

Redmond teachers to get new grades

By Patrick Cliff / *The Bulletin*

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REDMOND — Perhaps one of the most contentious issues in education has been figuring out how to tell when teachers are doing their jobs well.

The Redmond School District, other districts in the region, administrators and teachers are wrestling with new approaches to that issue. The Redmond School Board recently approved standards for the district's teachers, and those will be one factor in evaluating teacher performance. Other factors will include the academic performance of a teacher's students, though how that will be used and with what weight remain open questions.

The board's adoption of standards was a big step for the district as it rebuilds its approach to teacher evaluation, say its staff and administrators.

The Redmond standards are based on ones developed by Charlotte Danielson, a well-known education consultant. Made up of several factors, the standards are complex. They include four broad categories: classroom environment, professional responsibilities, instruction, and planning and preparation. Each category has at least five components, and each component has multiple elements on which teachers will be rated.

For example, under the "instruction" category is the component "communicating with students." That component has four elements, including "explanations of content."

Over the next year, teachers and administrators will define exactly what each of those components means and decide how to measure each. District teachers and administrators will be trained on each of the components.

A teacher's performance on each standard will add up to one of four rankings, so that a teacher can be anywhere from unsatisfactory to distinguished. The new standards will provide a road map for teachers to use to reach the next level, according to Valerie Grindstaff, who led the standards design committee and is a fourth-grade teacher at Tom McCall Elementary.

The standards, and eventually the evaluation, will help teachers improve in ways the current system does not, Grindstaff said.

"One thing I don't like about the current system is there's no scale for helping teachers improve. You're either good or you're not good," Grindstaff said.

The district's work is backed by the nonprofit Chalkboard Project and its Creative Leadership Achieves Student Success — also known as CLASS — Project. There are 14 districts across the state working on CLASS Projects, including Redmond, Bend-La Pine Schools, the Crook County School District and the High Desert Education Service District.

In Bend-La Pine, the CLASS Project team hopes to have a new evaluation system in at least some of the district's

schools by the next school year. The team will work on the district's plan through the summer. If that work goes well, the implementation could be more widespread, according to Dan Jones, one of the CLASS coordinators.

"We may initiate this through the entire school district," Jones said.

Among other areas, each of those districts is working on new ways to evaluate teachers. Too often, teacher evaluation means a principal spends 30 minutes in a classroom, then writes up an evaluation maybe once a year, said Dan Jamison, the nonprofit's vice president.

Neither teachers nor administrators gain much from that system, Jamison said. Teachers get little guidance on how to improve, and administrators do not have a good handle on how skilled the school's staff might be.

Jamison believes work like that in the Redmond district will improve teacher performance and schools in general.

"The current system is broken," he said. "It's glaringly inadequate."

That realization has become more common, and, as it has, more streams of information are influencing teacher evaluations, Jamison said.

Increasingly, one of those streams is student academic performance, which is being used as one factor that describes a teacher's work, he said.

"I think (using student performance) was very contentious even as recently as a year ago," Jamison said. "It is really moving into vogue now, not only in Oregon but certainly around the country."

The Redmond standards are the first step in developing a new evaluation system for teachers, according to Lynn Evans, the district's human resources director.

Currently, a teacher's principal evaluates performance. The time between evaluations varies, but in general they happen every other year. New teachers are evaluated more frequently, Evans said.

Under the new system, a teacher could be evaluated by a different school's principal to limit the possibility of personal bias. Evaluation by colleagues is another option, Evans said.

That work will happen over the next year, she said. For now, the district has its new standards that Evans believes will make for better teachers and a better district.

"We want a development tool, not just an evaluation tool," Evans said.

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