

Idaho Senate backs contentious charter school contract bill

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Charter schools would no longer be required to use the same teacher contracts as other public schools under a bill that has cleared the Idaho Senate.

Senate lawmakers voted 22-13 Monday to allow charter schools to create their own contracts without approval from the state's superintendent of public instruction. The legislation wouldn't require charter schools to opt out of using the superintendent-approved language nor would it affect current charter teacher contracts.

"All we're trying to do here is provide some flexibility," said Sen. Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene, the bill's sponsor.

Nonini said a charter school in his legislative district asked for the exemption. For example, if approved, charters could provide one-year contracts rather than the current mandated three-year contract. They could also mix in half-days or add duties outside the classroom inside their contracts.

However, since its introduction in the Statehouse, the bill has faced opposition from some education lobbying arms such as the Idaho Education Association — the state's teachers union — as well as the Idaho School Board Association and Idaho Association of School Administrators. They warn that the legislation will create two classes of public school teachers.

Officials warned during the bill's legislative hearing that teachers in charter schools will be at risk of getting roped into contracts that do not guarantee their rights as protected in the standard language overseen by the superintendent's office.

"I believe this bill will make it harder to recruit and retain teachers," said Sen. Janie Ward-Engelking, D-Boise.

Ward-Engelking argued that the state has made a commitment to not only increase teacher pay, but to also find ways make moving to Idaho more attractive for teachers. If this bill passes, she said, it'll make that effort even more challenging because charter schools may be seen as a sub-par position compared to public schools.

The bill, SB 1248, now moves to the House.

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