

GOP Urges Stiff Teacher Tenure Laws

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Assembly Republican leaders Monday proposed major changes in California's teacher tenure laws, suggesting proficiency test for all teachers and linking school finance to improvements in teacher competence.

A previous teacher proficiency bill by Assemblyman Gary Hart, D-Santa Barbara, would require testing only of new teachers or those renewing credentials or changing jobs.

Flanked by Republican members of the Assembly Education Committee, Assembly minority leader Carol Hallett, R-Atascadero, clearly was requiring Democratic support for the Republican teacher reform package, in return for Republican approval of a key Democratic bill to raise the level of public funding for education.

That bill, by Assemblyman Leroy Greene, D-Sacramento, would pour into California's beleaguered public schools nearly \$500 million more than proposed in the 1981-82 budget.

Hallett said Republicans continue to oppose Gov. Brown's proposed spending cutbacks in the schools, which they say would be shortchanged in the governor's budget by about \$148 million below statutory standards.

"We are still strongly opposed to wholesale cuts in educational funding," Hallett said Monday. "We are determined to restore school funding to authorized levels.

"We will support any reasonable proposal to provide our schools with extra funding, provided it is economically feasible, and provided major changes are made in our state's teacher seniority and tenure laws at the same time.

"In short, we want to link increased school funding with badly needed educational reforms."

Key legislative elements of the Republican education package are:

- Basic reading, writing and math proficiency tests for all in-service teachers, "stressing such testing when teachers are shifted to subjects of which they have not had recent experience."

- Overhaul of the existing teacher seniority system, allowing school boards to retain teachers with low seniority if they have demonstrated expertise in needed subjects.

"The current seniority system frequently results in the dismissal of highly qualified, low seniority teachers, and their replacement in the classroom with high seniority teachers who have had little experience with a given subject matter," the bill's authors assert.

- Expansion of the teacher disciplinary process to include disciplinary methods — such as suspension and loss of salary — utilized by community

colleges.

- Elimination of key collective bargaining and/or Education Code protections for school employees, giving school districts the option to (1) "meet and confer" on wages alone or (2) expand bargaining to "mutually agreed issues."

- Streamlining of the current fair hearing process for teacher dismissals, which — according to the bill's authors — now costs districts up to \$75,000 to dismiss a single teacher for incompetence. Under the new plan, one hearing officer would hear dismissal cases, rather than a three-member commission, and the hearing officer's decision would be advisory to the school board, not final.

- An across-the-board 4 percent benefit improvement for retired teachers, at an estimated cost of \$16 million and in addition to the automat-

ic 2 percent increase now in the law.

"The purpose of such an increase," the Republicans said, "is to begin to correct the disgraceful inequity which exists for our retired teachers, making it steadily more difficult to attract and retain well-qualified teaching talent."

- Changing to July 30 the March 15 legal date when school districts must send layoff notices to teachers. Districts are often forced to send out layoff notices because their financial status — based on state and federal funding — is unclear until mid-summer.

As a result, the Republicans said, "the morale of many teachers is undermined each year."

Assemblywoman Marian Bergeson, R-Newport Beach, a member of the Assembly Education Committee, said competent teachers are leaving the profession — particularly in math and science — because of declining public confidence in education, and because more rewarding and lucrative jobs are available in private industry.

"We may have to look at higher levels of compensation for certain areas," she said.

Republican leaders defended their link between increased public school funding and approval of their educational package.

"Any school funding bill should address not only funding, but quality as well," said Assembly Republican Caucus Chairman Bob Naylor. "The

state Education Code seems more often than not to get in the way of quality education."

Without substantive educational reforms, Republican leaders said, parents will more often turn to private schools as well as support tuition tax credits and vouchers.

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AP photo
Carol Hallett and Assemblyman Robert Naylor, R-Menlo Park, discuss plan.