

45. The New York Times

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Facing Storm, Regents Alter Teacher Plan

By SOMINI SENGUPTA

Facing fierce opposition from the powerful teachers union, the State Board of Regents has backed away from a proposal that would have ended lifetime licenses for new teachers in New York. Instead, the board is considering a requirement that all teachers pass performance reviews every five years or face dismissal.

The Regents, who set state education policy, amended their earlier proposal after state lawyers advised them that the change would require legislative approval. And because the teachers' union, with its 380,000 members, has so much clout in Albany, passage of the measure was considered "unlikely in this climate," said Robert M. Johnson, the former Newsday publisher who is co-chairman of the Regents' task force on teaching.

Mr. Johnson said the latest proposal, to be presented at the Regents meeting today in Albany and voted on next March, "avoided a potential roadblock across the way in the Legislature." The new measure requires a majority vote of the 16-member Board of Regents.

In addition, the Regents propose to tighten standards for the state's teaching colleges by requiring them to earn national accreditation. State education officials said they would require that teacher-training programs be accredited by either the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, a nonprofit agency in Washington, or another agency approved by the department. Five of the state's 112 colleges and universities that offer teacher training are currently accredited by the National Council.

Most of the other teacher-training programs have accreditation by the State Education Department. Mr. Johnson and others say, however, that the state is no longer able to adequately oversee the

quality of the programs because of budget cuts to the department's division of higher education.

Teachers union officials said they were pleased with the Regents' revisions. "We don't believe it's logistically or financially feasible for the state to supervise the continuing competency of teachers," said Linda Rosenblatt, a spokeswoman for the New York State United Teachers. "They are calling for standards, and that is logical. Let the district develop a plan on how to reach the standards."

But the plan drew fierce criticism from the president of the New York State School Boards Association, Louis Grumet, who accused the Regents of bowing to pressure from the union. "In this week, when they've made it much tougher for kids to graduate, which we support, they've taken out any serious attempt to make sure every teacher can teach to these standards," Mr. Grumet said, referring to new graduation requirements being considered by the Regents. "They totally caved."

Education officials dispute this, saying they scaled back the proposal because it might run counter to laws about dismissing teachers.

Under state law, a teacher can be dismissed only if found to be incompetent. In the 1995-96 school year, the latest for which statistics were available, school officials sought to dismiss 156 teachers, and 24 were found to be incompetent, according to a department spokesman, Alan Ray.

The law requires school districts to conduct annual evaluations of all teachers, but state education officials say the reviews are not particularly rigorous.

Under the state's latest proposal, which would take effect in 1999, a team of evaluators, including a school administrator and outside experts, would

observe teachers and review a portfolio of their work. A teacher who did not measure up to the review would be offered remedial help and re-evaluated in a year. A teacher who failed again would be subject to dismissal procedures. If the teacher was found to be incompetent, the State Education Commissioner could take away the teacher's license.

New York is among a handful of states that still issue lifetime licenses. Most states require teachers to renew their teaching certificates every few years by taking college courses or professional development seminars, according to the Education Commission of the States.

Several states require a performance evaluation, such as the one that the Regents have proposed. "It doesn't sound like New York is pushing any envelope," said Kathy Christie, a spokeswoman for the commission.

Three other states — Arkansas, North Carolina and West Virginia — require teacher-training programs to be accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, according to the agency's president, Arthur E. Wise. The agency examines factors like the use of full-time faculty versus adjunct professors, the rates at which students pass the state teacher certification exams and students' mastery of the subjects they are to teach. Some City University of New York campuses, where many students fail the state exams, would be hard pressed to meet some of the accreditation standards.

Many college presidents object to national accreditation because, they say, it imposes rigid requirements on everything from faculty qualifications to the supervision of student-teachers. About 500 of the country's 1,300 teacher-training programs have accreditation through the National Council. ■

exams, the school would get a limited time to improve before possibly losing its accreditation, said task force co-chairman Robert Johnson, a regent from Long Island. "Some of the CUNY schools are very vulnerable in that regard," Johnson said.

