

# R.I. regents approve new guidelines for teachers

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Maria Diaz, 16, left, Johanna German, 15, and Heiry Borrell, 15, members of the urban youth advocacy group Young Voices, attend Thursday's meeting of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education at the Juanita Sanchez Complex in Providence.

The Providence Journal / Connie Grosch

PROVIDENCE — More than 25 high school students attended Thursday's state education meeting, saying they want officials to make proposed teacher evaluation standards even tougher.

The Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education approved a proposed set of standards that would, for the first time, require that all educators — new and tenured teachers, principals, assistant principals and support staff — be evaluated annually and that the evaluations meet a rigorous set of state standards.

Currently, very few districts have substantive teacher evaluations and even fewer administer them routinely, said Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist. The proposed standards would link how well students learn to a teacher's evaluation. They would also be sophisticated enough to recognize and reward exemplary teachers, offer support to struggling teachers and establish guidelines for the removal of ineffective teachers.

But members of the youth group Young Voices do not think the proposed standards go far enough and asked the Regents to insert more powerful language, particularly about districts identifying and removing the worst teachers.

The Regents met at the Juanita Sanchez Complex at 182 Thurbers Ave., part of an attempt to hear from students and parents from across the state.

Poorly performing teachers should be given three years to improve and if they fail to do so, their certification should be terminated, said the students.

"There is no clear decision about the consequences for school districts that don't put [evaluations] in place," said Johanna German, 15, who will enter 11th grade at Classical High School this fall.

Firing bad teachers is very difficult, she said, and the Rhode Island Department of Education needs to back up districts that do so.

"Recertification needs to be connected to what actually goes on in the classroom," Johanna said.

Also, while the proposed standards require that parent and student surveys should be used in teacher evaluations, Young Voices wants to ensure student viewpoint is part of every educator evaluation.

"High school students in grades 10, 11 and 12 will be able to evaluate teachers using an objective rubric ...." the student recommendations state. "Results of student evaluation will not influence disciplinary decisions, but will become a part of every teacher's individualized goal plan for professional development."

Several Regents said they liked the recommendations and would consider them as the proposed standards go out for public hearing this fall.

The Regents also approved a draft version of a code of professional conduct that all educators would be required to sign to become certified in the state of Rhode Island. Several other states require educators to sign similar codes, said Paulajo Gaines, the state's director of educator quality and certification. The code will also go out for public hearing this fall.

Marcia Reback, president of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers said she approved of the documents but suggested several changes. Districts may not have the capacity for annual evaluations of tenured teachers while new teachers may need to be evaluated more frequently than once a year, Reback said.

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