

Hello, Chair and members of the education committee. My name is Yesica Escalante and I am writing today about House Bill 26-1291; Educator Performance Evaluation.

As an education advocate I often talk with parents, teachers, administrators and students about their current school experience with the school system and what could be improved. House Bill 26-1291 raises a lot of questions on what teacher evaluations might look like in different schools and the unintentional impact it might have on students. We need to be looking at any bill that comes to committee with a Justice lens, making sure that we center students at the core of every bill that passes, not adults. Justice requires systems intentionally designed to guarantee fairness, transparency, and equitable outcomes—not systems that rely on families to navigate inequality especially for those who, by design, have the least agency to navigate complexity.

A bill about teacher evaluation frequency may seem administrative, but it touches one of the most important justice questions in education: How will the system ensure every child has access to a great school? If high-quality teaching is one of the most important drivers of student learning, then the policy question becomes: Does this bill help ensure every student has access to effective teaching? Some of the concerns that come to mind are if teacher evaluations occur less frequently, the system may: detect struggling teaching later, intervene later, and allow inequities in classroom quality to persist longer. For students already living in education deserts, delayed accountability may reinforce existing disparities.

This bill gives the power to the local boards to adopt a written system to evaluate the employment performances within a period of six weeks or less. This also gives a lot of wiggle room for each district and the outcomes may vary depending on policy implementation. Educator evaluations are one of the consistent measures of instructional quality that we currently have. If teacher evaluation systems can serve as a form of public accountability for instructional quality. Reducing evaluation frequency could potentially reduce: available data on classroom quality and transparency about teaching performance. From a justice perspective, the key issue is whether families and communities still have clear visibility into school quality.

I'll end my speech with this: If changes to evaluation systems reduce bureaucratic burden while increasing meaningful coaching and support for educators, they may advance justice. But if they weaken transparency or delay intervention when students are not receiving strong instruction, they risk reinforcing the very education deserts our work seeks to eliminate. I urge this committee to view education bills through a Justice By Design Policy Test. Policies affecting schools must demonstrate they will:

1. Protect students' right to high-quality instruction
2. Strengthen systems that support educator excellence
3. Ensure transparency and accountability
4. Prioritize the needs of students furthest from opportunity

If a reform reduces oversight, it must also increase the system's capacity to support and develop great teaching. Otherwise, inequities may persist by design. Thank you for your time.



Dear Members of the Colorado House of Representatives:

My name is Wendy Cole and I live in House District #2. I'm a parent of three kids who have grown up in DPS. Like every parent, I want my children and all children to grow up healthy, supported, and prepared for their future. One of the most important ways I have been able to do that is by finding great schools for my kids. I have a unique perspective of having experienced a variety of different schools, teaching methods and philosophies, and leadership, including several private pre-schools, Sewall CDC, Knight and Cory Elementary, Innovation schools C3 and Merrill, Hill, and now South High School.

I moved to Denver when my oldest daughter was an infant. As a new mom, I initially relied on word-of-mouth, availability, and proximity to find schools. Sometimes it led to a great school, in other cases the reputation masked inconsistent teaching quality. I have seen first-hand how a great teacher can inspire, spark the imagination, create a thirst for knowledge and believe in and challenge a child's potential. A great teacher understands that each child is unique and possesses unique qualities—sometimes obvious and other times requiring a little more effort to uncover. I have also seen poor teachers create lackluster interest in learning, disruptive behaviors, and sadly instill anxiety, self-doubt, lack of confidence and loss of hope among students. Poor teachers operate within a bell curve and don't take time or effort to understand and connect with the outliers.

Great teachers are the building blocks of great schools, from classroom to classroom, from grade to grade. Every child deserves to have access to great teachers and great schools, not just some of the time but all of the time. In order to ensure great teaching and consistency across schools and population, a performance framework that constantly evaluates and provides feedback to teachers is needed to allow them to improve and grow. Not every teacher is born a great teacher and having this framework allows for personal and professional development, while providing kids with high quality teaching they deserve.

House Bill HB26-1291 introduces changes that are counter to this idea by reducing the frequency of evaluations for "experienced" teachers to every three years. It makes the false assumptions that:

- Experienced teachers do not need feedback and opportunities for growth.
- Everything else stays constant—school leadership, the environment, the student body, the curriculum, and personal circumstances that can affect the quality of teaching over time.
- Teachers don't experience fatigue or burnout.
- The last time a teacher was evaluated was a fair and accurate assessment.
- A teacher will remain at one school for three years to receive these evaluations.

