

New teacher evaluation standards on the way for Idaho

Educators still concerned 'pay for performance' will eventually become part of state's plans

By Halley Griffin, Daily News staff writer

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A proposed rule change by the Idaho State Board of Education could force local school districts to spend the next year preparing teacher evaluation criteria based on new statewide standards.

The standardization of teacher evaluation methods stems from a "pay for performance" discussion two years ago, but state officials say this is not a step toward linking assessed performance to contracts or salaries.

Last fall a state teacher performance task force released an initial draft of its recommendations for teacher performance evaluations. Educators both locally and statewide expressed concerns that adopting state performance-evaluation standards would be the first step toward a pay-for-performance system like the one proposed by state schools chief Tom Luna in 2007.

Penni Cyr, a Moscow High School librarian and Idaho National Education Association director, said those fears still exist.

"I know pay for performance or merit pay ... did not come forward at this legislative session because of the economic crisis," Cyr said. "I believe it will come forward again."

Idaho Deputy Superintendent of School Support Services Nick Smith was on vacation and unavailable for comment, but State Department of Education spokeswoman Melissa McGrath said this is not related to Luna's pay-for-performance plan.

"If the state wanted to do that, they would have to go through the legislative process. The task force made it pretty clear that they thought this would be better if it was not tied (to pay)," she said. "So at this point, no, it's not tied to that."

Although Cyr and other educators say they still are concerned the pay aspect could one day be brought back into the picture, their current concern is where the funding will come from to implement the task force's proposal.

"Of course in these economic times you worry about that," Cyr said.

McGrath said the state will spend some of the about \$30,000 that is budgeted each year for administrative training to make the one-time purchase of materials for "Webinars."

Moscow Junior High School Assistant Principal Kevin Hill said it will be hard to get the funding to implement the new standards, because money for professional development tends to get cut early on when budgets are trimmed.

"There are mandated costs not only with implementing models but training administrators and teachers. There's a lot of background work that hasn't necessarily been done to get this up and started," Hill said.

Still, he said he has used the new framework developed by educational consultant Charlotte Danielson before and found it to be an effective tool for teacher growth.

The method divides evaluation into 22 "components" in four "domains": planning and preparation, learning environment, instruction and use of assessment, and professional responsibilities.

"Most educators believe the Danielson method is a good way to promote growth," he said. "I'm not convinced that it's the best way to do evaluations."

Hill said individual districts will have some flexibility in how to implement the standards for their own teachers, and it will be useful to have some consistency across the state.

The change was approved by the board in April, and is now in a public comment period. If the board gives final approval to the change, it will go to the Legislature next year and go into effect in fall 2010.

On the Web:

- www.sde.idaho.gov/site/publicComments/

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