

Opinion Editorial
Sept. 9, 2014

Higher pay for Idaho teachers in the works

Idaho teachers should receive higher pay. In 2013, education stakeholders throughout Idaho, including teachers, administrators, state and local board members, and community and political leaders, were asked to take a comprehensive look at how to improve Idaho's education system. The Governor's Task Force for Improving Education worked for several months to bring forward 20 recommendations based on research, best practices and input from educators. Among those recommendations was a plan to increase pay for Idaho teachers to attract and retain great teachers.

In order to build support for what will be a \$200-\$250 million infusion of new money for public education, the Task Force unanimously agreed to recommend a career ladder compensation model tied to a framework of tiered licensure for accountability. While the recommendation was specific in many areas, additional work was needed to develop a plan for implementation.

A Career Ladder/Tiered Licensure Committee comprised of Task Force members as well as additional stakeholders began meeting in April of this year to complete this task. Nearly half the committee are teachers or former teachers, and the group includes representatives of every major educational stakeholder group in the state. The process has included consideration of best practices throughout the country, and all of the Committee's meetings have been open to the public. The group has engaged in meaningful discussions, and compromises have been made to address concerns on key issues.

There are currently 13 states, most of which rank ahead of Idaho in student achievement, using a tiered certification model for teachers. All of these models use some form of assessment of teacher performance.

Currently, Idaho districts are allocated funds, and teachers are compensated, primarily based on years of experience. In 2010, Idaho adopted the Charlotte Danielson Evaluation Framework to evaluate teachers after convening a group of teachers and administrators to study research and best practices including the highly regarded Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) study. Under a tiered licensure approach, teachers will be evaluated using the existing evaluation framework (by at least two observers proven to be proficient in evaluating teachers) and on state and local district assessments of student achievement.

Upon implementation of the tiered certification program, all certificated teachers will receive continuing Professional Certificates and increased salaries under the career ladder plan. In addition, outstanding teachers will have the opportunity to be recognized with a master teacher designation resulting in enhanced pay. New teacher candidates will also receive increased pay but will be given residency certificates with increased training and mentoring with an opportunity over three years to qualify for a Professional Certificate.

There has been a fair amount of misinformation communicated regarding the Committee's recommendations, including that a Professional Certificate can be revoked under tiered licensure. To be clear, this is not the case. Once a teacher receives a Professional Certificate, it cannot be revoked by an administrator, a district or the state, except under the current system of due process in place through the state's Professional Standards Commission. In addition, assessment of student achievement will be determined primarily at the district level rather than solely by use of the current statewide Smarter Balanced Assessment. We encourage all stakeholders to examine the Committee's recommendations carefully. More information about these plans is available at www.boardofed.idaho.gov.

The career ladder to increase compensation is the next piece of the plan, and the Committee is continuing to work on the phase-in for higher salaries. We expect to have details finalized before the legislative session begins in January. Both pieces -- tiered certification and the career ladder -- remain essential to achieving the goal of attracting and retaining great teachers.

These implementation plans are critical steps to improving our education system. Idaho teachers and students deserve progress and improvement not status quo. We believe this is the best opportunity we will have in the foreseeable future to significantly increase pay for Idaho's teachers.

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