

The following is an article that appeared in the Record. It was written by Dave Claeys who is a member of the Pequannock Township Educational Association Legislative Team.

I'm writing in response to Bob Ingle's column ("Top teachers could mentor their peers," @issue, March 20), where Ingle touches on pretty much every other possible issue he can about his problem with teachers. He starts by recounting how acting Education Commissioner Chris Cerf told a failing charter school to either get their act together or face closure. Ingle then talks about this being what should happen in public schools where "failure can go on for generations."

First, let's get a couple of things straight about public schools. Public schools in New Jersey provide the best public education in the country. Our students are among the highest-scoring in math and English. We have among the highest Advanced Placement test scores and we are one of the only states where the gap is shrinking between inner-city student test scores and their counterparts in the suburbs. These are facts our governor refuses to talk about. In fact, the only schools that are really failing in the state of New Jersey are those located in inner cities such as Newark and Camden. By the way, these are the same schools that were taken over and have been run by the state of New Jersey for the past 15 years. The problems with inner-city schools are not problems with education. Poor student performance is due to broken homes, one-parent families, drugs, alcohol, crime, missing parents, and all of the social and economic problems that go with it. It is unrealistic to think that a teacher spending an hour a day with a student is going to overcome all of the burdens these students show up with. It is not public education that is failing these students. It is their communities. If we are going to fix public education, let's make sure we are fixing it only in those places where it is broken.

Ingle goes on to say that New Jersey spends twice as much per student on education as some states, but doesn't get twice the results. Guess what, Bob, New Jersey spends twice as much as some states on newspaper columnists, too, and doesn't get twice as much, either. Everything costs more in New Jersey because it's prime real estate that is populated by an educated workforce and is a bedroom community to New York City. Education costs more because everything costs more. We teachers have to live here, too. By the way, access to a quality education is one of the main reasons that people move to New Jersey.

To hear Ingle talk about teacher tenure, you would think that our schools are overflowing with ineffective, nonproductive and unmotivated has-beens who are protected by a self-serving tenure system. How far from the truth. New Jersey has the best public schools and the best teachers in the nation, as evidenced by most all measurements of performance. The tenure system doesn't protect low-achievers. It is in place to protect good teachers from political and economic dismissals. When that happens, it is bad for students. Tenure only is earned after three years of performance reviews and evaluations by school administrators, and is then awarded at the discretion of the board of education. Granted, once earned, the review process to remove a tenured teacher is expensive and time-consuming and, often, that is a detriment to removing a bad teacher. That is why the NJEA has put forth a recommendation that would streamline this process and reduce the cost, thus making it easier to remove a teacher for a truly tenurable offense.

Ingle finally addresses the point included in the title of his article in his second to last paragraph. He says that outstanding teachers can be "role models and mentors to lesser-skilled educators in each district." This already is done in most districts, whether formally or informally. Good teachers collaborate with each other. In schools where this doesn't occur, I agree that it needs to be implemented. It would be foolish, however, to think that this would provide the remedy to inner-city problems. The sooner we focus on what really needs to be fixed, the better.

By the way, Bob, I'm sure you can find a great job in Sioux City, Iowa, for about half of what you're making here.