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Teachers to get new evaluation system

Performance-based model could potentially affect compensation

By Sam Wheeler

Ashland Daily Tidings

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The Ashland School District plans to begin implementing new standards for evaluating its teachers by the beginning of next school year.

The new performance-based evaluation system will take into consideration more than student test scores, and potentially affect how educators are compensated based on how they score in their evaluations, said Superintendent Juli Di Chiro.

"Relying on a single test score to evaluate teacher performance isn't reliable or valid from a statistical standpoint; it needs to be combined with something else," she said. "I imagine test scores will be a part of it, but we need to combine that test data with other things."

Di Chiro said multiple measures of student achievement will be taken into consideration, and in-class observations by administrators will serve as a foundation for the remainder of the evaluation.

The evaluation might include how effectively teachers design unit and lesson plans, how well they interact with students' families, their goals as an educator, the quality of their students' work, Di Chiro said.

The district began evaluating its teacher hiring practices, professional development standards and student test scores in 2010 to determine how to improve teaching quality within the district, the main force behind a recent statewide push to tie teachers' performance to their salary.

"We had a really good meeting last week and things are starting to come together for us," said Di Chiro. "The thought is, there are better ways to move teachers through the salary schedule with a new compensation model that is based around these developing performance standards."

She said the new model would allow teachers to spend their careers in the classroom, but continue moving up the pay ladder throughout that span.

Currently, the compensation model is based primarily on how long a teacher has been teaching, and how many units past their bachelor's or master's degree they are. Units are earned by teachers taking proficiency tests and furthering their formal education.

With the new model, salary would hinge more on how well teachers perform their duties as an educator, said Di Chiro.

"The new compensation and evaluation models are intertwined," she said. "One affects the other."

The Chalkboard Project, a nonprofit focused on improving Oregon schools, awarded the Ashland School District a \$30,000 grant last August to conduct its ongoing study into teacher-pay and evaluation reform here and across the state.

Since then, the district's former Alternative Compensation Committee, which was conducting these studies in 2010, has evolved into a team led by Cece Amuchastegui, an adviser from the Chalkboard Project and former superintendent at Klamath County School District.

"What we're hearing from across the state is that teachers are hungry for this," said Dan Jamison, vice president of education policy at the Chalkboard Project. "Ashland is making very good progress with their design and research. "... This is a chance for the district to design more robust and more meaningful performance evaluations, and raise student achievement with professional development."

The Chalkboard Project's Creative Leadership Achieves Student Success initiative received a \$13.2 million federal grant in September 2010 for the study and implementation of teacher compensation reforms over the next five years, which is where Ashland's grant originated.

Similar grants are helping nearly a dozen districts around the state prepare to meet new education standards that were passed by the Oregon Legislature in 2011.

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"Our charge is to come in and make sure the evaluation plans align to the changing state standards," said Amuchastegui. "Everyone in the state of Oregon has to align their teachers to meet the new standards."

That includes meeting Common Core State Standards, for which the state will begin testing students in 2015, and adhering to Senate Bill 290, which calls for school districts to adopt performance-based teacher evaluation models by July 2013.

The only thing holding Ashland back from a performance-based compensation system is funding, said Di Chiro.

The district will look toward acquiring funding from the state through Senate Bill 252, which was passed in 2011 to supplement districts establishing a performance-based pay scale for their teachers. However, it is possible the Legislature will suspend that funding during its upcoming session, said Di Chiro, because money is tight.

If that happens, the district will begin pursuing other available grants to fund the effort.

Di Chiro said the district is currently organizing its plan so that it will need outside funding only for the first three years of implementing its new pay model.


"After that, we should be able to support the program with our current level of funding," she said.

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