

Study Criticizes Contract Process With R.I. Teachers

Coalition Suggests Creating Four Categories Of Teachers

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PROVIDENCE -- A study by a business-led coalition criticizes the method by which teacher contracts are negotiated in Rhode Island, and recommends the state assume control from local school districts over the process, which includes setting teacher salaries, benefits and evaluations.

The coalition, the Education Partnership, looked at Rhode Island's education system for a year. Authors concluded teacher contracts are one of the most formidable barriers to better schools. They accused teacher unions with being more concerned with protecting faculty than helping students.

"Let's stop talking about the things that have nothing to do with students," said Valerie Forti, president of the Education Partnership and the study's author. "Let's get back to talking about the kids."

The National Education Association, which represents teachers, said it was not consulted for the study. "We're at war with these folks now," said Robert Walsh, executive director of the National Education Association, which represents teachers in 27 districts.

Forti said the unions' points of view are clearly articulated in the contracts.

The coalition also suggested creating four categories of teachers: master, pre-master, basic and below basic. The group said master teachers should be paid more than the other groups of teachers. Also, teachers who receive two negative evaluations in one year could be fired immediately.

The coalition said evaluations are critical to establishing the teacher categories, and wants the Rhode Island education commissioner to develop statewide standards for teacher evaluations. Also, the coalition recommends that principals, rather than superintendents, should decide the curriculum, how money is spent and how teachers are hired and fired.

Gov. Don Carcieri supports many of the coalition's recommendations, including a statewide teacher contract and teacher evaluations.

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