

School council recommends process for 25%

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ASHEVILLE (North Carolina)— A group of educators tasked with deciding criteria for a contentious state mandate to offer 25 percent of teachers four-year contracts gave city school board members a preview of their plan Monday.

The special advisory council tapped by the Asheville City Board of Education presented their recommendations to the board in advance of the March 3 regular board meeting, when the plan is expected to pass on the board's consent agenda.

"I find it incredibly disappointing that this tremendous brain power had to be used for this task," board member Leah Ferguson told the group Monday. "They should be using this energy helping our kids, instead of humiliating teachers."

Lawmakers last year eliminated career status, a designation that had given teachers tenure-type protections.

The law also directs school districts to offer the top 25 percent four-year contracts with pay raises totaling \$5,000 in exchange for giving up tenure rights. Of 241 eligible teachers, 60 will be offered contracts.

The new recommendations suggest the district narrow the list of "proficient" educators, or those who have met their evaluation standards in recent years and have been in the school system for at least three years, then let a lottery decide who will be among the 25 percent.

The teachers who are deemed eligible will then have an option to opt out of the process altogether, so other teachers may be in the running for contracts they might otherwise have been offered.

The district will then use a lottery system within each individual school to decide which of that school's eligible personnel will actually be offered contracts. If fewer than 25 percent in any given school agree to participate, the system will hold a second, district-wide lottery.

"If we don't end up with 60 teachers who haven't chosen to opt out, then we'll offer contracts to those who opted out anyway. We have to offer that many, whether anyone accepts them or not," said Asheville City Schools human resources director Cynthia Grady.

"That's definitely looking like a possibility," she said. "That less than 60 will even accept."

The group also presented a "letter of intent" to the board, expressing their displeasure with the mandate.

"We're probably the only committee in the state who will do this," interim Superintendent Bobbie Short said. "But we felt it was important to express. The teachers found this process very difficult, felt it was divisive and that it was very unfair.

"We want people to know that this does not represent the top 25 percent of our teachers," Short said. "It represents a mandated law."

The new policy eliminates more than 40 years of job protections in favor of employment contracts that supporters say will promote sharper classroom performance. But many educators say the law will only deteriorate quality in the classroom.

The North Carolina Association of Educators and six veteran teachers filed a lawsuit that contends the law, passed this summer, takes away requirements that school administrators follow a defined process when firing a teacher.

The licensed positions that qualify for the 25 percent pool include guidance counselors, school psychologists, speech-language therapist and media coordinators. Traditionally those positions would all be evaluated within their school systems based on very different criteria specific to their jobs.

This is ridiculous.

The notion that a group of supposed professionals who have, at the core of their profession, the task of grading and evaluating students on a daily basis can't actually come up with a simple way to do the same for themselves is a farce.

A lottery for everybody who meets minimum standards to choose the "best"? Hell, why not take it a step further and do the same for student grades. Deans List and Honor Roll by lottery! Sound pretty stupid? Because it is- for grading teachers or students.

This is little more than a hissy fit being thrown by teachers who think they shouldn't be held to the same kind of accountability and standards that virtually every other job is. The notion that being evaluated in your profession and rewarded for being the best is "humiliating" is so way out of touch with reality and how the real world works that I question if people who think like this really should be entrusted with educating our children. It certainly explains why all the young people these days think they are entitled to jobs where they don't have to work hard or earn a check and shouldn't be held accountable- they are just doing as they have been taught.

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Dave Stamey · Top Commenter · Hayesville, North Carolina

Is "a hissy fit" a sexist term in this context? Just wondering. Also, how would you characterize Mr. Glance's diatribe?

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Tim Glance · Top Commenter · Clyde, North Carolina

Dave Stamey I have used "hissy fit" my entire life, applied equally to all. But when you can't refute an argument I guess the baseless sexist card is almost as good as the baseless race card....

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James Cassara · Top Commenter · Teacher at Asheville Country Day School

I'd like you to develop a way of identifying the top 25% police officers. Be sure to compare those patrolling the upper income neighborhoods to those whose beat includes public housing. Make sure they are given older police cars and equipment, and are constantly given new directives that change with the wind. And be sure to evaluate them of the rates of recidivism of those that arrests; after all if they fail to make positive changes and continue to fall short that MUST be the officers fault, right?

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Tim Glance · Top Commenter · Clyde, North Carolina

Actually, police departments do that quite often. Most departments have officer evaluation systems.

To look at an even harsher environment, the US Army ranks officers exactly like this- some officers are rated "Above Center of Mass" some "Center of Mass" and the lowest are "Below Center of Mass" with that category broken into "Retain" or "Do Not Retain". An officer can only rate 49% of the officers he rates as "Above Center of Mass"- despite the fact that the same officer may rate infantry officers with the worst part of Afghanistan to patrol and a logistics officer who never leaves a major base at the same time, and all the officers he rates may have wildly varying tools, conditions, and people to work with.

Teaching is nowhere near as hard, complicated, dynamic nor unforgiving as leading men and women in combat. And has nowhere near the wild variation in conditions and stability. I am pretty sure a teacher knows where his or her classroom is and doesn't get sent halfway across the globe at a moments notice and get expected to perform. So if we can rank Army officers and rate the top 49%, surely the education establishment can find a way to do the same with teachers.

if they are not smart enough to do that, they shouldn't be trusted to educate anybody.

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James Cassara · Top Commenter · Teacher at Asheville Country Day School

I have no issue with evaluations. I have issues with favoritism or a system that pits one teacher against another.

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Stonee Faulkner · Top Commenter · Asheville, North Carolina

James, this form of performance evaluation which results in some employees getting raises and some not getting raises happens in professions everywhere. And in private business, its more than that -- your job can end with 2 weeks notice because the company eliminates your position through no fault of your own. The only way one can avoid such competition in a job is either to not work or to go into business for yourself and be your own boss so there is no one to argue with about what your salary is and when you get a raise.

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Jane H Robinson · Top Commenter

This is going to turn into a "farce" to say the least! I'm ashamed of what our GA and governor continue to do to erode the morale of our teachers. This is just another "nail" in the proverbial coffin of the public education system.

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