

School Reform Statement (Teacher Tenure, Teacher Performance)

Figuring out how to improve school performance is a complex and controversial topic in many states at the start of the 21st Century.

Illinois [SB 7 \(Public Act 097-0008\)](#) establishes new standards for teacher tenure, empowers school districts to remove poor performing teachers from the classroom, and updates regulations about teacher strikes.

For example, the law states tenure can only be obtained after four years of service and a series of proficient reviews. However, it allows for the top-rated educators to be put into a fast-track for tenure after three years without having to wait for the fourth year.

SB 7 sets new guidelines that make teacher strikes more difficult. Suburban school districts and other state teacher unions outside Chicago along with their school boards are required to meet with a mediator to disclose their best offer prior to any strike. Strikes in Chicago schools will require a 120-day waiting period from the date the impasse moves to an advisory panel. The Chicago Teachers Union must also have support from at least 75 percent of its bargaining members and provide a minimum of a 10-day strike notice. Chicago Public Schools also now have powers to impose longer school days as well as lengthen the school calendar.

This bill is one of several enacted in 2011 that restrict teacher tenure and/or collective bargaining powers. Ohio's SB 5, Idaho's SB 1108, and Wisconsin's Act 10 are other examples of legislation reducing teachers' collective bargaining authority. Bills passed in Ohio and Idaho also reduce the role of seniority in layoffs, tie teacher evaluation to student achievement, and place additional restrictions or conditions on teacher tenure.

Although Illinois' SB 7 includes similar provisions to legislation enacted in those states, some significant differences in the process exist. For one thing, the legislation in Illinois was enacted by a Democrat-controlled legislature and signed by a Democratic governor, unlike in Ohio, Idaho and Wisconsin. Perhaps a more important difference is that the Illinois bill passed with support from the state's three largest teachers unions, which helped to counteract opposition from the rank-and-file or other unions. Possibly the most telling description, as reported in *The Huffington Post*, was that unions "accepted a spanking in order to avoid a real beat-down." Having observed more stringent bills in Ohio and neighboring Wisconsin, teacher unions in Illinois and legislators successfully negotiated to enact legislation that significantly reforms teacher tenure laws without outlawing teacher unions or abolishing tenure entirely.

The Illinois law, however, has been recognized as a national model by U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan who stated, "Illinois has done something truly remarkable and every state committed to education reform should take notice." One significant difference in Illinois' SB 7 was a substantial degree of input in Illinois from teacher unions, business interests, and education advocacy groups.

Groups that participated in drafting and passing the reforms included the Illinois Education Association, the Illinois Federation of Teachers, the Chicago Teachers Union, Stand for Children, Advance Illinois, the Illinois School Management Alliance, Illinois Association of School Administrators, Illinois Association of School Boards, Large Urban District Association, ED-RED, Legislative Education Network of DuPage, Chicago and Illinois Principals Association, and the Illinois Business Roundtable. Two unions temporarily withdrew their support of SB 7 because of provisions that would have affected an ongoing lawsuit and made it harder for members to call a strike. But, both unions signed on again after a trailer bill amended those issues.

Submitted as:

Illinois

[Public Act 097-0008 \(SB 7\)](#)

Status: Enacted into law in 2011.