

GRADING THE TEACHERS

States watch, worry as NY's battle over evaluations plays out

BY JO NAPOLITANO

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New York's teacher-evaluation battle is being closely watched across the nation, with officials in other states saying the dispute could foreshadow obstacles they may face.

The new standards, adopted in some form by nearly every state, link teacher ratings to student performance, which can include test scores or grades over time. That approach has been promoted by the federal government as a critical step in education reform.

In New York, the debate centers on students' state test scores. The state Department of Education and the largest teachers union are in a court fight over how much those scores can count in an individual's rating — 20 percent or 40 percent.

Officials in other states working to set up their own evaluation systems said they fear similar disagreements as they move from pilot programs to full implementation.

California is monitoring the situation in New York, said Lynda Nichols, spokeswoman for that state's Education Department. "That will have a big impact on how we move forward," she said.

Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia have adopted systems that link teacher evaluations to student performance, and of those a handful are using them now, Newsday found in a national survey. Twelve states are considering the approach. Four say they're not planning such a shift.

Fifteen states want student data to make up 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation.

President Barack Obama, in

his State of the Union address, said schools should have the flexibility to "replace teachers who just aren't helping kids learn."

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo has said he will implement an evaluation system of his own if the teachers union and state Education Department can't reach an agreement by Thursday.

National conversation

Linking teacher evaluations to student data became part of the national conversation on education reform about five years ago, after a few large school systems experimented with the approach. Think tanks, foundations and nonprofits took note.

Studies showed that teachers are the most important in-school factor in student learning, and these organizations started to hone in on evaluations as a tool for reform.

The approach gained bipartisan support and was promoted at the federal level through both Obama's competitive Race to the Top initiative and the creation of waivers to parts of the previous administration's No Child Left Behind policy. Each requires linking teacher evaluations to student achievement.

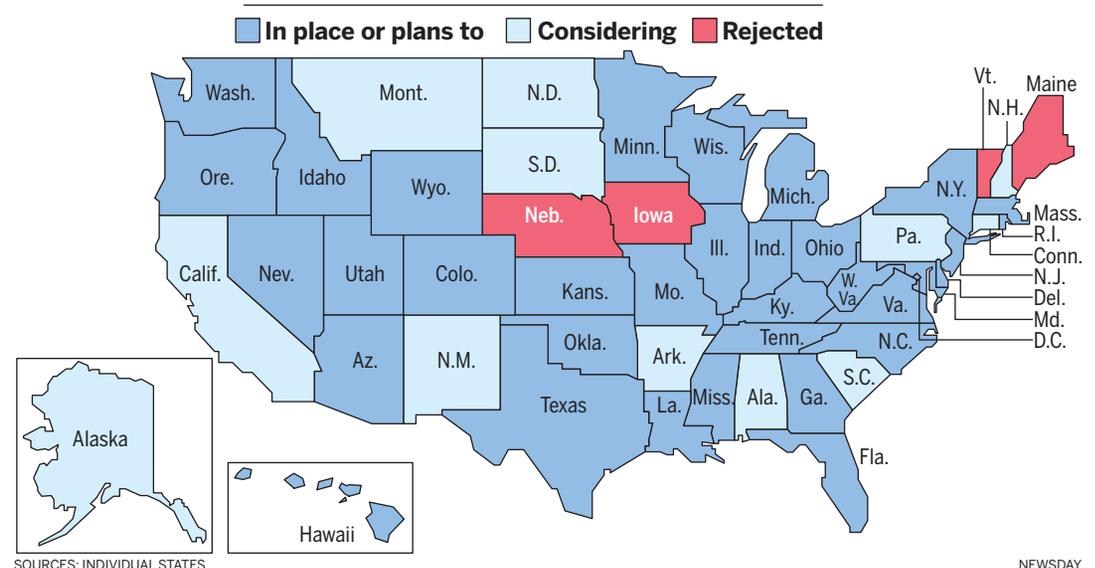
As the concept takes hold nationwide, Kentucky, Ohio, Oregon, Nevada and New Jersey, as well as California, are among those looking at New York's struggle.

"We want to learn from the challenges others might face," said Patrick Gallaway, spokesman for the Ohio Department of Education.

