

## **Tests for teachers on hold as funds sought**

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The controversial on-again, off-again performance test for teachers is off again, for now, but when it's on again, at least teachers may not have to shell out \$400 for it.

Teachers who earned temporary teaching certificates on or after June 1 were required to take the exam but have been given a reprieve as the state Board of Education and state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne ask the Legislature to pick up the \$400-per-teacher cost, which the prospective teachers had been expected to pay. The exam is designed to create better teachers and lead to higher student performance, experts say.

However, critics argue that it could discourage teachers from staying in the profession because they already face lower pay in Arizona and must meet many requirements in the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

"The hope is that it will provide some assurance that our continuing teachers are quality individuals, and ultimately the hope is to improve student learning," said Vince Yanez, the state board's executive director.

It is impossible to know exactly how many teachers will decide to take the test when it is eventually given, but the Arizona Department of Education estimates there could be as many as 5,000 in the first batch.

Current certified teachers won't be affected, but anyone applying for their temporary teaching certificate once the test goes into effect would have to pass it after teaching for a few years if they wanted to stay in Arizona.

The test has been controversial because it will include a 15- to 20-minute videotape of the teacher's classroom work and a written portfolio reflecting his or her work, said Jan Amator of the Arizona Department of Education.

Two evaluators who teach in the same subject area or grade level will evaluate the tapes and portfolios.

"It seems like for a state that is so short on finding teachers they are making it more and more difficult every year to have school districts hire teachers to teach the Valley students," said Michael DiGirolamo, 21, an Arizona State University education major who plans to graduate in May. But, he added, "in education, right now, we're in the age of accountability."

ASU education major Theresa Procaccini, 32, who also plans to graduate in May, said she is concerned that the test is costly and will be time-consuming, but she understands why the state is doing it.

"We just learned about this; we were all kind of shocked," Procaccini said.

"I realize because of No Child Left Behind we really have to prove we are highly qualified teachers."

John Wright, president of the Arizona Education Association, said the association backs the performance test and thinks having the state pay for it would be a "demonstration of state support for teaching excellence."

How it works

Historically, Arizona teachers have earned their permanent license just by surviving two years in a classroom.

For nearly 10 years, state officials have talked about using a performance test to determine whether teachers should earn their permanent certification, Amator said.

The push took on new urgency about two years ago, when Education Week gave Arizona a grade of "D-" on its attempts to improve teacher quality, embarrassing state officials. That prompted Horne and a panel from the Arizona Education Association, school administrators, universities and others to find a new test, said Amator, a deputy associate superintendent.

In June 2005, the state board approved using the performance test.

And although some would rather there not be a test, others are tired of the fits and starts.

"It's been very frustrating to the districts that the state continues to say that this is going to happen and then (it) does not," said Janet Seegren, an assistant superintendent in the Tempe Union High School District.

Tying a teacher's work to his or her certification is not a bad idea, but it comes at a bad time because the state has a teacher shortage and teachers are already burdened with many federal and state requirements, she said.

Seegren fears it could discourage teachers in other states from moving to Arizona.

Other states' success

Arizona is not the only state to consider a performance test for teachers.

Connecticut has seen teacher turnover decrease and student achievement increase since it started a similar certification test, including videotaping and a portfolio about 10 years ago, Connecticut education officials said.

Teachers at the end of their second year teaching there must submit a portfolio and videos of their work that are then judged by peer teachers, said Larry Jacobson of Connecticut's Department of Education.

"I really do hope Arizona is able to effectively implement a program," Jacobson said. "It's really a critical time in education."

In New Mexico, teachers put together portfolios that can include videotapes to move up the second tier in a certification system.

If they move up, they earn at least \$40,000 in their school districts, said Mary Rose Cdebaca of that state's Public Education Department. The state is still analyzing the evaluation, but Cdebaca said it looks like the number of teachers applying for national board certification or earning master's degrees has risen since the evaluation started three years ago.

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