

## Dig for details of teacher contracts with new Web tool

Did you ever wonder how the contract your district has with its teachers compares to those of other districts? Is the number of days granted for sick leave the same? What about the subjects for which teachers get differential pay, or the terms for unused sick leave on retirement?

What once would have required a massive amount of research and reading is now available with a new, easy-to-use Web tool from the **National Council on Teacher Quality**.

With a few clicks of the mouse, you can compare some 300 provisions of collective bargaining agreements from the 50 largest districts in the country and generate a report, either as a table or an Excel spreadsheet. That offers you a new tool when it comes to policymaking, said **Kate Walsh**, president of the council.

"This has more application for board members and others at the district level than any other group," Walsh said. "They have to negotiate these contracts. Certainly the unions have had this information at their disposal, and though unions don't always agree, it's been harder for districts to have access."

But Walsh said she expects union members to tap into the database, too. "I think we all make better decisions when we have better information before us," she said. "Everyone will be dealing with accurate facts, and that's not always the case, especially when it comes to financial information," she said. Union members who see that their pay is among the lowest, for example, might use the information to argue a case for higher salaries.

■ **States included.** The 50 largest districts are in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Wisconsin. This spring, the next 50 largest will be added.

At least 15 of the current districts represented are in "right-to-work" states, where collective bargaining is prohibited and teacher work provisions are set through other methods, including state law and school board policy. The inclusion of those districts will facilitate comparisons of whether teacher work rules differ in states that allow collective bargaining versus those that prohibit it.

■ **Getting to the details.** Although teacher contracts are public documents, the agreements are not readily accessible. "These contracts have gotten very

### Union expresses concerns on new contract database

A new database from the **National Council on Teacher Quality** will allow easy comparison of hundreds of provisions in the contracts the 50 largest districts make with their teachers.

But an **American Federation of Teachers** official said he worries researchers and journalists might misinterpret the data. Although AFT provided feedback during beta-testing on the tool, "We're not at a point where we're saying we endorse it," said AFT Director of Educational Issues **John Mitchell**.

He noted the database does not indicate, for example, whether a particular provision came from the union or the management side of the bargaining table.

And in every state, the parameters of what can be bargained collectively differ under state law and school board management rights. That means if a provision on teacher evaluations isn't in the database, officials may have addressed it elsewhere.

"This may be a starting point for researchers and journalists, but I hope it's not the end point," Mitchell said. ■

unwieldy," Walsh said. "At 200 to 300 pages in length, they are protected from public scrutiny."

But they contain key details on day-to-day operations in schools and generally include provisions related to factors like seniority rules, class size, lesson plans and preparation that could affect student achievement. "Districts should find this very helpful as way to inform good policy," she said.

■ **What you can access.** You can read the entire text of the contracts in the database or you can generate a report comparing several districts. Instructions are clear, and it takes just three basic steps.

For the report, you can select from 10 categories now: calendar; differential pay; evaluation; general employment provisions; leave; professional development; safety, security and class management; salary; tuition reimbursement; and union.

This spring, five more categories will be added: benefits, dismissal policies, grievance procedures, class size and transfers, Walsh said.

Each category is divided into subcategories. You then chose from a list of questions in each subcategory that digs into the details. Each report can contain up to five questions.

To use the database, go to [www.nctq.org/cb/](http://www.nctq.org/cb/). ■