Christine Miles, a spokeswoman for Oregon's education department, said, "New York is getting a lot of attention right now. We're watching."

National trend

This map shows the status of efforts to link teacher evaluations to student performance, which might include student test scores or grades over time. All of the information comes from each state's department of education, except for Wyoming and New Hampshire, where data were provided by the states' teachers' unions.



NOW ONLINE Our interactive map provides a state-by-state guide to teacher evaluation plans. newsday.com/education

Hesitance over concerns

Nichols said California is moving slowly partly because of lingering concerns about linking teacher evaluations to student scores.

"Before we throw the baby out with the bathwater and jump in the rapids, we need to ask several important questions," she said, including whether the concept is "relevant, appropriate and necessary."

Then there's what she called the "common sense" concern about lawsuits.

"Can you imagine the litiga-

tion that would come from the idea that 'Whoa . . . I'm losing my job because a parent didn't send a kid to school, so they don't have good test scores?'" Nichols said. "There is so much the school has no control over in terms of student achievement. We are not willing to jump on the bandwagon to get [grant] money."

Federal officials said they knew the initiative might run into problems, and they're hopeful of a quick resolution in New York.

"The worst thing that could happen is that we lose our

focus and stop paying attention to how we can improve evaluations," said Brad Jupp, senior adviser to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "We are only at the very beginning."

Looking for compromise

More than a dozen states have won Race to the Top funding and have agreed to specific timelines for rolling out new evaluation systems. Many feel pinched to meet their deadlines, said Dennis Van Roekel, president of the National Education Association.

Some schools are judging

Lawmakers debate tracking Rx drugs

BY YANCEY ROY

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THE STATE SENATE MEASURES WOULD:

Tighten the control of hydrocodone and tramadol, effectively eliminating automatic refills and requiring more secure storage at medical facilities.

Increase penalties for physicians and pharmacists who illegally divert prescription drugs, trying to reduce the black market for medications.

Criminalize the illegal sale of a controlled substance to practitioners operating “pill mills” that fuel the black market.

Declare April 28 as “Prescription Drug Take Back Day,” allowing patients to return unused and expired medications.

— YANCEY ROY

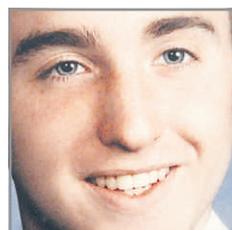
NOW ONLINE

Look for updates on state efforts to tackle prescription drug abuse.

newsday.com/politics



NEWSDAY PHOTO/TED PHILLIPS



Son's fight

Teri Kroll, whose son Tim died of a heart attack after years of addiction, testifies at a hearing in Albany yesterday.

PHOTO BY STEVE POST

teachers based on current exams, even as state tests are to be improved. That's unfair, he said, adding that the country is moving too fast and in the wrong direction.

“I don't know how you look a third-grade teacher in the eye and say, ‘I know the measures we're using aren't accurate, but I'm going to use them anyway to make a high-stakes decision about whether or not you're an effective teacher,’” Roekel said.

Officials in Iowa are concerned about flaws in student data — New York has raised similar concerns — and how they could affect teacher ratings.

“These measures are valuable and important, but they are not perfect,” said Jason Glass, head of that state's Education Department. “They have errors and occasionally produce inaccurate results.”

Tests can't capture all a student knows, Glass said. So Iowa is using student data only to reaffirm what is learned from classroom observations.

“We are intentionally trying to be a square peg in this de-

bate,” Glass said. “We think there is a middle path that is the right one to walk.”

'It will blow up in their face'

Randi Weingarten, head of the American Federation of Teachers, said legislators want to claim they are fixing education, and schools, desperate for money, are rushing to new standards that might not be sound.

“A lot of places will not do it well,” Weingarten said. “They'll do it in the most shorthand way. It will blow up in their face. And a lot of really good people who should be in teaching will just turn around and say, ‘Forget it, I'm not going to do this.’”

Michelle Rhee, the former chancellor of the Washington, D.C., public school system, who gained national attention in 2010 for ousting ineffective teachers and principals by the hundreds, said change is overdue.

“Consecutive years in an ineffective classroom have such a detrimental effect on kids,” Rhee said. “I think the question we ought to be asking is, ‘Are we moving fast enough?’”