

Teacher Pension reform - Testimony

Hello!

My name is Susan Wagner and I have taught in Minnesota for 32 years. I graduated from Concordia College in 1990 with an English Education degree. At that time the education field had a very competitive job market. I subbed in Hutchinson in May of 1990 and then taught in Grey Eagle from Sept. 1990 - May 1993. I missed the June 30th, 1989 Rule of 90 mark by less than a year.

In 1994 the high school in Grey Eagle closed. Feeling a bit disillusioned with education at the time, I looked for a different type of job and spent the next year working at a variety of jobs, including substitute teaching in the metro area. In the fall of 1994, I took a teaching job in Crookston, MN and this May will finish my 29th year in this district.

I like what I do. I like being around kids. Some may call me crazy, but my favorite grade to teach is 7th grade. (I also teach seniors) But teaching 7th graders is both mentally and physically exhausting. At the age of 54 now, I truly can't imagine doing this until I am 66. I don't think my body or mind will be able to handle it. Besides, who truly wants a building full of 66 year old teachers.

But sometimes I feel like my hands are tied. If I go out any earlier than 66, my pension takes a beating. TRA may want to call it a discount, but in all reality it is a penalty.

I admit that as a younger teacher, I didn't really worry about retirement as I was often told by older teachers that Rule of 90 or something even better would return. Of course this never happened. I don't have ill-will toward those teachers (Tier1) who retired under Rule of 90, I just feel that we should have something comparable. Plus, I'm a third generation teacher so I truly understand how Rule of 90 works and how beneficial it has been for my father in enjoying life after teaching.

I do not feel that I should have to teach 10 more years to get the same benefits as that person who started teaching 9 months before me. That is definitely not fair. I do not feel that poorly made decisions made by TRA 30 years ago should have to be paid back on the backs of Tier 2 teachers.

Please support the proposals by TRA and Ed MN. Either 60 and 30 or 62 or 35 is much better than what we have. Please also support lowering the NRA and reducing the penalties for retiring early. Compensation for all of the extras during the COVID years isn't much to ask for either. At a time when there is a budget surplus, show your support of what teachers provide for our state. Help make the teacher pension better so we can continue to keep Minnesota at the top of the country in education and attract more great teachers.

Thanks for your time and for your commitment to what you do.