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## Update

9:27 P.M.

# Oregon districts to pilot teach pay program

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

April 17, 2008

PORTLAND — Two Oregon school districts are experimenting with providing extra pay for educators who agree to take on new duties, an idea that's been controversial among teacher unions.

The three-year pilot program in the Sherwood and Tillamook school districts, which is being backed by about \$2.2 million in grant money from the nonprofit Chalkboard Project, is not the same as "merit pay."

That's extra money that's generally given to teachers who agree to work in high-poverty schools, or teach subjects in which there's a shortage of specialists, like upper-level math and science.

Under merit pay, teachers often get a bonus if their students' test scores improve.

In Tillamook and Sherwood, the extra money will go to teachers who agree to serve as mentors for new teachers, or as academic coaches to help other teachers analyze student data and plan curriculum.

The idea, Chalkboard Project officials have said, is to give teachers expanded career opportunities beyond winding up in administrative jobs.

The nonprofit Chalkboard Project, which is backed by several of Oregon's largest foundations, has also lobbied unsuccessfully for more public dollars for teacher professional development. The pilot program is one way of getting to that goal, and of adding to the state's teacher mentoring program aimed at keeping new teachers in the profession.

Teacher unions in Oregon are historically leery of anything that smacks of merit pay, because it bypasses seniority and experience levels. They say it could serve to undermine negotiated contracts.

And in the beginning, teachers at Tillamook felt the same way, said Karen Thenell, the president of the school district's union, who is the dean of students at East Elementary School there.

"I was very concerned," Thenell said. "I thought it would mess with a contract that we feel very comfortable with, and I was hearing whispers of merit pay. That is enough to make anything stop permanently in the union."

But she said teachers in the coastal school district changed their minds as talks about the new initiative went on, and they became convinced that more mentoring and academic coaching would ultimately help students.

"If we are engaging in these programs that research has showed has affected student scores, that can only help our student population," Thenell said.

Schools and districts in 19 states have incentive pay plans for teachers, including Minnesota, New York City, Denver, Texas and Florida. In Oregon, anti-tax initiative activist Bill Sizemore has proposed a measure for the November 2008 ballot that would tie teacher pay to "classroom performance."

Under the measure, the criteria for determining a teacher's salary could include test scores, but also peer review, evaluations and student improvement. Years spent in the classroom or in graduate school would not matter.

The measure is on hold because elections officials say Sizemore has yet to produce required financial records. But teacher unions have said they are ready for a big fight over the measure, should it make it onto the state's ballot. Chalkboard, too, has come out in opposition to the Sizemore measure.

The pilot project in Oregon is loosely modeled on a similar program in Minnesota called Q-Comp, which ties teacher raises to performance goals. Minnesota provides incentive funding to the 39 districts that have

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mutually agreed with their teachers to take part in the program.

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