

teacher's turn for testing

By Fred Schecker

The Star's education writer

When reports of high school graduates unable to read street signs or make correct change began making headlines in recent years, tests of student competency suddenly became fashionable.

Now, demands for proof of skill are moving to the front of the classroom.

The question is no longer simply, "Can Johnny read?" It's also, "Can Teacher teach?"

"It may be the result of the public's clamor for accountability," said R.V. Wilson, director of teacher education and certification at the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. "We're aware there are some teachers out there who shouldn't be teaching."

Support for more teacher testing in the basics, such as English and math, however, is by no means unanimous.

"There are problems in education, so people believe that someone must be to blame. They're trying to find a scapegoat," said Dr. Wesley J. Sandness, dean of Pittsburg State University's School of Education in Pittsburg, Kan. "Teachers are not that incompetent at all."

Nevertheless, more state legislatures and teacher training institutions are looking at or implementing teacher competency tests.

In Missouri the Educational Conference, made up mainly of deans and presidents of state universities, is discussing a requirement that applicants to their schools of education pass a competency test before admittance.

The next two years will be used to gather data on cutoff scores, Wilson said, adding that the program could be implemented by 1983.

Such a move would follow on the heels of another state decision to implement a minimum grade point average of 2.5 for teachers effective Sept. 1, 1982. That grade point average would be roughly a C-plus.

"This is all part of a big package of things we have done here," Wilson said. "We have revised many certification requirements and are considering new guidelines for certification in administrative, special education and some vocational education areas."

"We're setting up checkpoints to eliminate as many teachers as possible who are not proficient," he continued. "We in Missouri feel it is time to make sure that teachers are proficient in the basics."

The Kansas Legislature is considering several bills on teacher competency, one of which would require examination of all new public school teachers for certification.

In addition, many of the state's school districts have approved or are planning similar projects.

Officials at Pittsburg State recently announced they planned to implement a competency testing program in the fall of 1982 for students seeking admittance to the School of Education.

Under the program, students, who normally apply for admittance to the school late in their second or early in their third year of college, will be examined for knowledge of English and math. The program is being tested this spring with 150 students.

Such testing at the university, however, is not in response to the fears about inadequate teachers, Sandness said.

Interest in competency testing is based on the false assumption that students are not as smart as they used to be, he said, which is an assumption growing out of reports of declines in secondary school students' test scores.

Average test scores have dipped, not because of a decline in quality of teachers, but because more marginal students are in high school than in the past, Sandness argued. In addition, he said, current tests are designed to measure computational skills rather than focusing on problem solving abilities stressed in schools.

"I think that teachers are faced with a whole series of dilemmas," Sandness said. "There is the problem of a proliferating curriculum and a number of new subjects, which the teacher must teach; there is the problem of special programs, which have divided the attention of children; and there is the problem of mainstreaming, which has required the teaching of gifted children and those of less ability in the same classroom."

Competency testing should be used only to determine whether college students have basic skills, Sandness said. If the test is expanded to determine their grasp of concepts or philosophies of education, institutions will start training for the test, and curricula will suffer, he argued.

Teacher training methods have changed in recent years. The University of Kansas now requires five years rather than four for an education degree, in order to increase the number of basic skills courses future teachers must take and the time they spend teaching as interns.

Dr. Eugene E. Eubanks, dean of the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Education, said the greatest change in teacher training at his school has been the increased practical experience with children, before intern teaching even begins.

How public schools select their teachers, however, has changed very little. Local school officials still report a reliance on the applicant's college record, certification and a series of interviews. Area schools report that roughly 5 percent of the teachers hired with this method do not work out.

In the Kansas City district, teachers are probationary employees under evaluation for the first 10 weeks before being offered a contract, said James Feldstein, personnel director. The focus of the evaluation has shifted, however, from whether the teacher has a plan book to whether the teacher's students are interested and learning, he said.

unity or requiring its own teacher tests, but has been discouraged by the extensive federal regulations, Feldstein said.

Many local officials believe competency testing for teachers belongs at the state level.

"We'll really get into a mess if every district sets up their own program," Donald E. Darnell, director of personnel services for the Kansas City, Kansas, district, said. He added that surveys of "personal characteristics, such as the desire to teach and liking children" might be more important.

Dr. Arzell Ball, superintendent for the Shawnee Mission district, said many of the learning problems some children are having are "not the teacher's fault."

"There are so many things that interfere with learning—children not getting the right amount of sleep or nutrition," he said, adding that the concept of teacher testing is not being ignored.

Norman Hudson, president of the Kansas City American Federation of Teachers, Local 691, said he was not opposed to teacher and administrator testing, but believed it was being administered at the wrong level.

"I have no trouble with giving competency tests to college professors who are supposed to teach education," he said. "It will weed out the bad ones."

