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States Move To Improve Teacher Pool

*Measures Aim To Lift
Supply and Quality*

By Bess Keller

After producing a bumper crop of laws aimed at upping the quantity and quality of teachers for the public schools in 1999, state legislators seem headed for a similar harvest this year.

With most legislatures adjourned for 2000 and others near the end of their sessions, the state law books already include some 70 new measures affecting teachers, touching everything from scholarships and performance bonuses to tougher rules for getting a license and keeping a job.

One reason for the attention is policymakers' concern about teacher shortages, especially for certain subject areas and in certain locales.

"We're seeing a lot more bills addressing teacher recruitment, even compared with last year," said Shelby Samuelson, a research analyst with the National Conference of State Legislatures in Denver. She added that legislators are searching across the country for programs likely to bring more people into classroom jobs without lowering the caliber of the teaching corps.

But many policymakers say it's not enough to preserve the current level of quality. The drive for higher student achievement puts greater demands on teachers, too many of whom are ill-equipped to do the job, they say.

New State of Urgency

The worry is not new, but in the past few years, lawmakers have brought greater urgency to tackling the problem as they raised the ante for districts, schools, and students in the struggle for better results.

"There's concern we have not ratcheted up the standards for teachers [as] we talked about in the '80s," said Lynn M. Cornett, the senior vice president of the

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New Laws Aim To Enhance Teacher Quality and Quantity

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Southern Regional Education Board in Atlanta. "I think the frustration was bubbling beneath the surface in the '90s, and now it's bubbling up."

Many states are trying to solve or avert teacher shortages by providing training subsidies or raising pay, especially for teachers who will work in subject areas or districts that are going short-handed.

Probably the nation's most extensive set of state teacher-recruitment incentives so far this year emerged from the New York legislature, which despite party differences rallied around a \$25 million "Teachers of Tomorrow" package that was proposed by Gov. George E. Pataki in January.

A central thrust of the plan by the Republican governor was to address the demand for more teacher power in troubled schools, as well as to meet a more general need for more teachers.

The package will provide college scholarships of up to \$3,400 a year for aspiring teachers who agree to teach in a geographic or subject area with shortages after completing their training; help with tuition or other expenses for teachers working toward full certification; and bonuses of up to \$30,000 over three years for teachers who are certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and who work in state-designated low-performing schools.

It also provides money for the state's five big-city districts to hire college interns to help out in classrooms over the summer, where they might discover a calling to teach.

The package was supported vigorously by the state's largest teachers' union, which released two polls showing that the teacher shortage in New York state would be larger and hit schools sooner than expected.

"It showed certain incentives could make a dramatic difference," both among prospective teachers and those old enough to retire, said Linda A. Rosenblatt, the spokeswoman for New York State United Teachers, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers.

Going for the Gold

Elsewhere, across-the-board teacher raises remained popular in legislatures this year, especially with many state economies thriving.

Oklahoma boosted its teacher salaries this year by \$3,000 per teacher, the same amount that neighboring Texas pledged for its teachers the year before. Most California districts are also likely to raise salaries, thanks to a proposed \$1.2 billion infusion of state aid. And a half-dozen states in the South, where teacher salaries have historically lagged behind the rest of the nation, plan to raise pay, including Alabama, Florida,

Georgia, Mississippi, and Virginia.

Even in cash-strapped Louisiana, lawmakers last week approved a plan advanced by Gov. Mike Foster, a Republican, that is designed to provide \$400 million more for teacher pay statewide. The plan calls for seeking voter approval in the fall for a proposed constitutional amendment that would restructure the state income tax.

Some of the laws enacted this year reflect a growing interest

standards. They will fashion a test and standards that will reflect more than the need for basic skills."

About 15 other states have such boards, which many educators see as a crucial step in fostering teacher professionalism.

Idaho this year enacted a new law requiring districts to provide comprehensive help for new teachers, including three years of mentoring by experienced colleagues, peer assistance, and targeted professional development. In exchange for that support, which will cost the state \$2 million in aid to districts, teachers agreed to give up some employment protections in their first two years.

Also in the package is an increase in overall state aid, which comes with a recommendation from the state superintendent to raise beginning teachers' salaries to a minimum of \$22,000 a year. "The former law said the districts had to offer administrative support to new teachers, but this new law offers a clearly defined program," said Robin Nettinga, the president of the Idaho Education Association, an affiliate of the National Education Association.

The union leader said that both the pay increase and the induction program, which is intended to reduce turnover, respond to a growing teacher shortage in her state. "I heard a lot more discussion about shortages in the legislature than I've heard in the last several years," she added.

Like many other states, Idaho has assembled a broad-based group on teacher quality that is expected to formulate recommendations for policymakers soon.

Politically Tricky

While a growing number of teacher groups are willing to accept more-stringent accountability measures, tying student performance to teacher evaluations remains a politically delicate maneuver. It's one that Delaware accomplished this session, but only after the effort failed the previous year amid intense wrangling.