It also raises the question of who is determined to be an “experienced” teacher to quality not needed a yearly evaluation. Every successful organization, whether for profit or not, relies on yearly evaluations to remain competitive and foster a culture of high performance and continual improvement. Without them, organizations become static and stale. It increases the risk that performance issues are not caught and addressed in a timely matter. Given that kids move to new teachers every year, it is a costly amount of time and loss of learning for kids to not be able to benefit from great teaching.

I have personally seen the effects of poor teaching quality go unnoticed at a reputable elementary school. When my daughter was in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, her teacher was well liked because of his vibrancy and humor. However, he was also a teacher who did not understand, nor cared to understand the kids in his classroom who did not fit the bell curve, including my daughter. He dismissed her struggles because she was smart enough to do well in school even though inside she was having difficulty and it wasn't until we kept advocating for a 504 that he recognized that she would benefit from some supports. I often volunteered in the classroom and saw him routinely lump her with two other struggling kids on field trips and assignments because it was the easy thing to do—she had medical needs and the other two had behavioral issues so I was often assigned to chaperone them. I was incredibly saddened and angered by this teacher's unwillingness to recognize these kids as individuals with individual needs. One student clearly had learning deficits that resulted behavioral issues, and was later diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia. The other student also was clearly struggling from social emotional issues, which also resulted in behavioral outbursts. She stood out because she came from a lower socio-economic family, Hispanic, and lacked the family supports and knowledge around how to advocate for her needs. These qualities were pretty clear and the disparity of the treatment towards these kids vs. the others was blatant and upsetting because not only did he not try to understand and support them, he did not have any desire to. On the opposite end, his Highly Gifted Talented kids also received no meaningful support, and the school was supposed to be a Highly Gifted Talented magnet school. Fast forward a few years, a friend's younger child also had this teacher for 1st grade and his behavior and teaching had worsened. He became complacent in his teaching, even lazy. Yet he remained “popular” because he was fun. This is unfortunately a situation where the evaluations themselves were poor, likely due to a period of tumultuous school leadership. Imagine if this happened under a system of evaluations every three years—how many kids would be affected by his poor teaching?

In 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, my daughter had a teacher who would be considered very experienced and had been at that school for many years. Yet her quality of teaching was very poor—she was a very caring teacher yet lacked energy in her teaching and was not able to engage her students. Her teaching reflected fatigue, and she ended up leaving a few years later because she was burned

out. Again, skipping evaluations for “experienced” teachers would miss this decline in teaching quality and negatively impact several classes of students.

I strongly urge you to oppose this HB26-1291 as currently written. The goal of this bill is focused on the alleviating school resources than improving outcomes of students and striving for high quality instruction for all kids. While some think it may provide immediate relief for certain teachers, it will actually be a detriment to their long-term development. It leaves certain populations of students at higher risk of receiving poor and inconsistent teaching quality and exacerbates the education deserts that already exist for these students.

The current law regarding timing of evaluations does not need to be change. Students and access to great schools need to be the priority by focusing instead on amendments that would materially improve the quality of evaluations, the professional supports to act on the evaluations and a system that makes the schools accountable to those evaluations and recommendations.

Thank you for your time and commitment to our children.

## Testimony Opposing HB26-1291

Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Lourdes Rodriguez. I am a Colorado parent, a graduate of Denver Public Schools, and I currently work in Denver Public Schools as well. My two sons also attend school in DPS. I am here today because I care deeply about public education in Colorado, and I believe every child deserves access to strong, high-quality teaching in every classroom.

I respectfully urge you to vote NO on HB26-1291, which would reduce how often experienced teachers are formally evaluated—from every year to once every three years.

As a parent, I want to share what this looks like from the perspective of a family whose child has already experienced learning gaps.

I currently have a fourth-grade son who is significantly struggling with math. Right now, he is performing around a second-grade math level.

Those gaps did not happen overnight.

In second grade, his teacher was in and out of the classroom frequently on leave, and there was very little consistency. Because of that instability, my son and his classmates missed critical foundational math instruction.

Those early math skills are the building blocks students need to succeed later on. When those foundations are missing, the impact follows students for years.

In third grade, the situation did not improve enough to help close those gaps. Many students did not receive the strong instruction they needed to catch up.