"It all starts in the colleges which have watered down their curriculum," Hudson added. "They're divorced from realities in the schools and, as a consequence, some poor teacher comes out believing he or she's competent and isn't."

Boy charged in teacher's death

NEW YORK (AP) — A 16-year-old student at Brooklyn's Bushwick High School has been charged with manslaughter in the death of a teacher who died after being hit while breaking up a fight between the youth and another student.

John Sette, 37, who died of multiple skull fractures March 19, is the first teacher ever to die "as a result of student violence," according to a spokesman for the United Federation of Teachers.

Police said they arrested the student, Anthony Davis, at his home yesterday. Witnesses had told police that Davis hit or shoved Sette during the fight, causing the teacher to bang his head against a wall "or some other fixed object."

The other student was not accused of striking Sette, and he was transferred to an alternative high school program for special attention without being charged.

Sette, a high school social studies teacher since 1965, had taught at Bushwick since 1969.

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BTU objects to change in evaluation

Teachers union seeking policy changes from Jackson County School Board

By Thad Martin

The president of the Baltimore Teachers Union has refused to agree to changes in teacher evaluation forms despite charges that the rating scale used in the forms would give mediocre teachers superior ratings.

Irene Dandridge, the union president, said the union "would resist any changes, because the forms were part of the union's negotiations with the [city school] board."

The forms are expected to be used for the first time later this month.

"We've done all the negotiating we're going to do on them," Mrs. Dandridge said.

Changes to the forms were first sought at a recent School Board meeting by Maurice Dorsey, the president of the Public School Administrators and Supervisors Association, the bargaining agent for school administrators.

Mr. Dorsey claimed that the rating scale of the new forms was "skewed too heavily to the right," and would give superior ratings to teachers whose performances were only mediocre.

The decision to use the new forms was "illegally arrived upon," Mr. Dorsey said, because a committee jointly appointed by the teachers' union and the School Board in 1979 to make recommendations for evaluating teachers did not come to an agreement.

"The board-appointed members of the committee of 10 were not consulted after the April meeting," he said, and

"therefore, had no input into the final development of the philosophy or forms."

The issue is overstated, Mrs. Dandridge said.

Administrators should "stop worrying about how teachers will come out during evaluation and stop trying to determine that in advance," she said.

"They're putting the cart before the horse. They have got to sit down without a predetermined notion in mind and evaluate each teacher on an individual basis."

On the issue of "skewness," David C. Daneker, board president, said in a written response to the administrators' group that the current evaluation forms are an "improvement" over previous forms. Any changes in the forms, he added, would have to be agreed to by the teachers union.

"Principals have not used the forms," Mrs. Dandridge said. "They don't know whether it works or not. . . . We negotiated an instrument. We would suggest they use it before they start making any changes."

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Chief

Harvey Holloway, president of the Jackson County American Federation of Teachers, who was not permitted to address the Jackson County School Board Monday night on two policy changes, said he may go to court to pursue at least one of the issues.

The union, through Holloway, is pushing for adoption of a measure which presents a grievance procedure for teachers, students and parents before the school board.

Another policy procedure the AFT is hoping to have revised, Holloway said, is the School Employment Procedure Law of 1977. This policy outlines procedures for any teacher whose contract is not renewed for the coming year.

Holloway wanted to discuss these points with the board Monday night, he said, but was not allowed to speak by Superintendent Jimmie Smithie.

The school board did not discuss either of these policies at the public meeting.

A math teacher at St. Martin High School, Holloway also contends he is being harrassed by the school district by being transferred to the junior high school next year.

Two other St. Martin teachers who are active in the AFT are also being harrassed, he claimed, since their contracts have not been renewed.

Holloway said he is in the process of obtaining legal counsel for these teachers, whose hearings on the non-renewal are set for April 20 and 21.

On the matter of going to court on the grievance policy, "this decision will be based on the clarification I get from Mr. Smithie," said Holloway.

"But since Mr. Smithie refuses to talk to me and all board members have been advised by their board attorney to not talk to me, then I will have to communicate with the board and the community through the media and daily newspapers," he said.

Smithie says the Jackson County AFT is not recognized by the school board and while teachers are welcome to talk

with the superintendent and school board as individuals, he will not speak to them as union representatives.

"He is not allowed to represent teachers," said Smithie. Holloway is not considered the teachers' representative, because the union is not recognized, he explained.

Smithie said as far as the policy changes are concerned, teachers may make appointments once a month with Administrative Assistant Max Walters to discuss any changes and Holloway is not following this procedure.

He also said that he is not personally responsible for Holloway's reassignment to the junior high. He said Attendance Center Principal Joe Barlow handled the matter.

"The superintendent makes the recommendations and it is up to the attendance center principal to see that the needs of the children are best served," said Smithie.

"Jimmy Smithie is not responsible for the reassignment," he said.

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