



## State incentive-pay cut could lead to higher teacher turnover

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*A state budget cut that axes \$47 million in bonuses and scholarships for teachers who earn national certification could prompt an increase in teacher turnover in Keys public schools, officials say.*

For years, Florida offered bonuses to teachers who earn certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and also paid \$2,250 of the \$3,065 in fees required for each teacher to become certified.

But on Wednesday, April 2, a state Senate committee approved a proposal to cut \$47 million in incentives for teachers who earn the certification.

Teachers will still receive a yearly bonus for their first 10 years of certification, but scholarships that cover application fees and bonuses for certified teachers who mentor new teachers will be completely cut.

The cut will not be made official until the legislature adopts the state budget later this month.

### **Mentoring meltdown**

In Keys public schools, where teacher turnover is already higher than anywhere else in the state, about 40 national board certified teachers are relied upon to mentor teachers in their first through third years of employment.

According to United Teachers of Monroe President Leon Fowler, mentors earn 10 percent of the state average teachers' salary in exchange for 92 hours of well-documented service, which does not include preparation time, only face-to-face mentoring.

Superintendent Randy Acevedo says the mentoring program is a critical element in supporting new teachers and ensuring that they stay in Keys public schools.

“That kind of cut would reduce the incentive for teachers to become national board certified and to become mentors. We certainly wouldn't want to see that. When you look at our teacher turnover, if a teacher stays three years they're generally going to stay for the long haul,” he said, adding, “I think it's going to have an impact on teacher turnover.”

Lisa Taylor, a national board certified third grade teacher at Key Largo School, agrees.

“The number one reason that new teachers leave the field is non-support in the classroom, they feel overwhelmed and they leave,” she said. “The national board mentoring model has made a huge difference.”

Taylor said the national board program is successful in part because it rewards teachers who work collaboratively, whereas performance-based bonuses tend to reward competitive behavior.

“Performance pay limits the number of teachers that can get that pay. If you want the pay, you’re not going to help somebody else because they’re competing with you to get the money. That’s not good for education. The whole underlying crux of what national board is about is teachers supporting each other and teachers working together.” she said.

National board certified teachers also tend to see higher levels of student achievement in their classrooms, proponents say. According to a January 2007 study by Florida State University, National Board Certification “provides a positive signal of teacher productivity.”

“The process educates you to reflect on what you’re doing, to look at what’s going well and look at what needs to be changed, because if you do it differently, you could improve student achievement,” Taylor said, adding, “It made me teach ahead of the curve.”

But with all its rewards, the certification process is also extremely demanding, and teachers may not be willing to extend themselves financially without a guaranteed reward, Taylor said.

To achieve certification, most teachers spend more than 200 hours gathering data, filling out forms and videotaping themselves in the classroom. After all that work, only 30 percent of all applicants were awarded the certification last year.

“It’s the most rigorous and rewarding thing I’ve done in my whole teaching career,” Taylor said, “but if someone said you need \$3,000 to see if you get it, I think it would totally deter people from attempting it. There’ll be very few people who are willing to risk \$3,000 plus of their pay to go through a process that 30 percent of the teachers pass.”

Taylor said she recently doled out \$1,200 of her own money to apply for her 10-year recertification, but because the cut axes bonuses for teachers who’ve been certified for more than 10 years, she’s uncertain whether other teachers will do the same.

“You’re taking your most seasoned teachers, with the most experience, who are able to maintain national board status for over 10 years and saying, oops, sorry, no more money,” she said.

Fowler said he’s disappointed by the cut, but not surprised.

“Every time the Legislature promises to pay teachers to do certain things and then they end up pulling the rug out from teachers when they do the work,” he said. “Until they finalize the budget, there’s still a chance, but it’s not good news for those people. It’s not good news for anybody in education right now.”