

## Don't Bash Teachers

As a career educator and a teacher in Southampton High School for the past twenty years, I must take issue with Laura Sinski-McMahon's letter regarding abolishing teacher tenure ["Winds of Change," letters, April 30]. The writer makes a common mistake as to what "tenure" actually is. Tenure is NOT a guarantee of employment. It IS a guarantee of due process in any dispute over performance. Tenure merely confers constitutional rights on public school teachers, such as the right to legal counsel, the right to know the charge against one, and the right to confront one's accuser. Shouldn't any citizen have such protections? That is ALL that tenure is.

If a teacher commits a felony or consistently performs badly, the school district can terminate that teacher. On the other hand, a good and capable teacher cannot be summarily dismissed due to a spurious charge, a vendetta, or a politically motivated campaign. These are the same rights provided to police officers, elected officials, transit workers, clerical staff, college professors, and

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virtually anyone in a democratic society.

Furthermore, tenure is not granted by teachers, it is given by administrators and school boards. If there are weak teachers in a school, they are the responsibility of those who first hire them and then foolishly grant them tenure three years later.

No, tenure is not the enemy of better public schools. And neither do our public schools have a higher percentage of ineffectual employees, or great ones, than any other demanding and essential profession. Far more serious issues are inequitable funding policies (based on property taxes) that guarantee huge disparities in school quality, punitive practices and charter schools, which destroy public schools in the neediest neighborhoods, misguided "leadership" at the state and federal level, the standardized testing obsession (largely being driven by corporate profits), single parent households and the alarming rate of children born out of wedlock, a rapidly expanding income gap between the haves and have nots, and an unresolved debate over what our educational system is even supposed to accomplish. Bashing "those bad teachers" is much simpler than dealing with real problems.

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