The measure may be the first of its kind for a state, but about a dozen states now reward teachers for improved achievement at their schools.

This year, Florida lawmakers approved such a measure for teachers in low-performing schools in their state, and the Georgia legislature passed a broad accountability bill that will provide bonuses to teachers at any school receiving an A or B under the new state's new grading system. In California, lawmakers are likely to go along with Gov. Gray Davis' proposal for one-time "prosperity bonuses" in the coming school year for teachers in every public school making significant test-score gains.

Under Delaware's law, a new professional-standards board will design a review system in which students' test-score improvement counts for at least 20 percent of

teachers' and administrators' evaluations. But in a compromise that teachers said was crucial for fairness, the reviews can also take into account such factors as a student's attendance and disciplinary record, as well as parent involvement. (See *Education Week*, May 3, 2000.)

The legislation also requires ongoing training for teachers to keep their licenses.

Proponents of the bill said it was the logical next step after setting standards and instituting accountability for schools, districts, and students. In fact, said Peg Bradley, the education aide to Gov. Thomas R. Carper, a Democrat, parents and students made it plain in hearings last fall that they were unwilling to pay the price of new state tests unless teachers shared the consequences for failure.

As a result, the bill also postpones for two years the requirement that younger students pass state tests in grades 3, 5, and 8 for promotion to the next grade, as well as one that high school students pass state tests before graduating. By the time the first test-driven promotion decisions are made, the teacher-evaluation system should be in place.

In Kentucky, where a decade-

sional development focused on middle schools, a trouble spot for student achievement in Kentucky and around the country.

Mr. Moberly, a Democrat, vowed to keep working on the issue. "We've adjusted our education reform in several different directions," he said. "I think it's teacher quality that most needs addressing now."

Legislators in at least nine states in addition to Kentucky took action this session on matters related to professional development, licensing, and evaluation. But few of their actions resulted in anything like a sea change.

For instance, at least two states this year eased restrictions on who can enter teaching. Utah passed a law letting unlicensed teachers of "outstanding qualifications" be hired, while Florida will provide an alternative certification program for people with specific subject-area expertise.

Three states, meanwhile, tightened preparation requirements for teachers in reading, mathematics, or technology at some or all levels. A new Virginia law will require that elementary teachers get at least three hours a week for planning, and South Carolina's governor wants five more days in teachers' contracts for professional development.

Certification Encouraged

The single most popular action among legislators this year was probably to provide financial incentives for teachers to win certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. At least five states approved such rewards for the first time, joining the 24 that already provide extra money to encourage teachers to seek the voluntary certification of their expertise.

Some critics, however, say such moves may miss the mark. Dale Ballou, an economist at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst who has studied the teacher market, argues that the extra money might be better spent on higher salaries and more support for teachers early in their careers.

"We don't have a lot of other options for rewarding teachers, and it may be a useful form of professional development," he said of national certification. "But it's unproven as a tool for raising student achievement, so it might be better to hold off."

Others see states' encouragement of the board credential as a useful step toward creating systems that genuinely elevate standards for teachers.

"To really increase student achievement will require some very different approaches, which are not the status quo," said Barnett Berry, who directs the state partnership effort for the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future. "For legislatures to take the next steps, the public is going to have to demand a lot more from them."

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Rep. Dave Quall
Washington House of Representatives

among legislators in having teachers trade in some of the job security they have won during decades of union activity. In exchange, they were offered better tools, greater autonomy, higher salaries, and other rewards—all in the interest of promoting more effective teaching. Prospective teachers are often the first targets of such changes, in part because they lack union protection.

Washington state, for example, enacted its first statewide new-teacher exam this March, joining 41 other states that use tests to help determine who goes into the classroom. The law requires prospective teachers to pass a basic-skills exam before enrolling in a state teacher-training program and a subject-matter test before receiving a license.

But to some legislators and educators, the new tests in Washington state are less important than the professional-standards board that was part of the package. Over the objections of the state school boards' association, which fought with Democratic Gov. Gary Locke and the state schools superintendent on the issue, the teacher-dominated board will control the tests and perhaps eventually direct the state's licensing efforts.

"I just never was that enthusiastic about the test," said Rep. Dave Quall, a Democrat who is the co-chairman of the House education committee. "But you put the profession in the hands of the educators, and they will raise the

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old reform effort is widely perceived to have altered many aspects of schooling for the good, a broad teacher-quality measure crumbled this spring after teachers' unions in the state lambasted it. (See *Education Week*, April 5, 2000.)

At least half the important provisions were not passed, including one that would have required middle school teachers to show preparation in academic-content areas and another that would have allowed teachers to be paid more because of subject area or location, said Rep. Harry Moberly Jr., the leading backer of the teacher bill in the Kentucky House. The bill in its final form did pay for additional profes-