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**KPLU Local News**

**Seattle Teachers Focus of Study**

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By Gary Davis, KPLU Education Reporter (2009-10-14)

**SEATTLE, WA (KPLU)** - A new study suggests Seattle's public school teachers could be more effective if the district and union could agree on reforms. A national education group released its report Wednesday. No one was really surprised by what the National Council on Teacher Quality would recommend. The group advocates for reforms such as performance pay, a topic which riles unions. Its president, Kate Walsh, says implementing performance-based evaluations puts student achievement where it needs to be - at the top.



Teachers are the subject of a new National Council on Teacher Quality study, commissioned by Seattle-based Alliance for Education. AP Image.

"And that system should be thought through carefully, with teachers, not done to them. But it needs to be done in a very thoughtful manner and not presuming we already have the answers of how to do it well." Walsh was in Seattle to present the findings at a community forum on Wednesday evening at Seattle University.

The study supports a performance pay pilot program the Seattle School District proposed this year, but the Seattle Education Association, the teacher's union, rejected it during contract negotiations. SEA executive director Glenn Bafia says the study overlooked what's already taking place in Seattle. "We do look at student achievement here in the district." Bafia says teachers set performance goals for themselves in conjunction with their administrators. He says linking performance to test scores alone would be unfair.

"We believe there's many factors which cause our students to perform in one way or the other that might not necessarily be tied just to the teacher's performance themselves," Bafia says. According to Bafia, SEA leaders met with district officials, NCTQ representatives, and leaders from the Alliance for Education and the League of Education Voters on Wednesday afternoon to discuss the findings.

One area where there seems to be some agreement on the study's recommendations is with accountability for teacher evaluations. NCTQ's Kate Walsh says last year only 16 of Seattle's 3,500 teachers were given an "unsatisfactory" rating by their principals. Walsh says that figure defies logic.

"Especially faced with the low performance of Seattle's poor and minority populations, those numbers just make absolutely no sense. And that's not teachers' fault, but it is something a district and teachers are going to have to come to grips with," she added. How? Walsh recommends that principals be held accountable for teacher ratings, and that more grade distinctions be used, rather than just "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory." Union leaders say they can get behind the recommendation for principal accountability, which will require changes to state policy.

In all, the study outlines ten goals with suggested changes to state and district policies. It was commissioned by the Alliance for Education, and paid for by a group of funders, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Seattle Foundation, Boeing and Microsoft. Gary Davis, KPLU News, Seattle.

For more information on the National Council on Teacher Quality, click [here](#) to go to the Alliance for Education web site. There you'll find a PDF of the NCTQ Study, titled "Human Capital in the Seattle Public Schools."

To hear more about the debate over performance evaluations, performance pay and retaining teachers by seniority, click on the audio link below to a story KPLU aired in July, while the Seattle School District and the SEA were in contract negotiations.