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Pilot Program To Test Merit Pay for Teachers

By Hailey Heinz / Journal Staff Writer on Tue, Oct 11, 2011



Through a voluntary program at four schools, Albuquerque Public Schools is making its first foray into so-called "merit pay" for teachers, or compensating them based partly on their students' success.

The controversial concept is a key component of Gov. Susana Martinez's education reform plan and is also championed by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

Teachers at Highland, Rio Grande and West Mesa high schools and Ernie Pyle Middle School will have the option to sign up for the program. Teachers will all receive their regular salaries, in addition to a stipend from the pilot program. There is not a clear range of how much money teachers will receive, since the program has a finite pool of money and it will depend on how many teachers sign up. The maximum a teacher could receive is \$7,500.

Richard Bowman, who is a fellow with the Harvard Strategic Data Project working with APS, helped design the model and said he wants to make sure it levels the playing field for teachers.

"I was a teacher, and I don't want to propose anything that I wouldn't have wanted to be evaluated under," Bowman said.

Albuquerque Teachers Federation President Ellen Bernstein worked with district officials to develop the program and is listed as a co-author of the plan.

The four schools have all been selected by the federal government as persistently low-performing and are recipients of School Improvements Grants, or SIGs. The SIG money will pay for the program.

At a policy committee meeting Monday, APS board members said it makes sense to be pro-active about reforming teacher evaluations, since the state and national momentum is headed that direction.

"We know this is where we're going," board member Kathy Korte said. "Being the largest district in the state, we ought to be spearheading this kind of work."

The board was generally supportive of the pilot program, which was brought before the policy committee Monday night for discussion. The program does not require a vote by the board.

APS and union officials will visit the four SIG schools in the next two weeks to provide teachers with details and take volunteers.

Teachers must volunteer by the end of next week. They will be expected to develop Student Learning Goals, which are designed to measure learning that falls outside the scope of a standardized test, but can still be measured based on other tests or on the work students produce. Teachers will develop learning goals for each of their classes. In addition, teachers in the pilot program will work in teams and will set team goals for their students.

Officials have developed two evaluation models: one for teachers whose subjects and grade levels are tested by the New Mexico Standards-Based Assessment, and another for those whose students don't take the SBA. The SBA is taken by students in grades 3-8 and 11. It tests math and reading, and in some grade levels it tests science or social studies.

Teachers whose students are tested will be evaluated based on a combination of achievement on their student learning goals, their team learning goals, observation by the principal, a student perception survey, the growth their students made on standardized tests, and the growth their entire school made on standardized tests.

Growth on standardized tests will be measured using a "value-added" model, which uses statistics to control for factors such as poverty, a student's prior test performance and a student's disciplinary history. The idea is to



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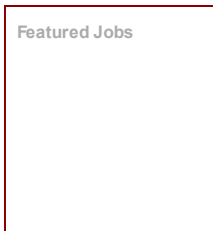
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for factors such as poverty, a student's prior test performance and a student's discipline history. The idea is to isolate the "value" a teacher adds to a student during the school year, holding other factors constant.

The value-added measure will not be limited to the SBA. Where appropriate, it will also incorporate other data, like the students' scores on the District Benchmark Assessment.

Teachers whose subjects are not tested, like art or music, will be evaluated using a similar model, except theirs will not include students' standardized test scores.

Board member Lorenzo Garcia expressed some reservations about the program. While still cautiously supporting it, he said he would like to see measures of school climate and principal leadership.

"It seems to me there are more components that contribute to the effectiveness of a teacher," Garcia said. "How do we begin to factor in the tone a principal sets, and whether the school is a friendly environment for parents and teachers?"

While the state Public Education Department is developing a system for evaluating principals, APS Chief Academic Officer Linda Sink said that for now, the APS pilot program will only measure teachers.

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