

Testing competency of teachers eyed in Ohio

By SANDY LITTLE
Journal Education Writer

Reaction is mixed to news that a state group is studying the possibility of starting a formal program to test the competency of persons entering the teaching profession — perhaps in the mid-1980s.

Ideas on testing teachers already in a job, renewing certification and requirements for continuing education are "not completely thought through," according to Ohio's assistant superintendent of public instruction, Roger Lulow.

Lulow said an Advisory Commission for Teacher Education and Certification has been directed by Franklin Walter, state superintendent, to study teacher competency tests.

The commission is "primarily looking at measuring levels of knowledge about subject matter, as well as the ability to communicate in a written and oral manner," Lulow said. He conceded it's "difficult to determine what personal qualities a person needs to be a good teacher," a complaint voiced by some testing critics.

Lulow said the commission will look at allowing potential teachers to retake the tests if they don't do well initially. In that way, the testing would be similar to that done in the legal and medical professions, he said.

ONE MAJOR reason behind the interest in teacher competency tests is a "need to communicate to the public that teachers are skilled in the areas they teach. There have been lots of questions raised about competency," Lulow said.

Lulow said the tests could "assure that teachers do have the skills" and secondly, "let the public know the profession itself is concerned about this."

Lulow said Walter's ideas "are not intended to be negative toward colleges and universities' efforts" to give future teachers the right education.

"His (Walter's) concerns relate in large part to the difficulty of attracting teachers to the profession" instead of other jobs whose "salaries have risen more rapidly," Lulow continued.

"It's something that could give the schools and teachers personally more status and more respectability" since in some public views, the traditional high regard for teachers and teaching has diminished, he continued.

LULOW SAID reaction he's heard to the tests "has generally been positive from the public and from teachers, with the only reservation being to make sure the tests are fair and accurate."

However, there are others locally who have misgivings about the concept.

Everhart, superintendent of the Franklin school system, maintains competency testing "doesn't do anything about quality. Teachers are not made. They're born. A competency test will not tell you that."

Everhart continued, "You have a minimum standard. People reach that standard. I don't think you'd see many

people being taken out of teaching because of the design of that test. Who wouldn't pass?"

Although he said he personally has no qualms about educators being required to pass examinations, he maintains "if we don't have competent teachers, perhaps we should redesign our requirements" for certification. There already is a group established to take care of certification requirements, he said.

Echoing Everhart's remarks about the inadequacies of competency tests was Gladys Vanderpool, president of the Franklin Education Association.

"Many people test out competently," she told The Journal. They "But that doesn't always mean have the skills and ability to relate to children or that they know how to understand and accept children on different levels.

"There's a whole process you have to consider before you go into that," Mrs. Vanderpool said.

Paul Kuhn, superintendent of the Middletown School District, said testing teachers after college would be "totally ineffective for the simple fact that you have very few new teachers being hired. So, the effect on the educational process would be almost negligible."

Kuhn said he's also "concerned" because "you may have a teacher who may not have been a straight-A student, but who has a lot of common sense" — something that's just as important in teaching.

Evaluations of teachers already in a job "could be beefed up" through "more frequent visits to the classroom and more follow on what's taking place in the classroom," Kuhn said.

Other area superintendents and presidents of teacher organizations contacted by The Journal declined to comment on teacher competency testing, saying they weren't familiar with the topic.

At least two superintendents conceded the subject is controversial.

WHERE DO national teacher groups stand on the issue?

The National Education Association has been quoted as opposing testing as a condition of certification or continued employment. It cited technical reservations about standardized tests.

One NEA article recently suggested that states should demand that teacher training institutions provide more rigorous assessment procedures, better counseling and more field-based experience that offer professors of education a chance to observe prospective teachers in action.

The article conceded, however, that many institutions lack the finances to do a better job.

NEA also opposes a push by some school districts to require teachers already on the payroll to take a written test to prove their skills in spelling, grammar, writing and math. The American Federation of Teachers has opposed the testing of employed teachers, but is in support of "certification tests.

"It won't tell you if a person is going to be a good teacher," AFT President Albert Shanker said, "but it will tell you pretty quickly if they're illiterate."

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U.T.L.A. Ms. Solkovits pointed out that only 31 of the district's more than 28,000 teachers had been accused of any wrongdoing.

The union president added that she believed the colleges had done "everything they can to investigate," and that they had been cleared. Mr. Bennett, however, maintained that the colleges "should know what's going on."

The Los Angeles school district, under the terms of its contract with the U.T.L.A., recognizes only credits from accredited institutions, according to Robert deVries, director of staff development.

The two colleges in question are accredited by their regional associations—California Lutheran by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Ottawa by the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges. Neither college is accredited by N.C.A.T.E.

The Los Angeles district expects 15 "contact" hours—hours actually spent in class—plus another 30 hours in outside preparation for each credit, Mr. deVries said. The standards of the Western Association call for the same amount of time spent in studies.

