

LEGISLATURE

Legislature
Notebook

Bill would reward certified teachers

By Jill Zeman
Staff writer

Teachers who go the extra mile could be rewarded with a bonus under a proposed legislative bill.

LB1226, introduced on Jan. 12 by Sen. Nancy Thompson of Papillion, would create the Master Teacher Program.

This program would recognize outstanding teachers in Nebraska by awarding teachers who obtain national certification an annual bonus of \$10,000 for as long as they are certified, Thompson said.

Teachers must have taught at either public or private schools in Nebraska for at least three years before becoming eligible for the award, she said.

Members of the Education

Committee discussed the bill Monday but did not vote whether to advance the bill to the floor for debate.

Currently, there are eight teachers in Nebraska who have obtained their certifications, Thompson said.

To become certified, teachers must submit a portfolio including their students' work and how they graded it, said Helen Banzhaf, a math teacher at Seward High School and a nationally-certified teacher.

Teachers must also send in an unedited videotape of one of their classes, showing their teaching methods, as well as taking a test showing their knowledge in their areas of expertise, Banzhaf said.

Banzhaf has taught for 32 years and received her certification last year, she said.

Certification doesn't require a

master's degree, but most teachers pursuing it have their master's, Banzhaf said.

"(Becoming nationally certified) has renewed my interest in education and excellence," Banzhaf said.

Under the proposed bill, teachers interested in becoming nationally certified would also be eligible for the reimbursement of their \$2,000 registration fee, Thompson said.

The bill would award \$1,000 at the beginning of the certification, and the other \$1,000 would be refunded at the successful completion of it, she said.

Thompson said the program offers many benefits to Nebraska's educational system.

"We're interested in providing quality teachers to students, and we also want young people to consider teaching as a career," she said.

General Affairs committee debates tougher MIP penalties

Senators discussed on Monday making a stiffer penalty for minors caught with alcohol.

LB1130, introduced Jan. 10 by Sen. Gene Tyson of Norfolk, would increase the penalties for minors in possession of alcohol.

The first, second and third offenses would result in \$250, \$500 and \$750 fines respectively.

Under the proposed bill, the court could suspend a minor's driver's license for six months for the first offense, one year for the second and two years or until the violator turns 21, whichever is longer, for the third offense, Tyson said.

Minors could regain their licenses after the elapsed time by paying \$95.

Another provision of the bill states that minors' parents or guardians must be notified of their arrests.

The General Affairs committee has not yet voted on the bill.

Stores selling alcohol to minors could have charges dropped

Members of the General Affairs committee discussed on Monday whether retailers who are charged with selling alcohol to minors should have their cases dismissed if the minors aren't convicted.

Currently, a retailer can be charged with selling alcohol to a minor even if the minor isn't charged with a violation,

said Sen. Jennie Robak of Columbus. LB1034, which was introduced by Robak, would allow retailers only to be charged if the minor is charged with a crime, Robak said.

Jim Moylan, representing the Nebraska Licensed Beverage Association, said under the current law, retailers are unfairly charged.

"It's always the retailer who gets charged, not the minor who intentionally breaks the law," he said.

The senators did not vote on the bill and will decide later whether to advance it to the floor for debate.

Lotteries could be required to disclose odds of winning

People who purchase lottery tickets in Nebraska could soon have more information about how bad their odds of winning may be.

The bill, introduced by Sen. Adrian Smith of Gering, would require the state lottery to disclose more information on their lottery tickets and advertisements.

The proposed bill would prohibit the use of actors or actresses portraying lottery winners as well, Smith said.

Smith said the bill would allow the use of paid actors or actresses in commercials as long as they didn't inaccurately portray lottery winners.

The bill would also require the lottery to list the odds of winning on each lottery ticket, Smith said.

The General Affairs committee did not vote on the bill Monday.

Compiled by staff writer Jill Zeman

Bill addresses shortage of young teachers

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The bill states that a student must fulfill four qualifications in order to be eligible for the scholarship.

Scholarship candidates must be a resident of Nebraska, enrolled in a teacher education program, have a GPA of at least 3.0 and sign a statement of intent to become a teacher in a shortage area in Nebraska following graduation.

"This would enable students to

come out of college debt-free, so they can afford to stay in their profession," Thompson said.

Students could receive up to \$3,000 per year, and those who are student teaching could receive \$4,500, she said.

Marge Harouff, Nebraska Board of Education member, said the board is concerned because people currently graduating with teaching degrees are sometimes taking positions outside of the teaching field.

Harouff said that the percentage of students enrolled in teacher education programs has dropped about 11 percent in the past three years.

Thompson said her proposed bills don't solve all the problems facing education in Nebraska.

"The fact is, we need more teachers, and we need to keep them in the profession," she said.

The senators did not vote on the bills and will decide later whether to send it the floor.

Childhood learning bill debated

By Veronica Daehn
Staff writer

The early years of a child's life are the most important.

Or at least that's what Sen. Ardyce Bohlke of Hastings told members of the Education Committee on Monday.

Bohlke's bill, LB1136, would amend a bill passed in 1990 that established 10 early childhood education programs in the state.

This new bill would take those projects off of pilot project status and provide \$50,000 a year to continue childhood education programs.

A new project would be added to the existing 10 this year, and three would be added in subsequent years, Bohlke said.

"Information continues to come in that proves everything we do in early childhood makes all the difference later on," Bohlke said.

By making the existing pilot programs permanent, the state would be recognizing the importance of early childhood education, she said.

Doug Christensen, education commissioner, said educating children while they're young is crucial.

"The achievements of students down the road will be the product of what we do in early care," he said.

Christensen said Bohlke's bill would strengthen the existing programs.

"These programs work, and they work very effectively," he said. "Nebraska can provide services in early childhood education, and we can help later success."

But the state lacks motivation, Christensen said.

He said Nebraska lags behind other states in funding early childhood education programs.

"Our general success in education makes us complacent," he said.

According to the bill, only a fraction of Nebraska's children benefit from the current childhood education programs, and the quality of the programs varies.

Bohlke's bill would also encourage cooperation between public and private providers of early childhood education and child care.

"It has to be a school-to-community partnership program," Christensen said. "The bill provides for slow, steady growth as community interest grows. As we wait, more children are not being served."

Al Inzerello, assistant superintendent of Westside Community Schools, said he knows the programs work well.

His school district has had early childhood education programs since they began in Nebraska.

"We can attest to the long term benefits of the programs," he said. "This is quality seed money and money well spent."

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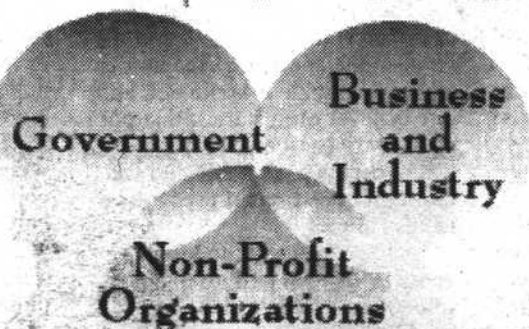
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