

Published: Apr 7, 2005
Modified: Apr 7, 2005 3:00 AM

Education board vows high standards

By TODD SILBERMAN, Staff Writer

One day after the state House approved a measure aimed at making it easier for out-of-state teachers to work in North Carolina, members of the State Board of Education vowed to set their own rules.

The state board Wednesday signaled support for a new policy that would ease the way for teachers from other states without dropping North Carolina's own certification standards.

With a vote today, board members will try to sideline the House bill, which they fear will hurt teaching quality by removing the state's current testing requirement that all teachers must meet for a classroom license.

Instead, the board's policy would leave the testing requirement intact but would allow all teachers new to North Carolina schools -- from in state or out of state -- to gain full certification by meeting other standards. The alternative requirements include National Board Certification, completion of an evaluation already in place for veteran teachers or a new measurement based on student progress.

The board's members, as well as Gov. Mike Easley, have said that the bill in the legislature would make the state's standards for teachers dependent on those of other states. North Carolina's requirements, including those for testing, rank among the nation's highest.

"North Carolina has made tremendous progress setting its own standards," board Chairman Howard Lee said at Wednesday's meeting. "The [board's] policy gets at what the legislature would hope to achieve."

School districts across the state have asked the legislature to improve licensing reciprocity with other states as a way to help ease the state's chronic teacher shortage. Rules under the federal No Child Left Behind law will soon require schools nationwide to hire only teachers who have certain standards, often comparable to state certification standards.

As a result, school districts fear that teachers from other states might meet the federal standard in their home state but not in North Carolina. Beginning this summer, North Carolina's schools that receive Title I funds -- about half the state's public schools -- will be able to hire only teachers who satisfy the federal requirement. All other schools will face the same requirement in 2006.

The board's new policy would allow teachers to work three years -- as long as they meet the federal standards -- before meeting North Carolina's specific criteria for a full license.

Joyce Wade, assistant superintendent for human resources for Johnston County schools, said the rapidly growing district relies heavily on hiring teachers from other states to fill vacancies. She estimates that as many as 60 percent of the district's annual hires are from out of state.

Wade said that any softening of the rules would help, whether from the legislature or the board.

"We would appreciate any consideration," she said.

But even if the board adopts its new rules, the bill might still pass the legislature.

That's what the N.C. School Boards Association and the N.C. Association of School Administrators are hoping will happen.

"We just think that as long as there are barriers, people are going to be unwilling to go over them," said Leanne Winner, lobbyist for the school boards association. "We will lose people coming to North Carolina who would be great teachers for our students."

Staff writer Todd Silberman can be reached at 829-4531 or todds@newsobserver.com.