"Sometimes we suspect something is wrong and check it out," Mr. deVries said, but not in these instances. "We assume the accredited schools follow the policy of the Western Association."

In 1979, that association estab-

lished as its policy that member colleges are responsible for all activities leading to credit, said Ralph Wolff, associate executive director of the Western Association. Colleges may contract with non-accredited organizations for facilities or support services, but instruction in off-campus courses "has to be done by a staff member," Mr. Wolff said. "I think this will solve the problem."

A spokesman for the North Central Association declined to comment.

Mr. Gubser, of N.C.A.T.E., said the incident demonstrates the need for national accreditation of continuing-education programs for teachers, and for stricter state and local requirements of accountability.

"The sad plight of these teachers becomes even more tragic when you consider that had they only been aware of the professional reputation of these institutions, they might have avoided the situation," he said.

"It could have happened anywhere," he added. "There are probably not 10 states where there is sufficient legislation or policies governing extension programs or credit where this couldn't have occurred."

"Through national accreditation, such professional associations as the N.E.A. [National Education Association] maintain a review process that could have provided these teachers with information that would have protected them from just

such a situation as that in which they are now caught, or it could have provided a complaint-review process that would have given them some recourse had the institutions been nationally accredited, which they are not," Mr. Gubser said.

"The kids need to be protected in those schools, even if it's the courts that have to do it. If the public isn't willing to let the profession do it, kids need to be protected no matter who does it."

"The point that I'm trying to get at is that there will be a tendency once again to damn teachers when in fact the teaching profession has established machinery to try to keep this kind of thing from happening," he said.

However, spokesmen for the N.E.A. said the association has no specific policy on accreditation of continuing-education courses for teachers, although the group strongly advocates N.C.A.T.E. accreditation of pre-service teacher-preparation programs. The spokesmen declined further comment until more about the Los Angeles incident is known.

Nor does the American Federation of Teachers have any formal standards for continuing education, according to Scott Widmeyer, a union spokesman.

"We encourage teachers to enhance their education," Mr. Widmeyer said. "Anything they can carry back and use in the classroom, we

endorse. But when it comes to an individual basis like this, and taking Mickey Mouse courses that do help in the classroom, we certainly don't endorse that."

The U.T.L.A. is the only local teachers' union in the country that is affiliated with both N.E.A. and A.F.T.

Correspondent George Neill contributed to this report.

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Union wins 10 seats on I.U. council

STAR STATE REPORT

Bloomington, Ind. — The American Federation of Teachers, a faculty organization which supports collective bargaining, has landed 10 spots on Indiana University's Faculty Council.

Election results for 20 seats on the council, an advisory body to the university administration, were announced Monday. The AFT now has a total of 13 council members.

Hal Pepinsky, AFT president and one of the 10 elected, said, "I think it was a pretty good outcome" considering it was the first effort by the group to land a sizable number of council seats.

THE AFT SUPPORTS a strong faculty governance role but was unsuccessful in bringing collective bargaining to I.U. last year when the I.U. Board of Trustees voted against the idea.

"Of course, this is no substitute for collective bargaining," Pepinsky said. "But the AFT has always been for strengthening existing (faculty) mechanisms."

The AFT had sponsored a slate of 17 candidates for the council election.

Pepinsky has said electing more AFT members to the council "can serve as a catalyst for making faculty government more organized."

HE HAS CRITICIZED the council for its rambling meetings and lack of quick action.

The AFT represents 140 faculty members on the Bloomington campus, which has 1,432 faculty and librarians.

Last week, the AFT gained further recognition when I.U. administrators agreed to allow payroll deductions to pay faculty membership dues for the AFT and the American Association of University Professors, which represents about 300 of the faculty.

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Professors meet to study impact of UC budget cuts

By MIKE CIRAOLO
STAFF WRITER

UC Berkeley professors and members of the American Federation of Teachers will meet today to discuss the impact of budget cuts on students, faculty and staff of the university.

Today's meeting represents the first attempt of any faculty organization to assess priorities for cuts in UC staff and programs, said organizers of the forum.

"There's concern from young faculty members and those working in creative programs, as well as from non-Academic Senate faculty (lecturers), for how their programs, positions, and security of employment may be disrupted," said Jeff Lustig, an organizer with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

Today's forum, to be held in 70 Evans at 4 p.m., will feature Sacramento lobbyist Mary Bergen,

representative for the California Federation of Teachers, who will discuss attitudes in the state capital about budget cuts, said Lustig.

Biochemistry professor Joseph Neilands, president of AFT Local 1474, said, "Students are being called upon to pay higher fees, yet here (in the Biochemistry Building) the number of custodians has been cut from five to two, and we are required to teach more."

There are no Academic Senate faculty or non-senate faculty involved in determining how the burdens of budget cuts will be borne, said Neilands. Members of the Academic Senate include professors, whereas lecturers and teaching assistants are not in the Academic Senate.

In addition to discussing where cuts will be made, AFT representatives will examine how budget cuts will affect the UC systemwide administration and how to respond to cuts.

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