Cumulatively, CUNY college graduates have the lowest pass rate, according to state Education Department data. Last year, 64% of the students taking one key exam, the Liberal Arts and Science Test, passed, compared with

95% of SUNY students and 87% of students at independent colleges.

Under the new proposal, teachers would start their careers with a one-year internship. All teachers would be reviewed every five years by two "exemplary" teachers and a principal selected from outside the school. If rated unsatisfactory, the teacher would have a year to improve or face dismissal.

The task force backed off a proposal made by Education Commissioner Richard Mills to require recertification

every five years, fearing such a move would run afoul of the state's tenure law, Johnson said.

United Federation of Teachers spokeswoman Susan Amlung said, "As long as it's not being viewed as a back door to get rid of tenure, which it doesn't look like it is, we'd love to work on getting it implemented."

The recommendations will be discussed at hearings around the state this year before the full Board of Regents votes on them in March. ■

58. New York Post

November 14, 1997 Category: Local

COMMISH: TEST TEACHERS EVERY 5 YEARS

By GREGG BIRNBAUM

ALBANY - Teachers should be forced to take a tough test every five years to keep their licenses, the state's education boss proposed yesterday.

The idea immediately drew howls of outrage from the state's powerful teachers union.

Trying to make sure teachers stay sharp throughout their careers, state Education Commissioner Richard Mills said all teachers should be regularly evaluated by a three-member panel comprising two teachers from outside the school and one administrator.

The panel would watch the teacher in action, conduct an interview and review materials being used in the classroom.

Teachers who flunk would have to improve their skills - in as-yet-unspecified ways - or face loss of their teaching license or their jobs, even if they have tenure.

"We want to make sure we put a capable, well-prepared teacher in every classroom and keep them there," Mills told The Post.

Mills' plan also would raise the number of exams required for candidates to get their initial license, and require more teaching experience, additional tests and mandatory enrollment in professional development programs to get and keep an advanced teaching certificate.

If approved, Mills' proposal would take effect for the school year starting in 1999.

Under current policy, teachers are subject to yearly reviews and a three-year tenure period, but can retain the "valid-for-life" license without having their job performance evaluated or proving continuing competence.

"In effect, a license to teach in New York state's public schools is now virtually permanent and unalterable," a state education report said.

The powerful United Federation of Teachers opposes Mills' plan, calling it a political attack on tenure.

"The whole concept of relicensing teachers every few years ... really started

as attacks on tenure by people who don't understand what tenure is," UFT President Sandra Feldman has said.

J.D. LaRock, a spokesman for city Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew, called the proposal "worthwhile," but said Crew had not had time to study it.

Mills also said he wants all schools with teacher-education programs - there are more than 100 statewide - to be accredited by 2003.

If at least 85 percent of teacher candidates graduating from a teaching school did not pass certification tests, the education program could be stripped of its accreditation.

The Board of Regents plans to vote on Mills' proposals in March, after a series of public hearings across the state.

Mills also proposed:

Teachers who work for three years in "hard-to-staff" schools get a financial bonus and loans forgiven.

Fingerprinting teacher candidates to check for past felony convictions and bar them if they have a conviction. ■

59. Associated Press

11-14 1:48a Category: Local

OEA submits school funding plan, lawmakers meeting on issue

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) - The Ohio Education Association has submitted its school funding plan to legislative leaders, who are trying to develop a plan to pay for primary and secondary education before Jan. 15.

The Ohio Supreme Court has ordered lawmakers to come up with a new school funding plan by March 24.

Majority Republicans have set a Jan. 15 deadline for passing the fiscal 1999 appropriation breakdown for education. If a tax increase or any constitutional

change is involved, lawmakers have until Feb. 4 to get it on the May ballot.

House Speaker Jo Ann Davidson; Senate President Richard H. Finan, R-Cincinnati; Senate Minority Leader Ben Espy, D-Columbus; and House Minority Leader Ross Boggs Jr.,