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## Romney wants teacher merit pay Key is students' performance

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By Maria Sacchetti and Tracy Jan, Globe Staff | September 22, 2005

Teachers could earn as much as a \$15,000 increase in their pay next school year based on their students' test scores and other measures, according to a new plan the governor will unveil today.

Governor Mitt Romney plans to roll out the plan as part of several education initiatives he will recommend to the Legislature, according to an administration official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

If approved by the Legislature, the \$68 million a year in bonuses would take effect next school year and reward roughly 25,000 teachers a year, about a third of the state's teaching force.

By proposing a plan that links teachers' pay to their students' performance, Romney is wading into rough political waters as he weighs both a run for reelection and a possible bid for president. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California shelved his merit pay plan earlier this year; teachers had rallied against his idea, and the Legislature never put it up for a vote.

Two key Bay State lawmakers said yesterday they were skeptical of Romney's plan, but willing to listen. State teachers union officials pledged to fight the proposal, pointing out that similar efforts to start merit pay programs have failed elsewhere. Boston tried to start a merit pay program about six years ago, for example, but scrapped it when unions and the school district could not agree on how to evaluate teachers.

Romney already has been under fire for his attempt to promote merit pay in the Springfield school system, where school leaders are still fighting with the city's teacher union over a performance-based pay plan.

Romney, who was unavailable for comment yesterday, has proposed pushing merit pay for teachers in the past, but today would be the first time he has offered details of such a plan. Aides would not speak on the record, deferring to the governor's wishes to disclose the details today.

Education Commissioner David P. Driscoll said he and other state leaders expect a fight from unions.

"The unions have got to come to grips with this," Driscoll said. "No longer can public education withstand the criticism to pay people according to how long they've been in the system. It's just ludicrous. Pay great teachers more. They deserve more."

The governor's initiative would also boost math and science instruction by establishing an elite corps of math and science teachers and by requiring all high schools to offer the most advanced classes in calculus, biology, physics, and chemistry.

Representative Patricia A. Haddad, cochairwoman of the Legislature's Joint Committee on Education and a former teacher, said she worried that a merit pay plan would overlook excellent teachers whose students score low on state tests.

"There are a lot of good teachers out there that do way above and beyond," Haddad said. "How do you put an objective value on that?"

The plan, Romney's aide said, wouldn't reward only teachers whose students recorded the best test scores, but would give bonuses to those whose students had improved.

Senator Robert A. Antonioni, Senate chairman of the Joint Education Committee, said he thought the proposal to attract math and science teachers would have an easier time passing the Legislature than bonuses tied to student performance. The Legislature could decide to approve all, part, or none of the governor's proposal.

The governor, an aide said, proposes creating an elite group of math and science teachers, known as the

Commonwealth Teaching Corps. The teachers would have to have degrees in math, science, or engineering and pass the teachers' test in their subject. They would not only qualify for bonuses with a good evaluation, but would also get other perks, including a 401(k) retirement plan with a state match. The plan is meant to attract people from the math and science field into the profession and would be open to veteran teachers.

Romney's plan calls for three types of bonuses of up to \$5,000 each, including one specifically for math and science teachers and another for teachers of Advanced Placement math and science.

The third category would be all teachers, regardless of their subject, who could receive a \$5,000 bonus if their students are improving and if the teachers get good reviews from their school principal and other teachers. Up to a third of each school system's teachers, about 22,000 teachers statewide, would be eligible for that bonus.

In the most lucrative scenario, a teacher could win a bonus from each category and earn up to \$15,000 in a single year.

Catherine A. Boudreau, president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, said the governor's plan to link teacher bonuses to test scores is divisive.

"This doesn't ultimately help the kids and student achievement," she said.

Kathleen A. Kelley, president of the Massachusetts Federation of Teachers, said the state tried signing bonuses for teachers in the late 1990s, with mixed results. A 2002 study indicated that almost half of the teachers lured to classrooms with \$20,000 bonuses quit within three years.

Now, teachers are paid based on their education levels and years of experience in the system. Only three school systems in the Bay State have experimented with bonuses for teachers, and at least one, Nauset, has already done away with them.

Engineering teacher Joye Thaller, who began teaching in September in Boston's Engineering School after a career as an environmental engineer, said Romney's proposal to create an elite corps of math and science teachers would entice specialists in those fields to enter the profession.

"You kind of need to compete," she said. "There are a lot of other job options out there for someone with an engineering background. The bonus would help recruit some fresh blood."

But she questioned the Advanced Placement bonuses, saying the greater problem is finding enough students who are academically prepared to take those classes. ■