Now in fourth grade, we are dealing with the consequences. My son is trying hard, and we are doing everything we can to support him, but recovering from lost foundational learning is extremely difficult.

So I want to ask this committee an important question:

If students are already falling through the cracks when teachers are evaluated every year, what will happen if evaluations only happen every three years?

Three years is not a small amount of time in a child's life.

Three years could mean a student spends second, third, and fourth grade in classrooms where learning gaps are not identified or addressed in time.

That is learning time children cannot get back.

Teacher evaluations should not be seen as punishment. They should be seen as a tool for accountability, support, and improvement.

When evaluations happen regularly, schools can:

- identify challenges early
- support teachers who need additional help
- ensure students receive high-quality instruction.

I am also concerned about what this bill could mean for students with disabilities.

I also have a third grader with an IEP, so I have firsthand experience navigating the special education system.

From my experience as a parent, the special education system already needs stronger oversight and accountability, not less.

Students with disabilities depend heavily on consistent, high-quality instruction and specialized support to make progress. If problems go unnoticed for years, the impact on these students can be devastating.

Children with IEPs cannot afford to lose three years of progress before issues are identified.

Reducing evaluation frequency risks allowing struggling classrooms to continue longer without intervention, and when that happens, it is not the adults who suffer.

It is the students.

It is the child who falls behind in reading.

It is the child who loses confidence in math.

It is the child who spends years trying to recover from gaps that should never have happened.

Our education system should be designed to guarantee strong teaching in every classroom, not weaken the systems that help ensure it.

Students only get one second grade.

They only get one third grade.

They only get one fourth grade.

They cannot go back and redo those years.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to vote NO on HB26-1291.

Because when accountability weakens, it is students who carry the consequences for years to come.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Colorado's children.

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Maya Moorman, and I am the Chief of Operations at FaithBridge. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about HB26-1291.

I am concerned that changing teacher evaluations for teachers rated effective from yearly cycles to once every three years will harm the day-to-day systems that help maintain the quality of instruction in our schools. I understand the concerns surrounding administrative workload, and I appreciate the clause that would require an evaluation only if there is a performance concern. However, I would like greater clarity about what constitutes a “performance concern.”

Changes made to SB10-191 through SB22-070 reduced the weight of student outcomes and learning measures in teacher evaluations from 50 percent to 30 percent. This leaves 70 percent of the evaluation based on professional practices. As a result, the focus of evaluations has shifted more toward professional behaviors. While professional practices are important, they do not always directly correlate with classroom performance or student outcomes.

Because of this shift, I hesitate to support reducing evaluation frequency from yearly to every three years for teachers who are rated effective or higher. Evaluations are not only meant to measure a teacher’s effectiveness but also to capture how the teaching environment evolves over time. A teacher may perform well in one year, but the following year circumstances may change—school demographics may shift, leadership may change, a teacher may move schools, or other factors may affect classroom performance.

Evaluations provide an important opportunity for teachers and administrators to reflect on the previous year—what worked well, what challenges occurred, and what adjustments are needed. With a three-year gap, many important changes could go unnoticed. A teacher’s rating in one year does not guarantee the same level of effectiveness over the next three years.

I also want to acknowledge the concern about administrative workload. If evaluations are conducted simply as a checkbox requirement, then they can certainly feel like extra work. However, when evaluations are used intentionally—as a tool to help teachers and administrators improve instruction, strengthen collaboration, and build a positive school culture—they can be incredibly valuable. The issue at hand is not the requirement of evaluations themselves, but rather how they are being implemented.

I recognize that the intended effect of SB10-191 was to improve student achievement through teacher evaluations, and in many cases we have not seen the level of improvement we hoped for. Many teachers receive effective ratings, yet student scores are not improving dramatically. We also know that bias can exist in teacher evaluations. Teachers working in lower-income or struggling schools are often rated lower, and the equity gap could widen with changes like those proposed in this bill.

For these reasons, I caution against creating legislation that dilutes the importance of teacher evaluations. Instead of passing a bill that only places a bandage over a complaint from one

stakeholder group, I urge the legislature to pursue policies that address the root causes of low performance—policies that break down silos between parents, teachers, and administrators, and policies that address gaps in knowledge, resources, and access across communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to vote no on HB26-1291 and to think bigger about solutions. Let's create policy that addresses the real challenges facing our schools rather than settling for a temporary fix.

Thank you for your time and consideration.