecticut, irrespective of the political consequences.

And so when I say it's time we reform teacher tenure, I mean it.

And when I say I'm committed to doing it in the right way, I mean it.

Since 2009, 31 states have enacted tenure reform, including our neighboring states of New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. It's time for Connecticut to act.

For those watching or listening who don't know what tenure is, it's basically job security. Let me explain.

Right now, if you're a teacher and you have tenure, your performance in the classroom has to be rated "incompetent" before a dismissal process can even begin. Even then — even if you're rated "incompetent" — it can take more than a year to dismiss you.

And to earn that tenure — that job security — in today's system basically the only thing you have to do is show up for four years. Do that, and tenure is yours.

The bottom line? Today tenure is too easy to get and too hard to take away.

I propose we do it a different way. I propose we hold every teacher to a standard of excellence.

Under my proposal, tenure will have to be earned and re-earned. Not earned simply by showing up for work — earned by meeting certain objective performance standards, including student performance, school performance, and parent and peer reviews.

And my proposal says, you should not only have to prove your effectiveness once, after just a few years in the classroom. My proposal says that if you want to keep that tenure, you should have to continue to prove your effectiveness in the classroom as your career progresses.

I'm trying to be careful in explaining this tenure reform proposal because I know there are those who will deliberately mischaracterize it in order to scare teachers. So let me be very clear: we are not talking about taking away teachers' rights to a fair process if an objective, data-driven decision is made to remove them from the classroom.

I believe deeply in due process.

I believe just as deeply that we need to ensure that our children are being taught only by very good teachers.

So for those teachers who earn tenure – by proving that they are effective teachers – it's the job of the local school district to make sure that you have every chance to continue to succeed. That means that if you start to struggle at any point after you've earned tenure, the district will provide support and professional development to help get you back on track.