

Bills

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themselves in the field. What about the math or science teachers who have been valuable staff members for years?" he said.

"To me, I would prefer to see that \$8,000 reduced to a smaller amount and the rest given to the district to use to retain or reward more veteran teachers, perhaps even use the money to attract a different hard-to-fill position such as music or special education. Each school is in a different situation, and HB1234 does not address the needs of many schools."

At Bon Homme, Superintendent Bryce Knudson would prefer to see local control in using the bonus money.

"Local school districts need to have the option of deciding hard-to-fill areas and to use some of the proposed \$40,000 suggested for new math and science teachers, on existing staff," he said.

"The state must take a more positive, active role in providing for all of our students, staff and districts, and do everything possible to get money into the classrooms to give everyone the tools necessary to improve the student experience and achievement."

If bonus pay is awarded to attract teachers, Avon Superintendent Tom Culver would like to see flexibility in using the money.

"Right now, we are OK," he said. "But if we have teachers leave, we may have trouble finding somebody for certain areas. It could be in a variety of subject areas, not just one."

Culver foresees problems when the bonus money runs out for a beginning teacher.

"You may have a beginning teacher receive \$30,000 to start and reach \$38,000. By the fifth year, then lose the bonus and then

see the salary drop back down to something like \$32,000," he said. "That teacher might then take the five years' experience, with the college debts paid off, and go out of state."

The bonus pay may still not solve the problem of keeping recent graduates in South Dakota, Culver said. A beginning teacher may go directly out of state after graduation for higher salaries, or those in an area such as math or science may enter the private sector and immediately make an additional \$10,000 or \$20,000, he said.

"If you do the math, it doesn't take long to see that \$50,000 a year for a job is a lot better than \$30,000 for a teaching job, even with an \$8,000 bonus," he said. "Over five years' time, that person would make thousands of dollars in additional earnings."

Under another provision of the governor's bill, the three superintendents see problems with identifying the top 20 percent of a teaching staff for a bonus. They point to concerns about dissension among the staff if they are pitted against each other for a bonus.

"This idea may lead teachers away from sharing their best interventions or strategies, because they are pitted against each other for the bonus money," Alvey said. "Education is about teachers collaborating for the best interest of students, and in my opinion, giving bonuses to a select group will interfere with that."

Alvey encouraged giving the money to local school districts to reward all teachers and students when a school shows high achievement. The additional funding could go towards professional development or extra equipment, he said.

Knudson called for more resources to support all teachers so they can grow in their profession and become the best possible teacher.

"The most important resource

we have is investing in our students, but with the low level of funding we are provided, this becomes a very difficult challenge," he said.

In terms of teacher merit pay, Culver said he could argue that his entire teaching staff has received national recognition and ranks among the entire 20 percent in the state.

As far as selecting the top 20 percent of a staff, he sees schools faced with problems such as re-employment and an unwillingness to collaborate on projects.

Culver opposes any efforts to end tenure. He sees teachers needing tenure as protection against retribution for giving out low grades or other unpopular actions in the classroom and in activities.

"Teachers need that security that they can count on," he said.

Not all of the focus is on HB1234. Culver testified Tuesday before legislative committees on SB85 and HB1189, both dealing with open enrollment.

SB85 would take away the small school factor in additional funding for open enrollment students who transfer from larger to smaller schools, which he said would immediately cost Avon \$23,000 annually.

HB1189 would establish deadlines for open enrollment, which he said wouldn't take into account extenuating circumstances such as divorce or bullying where the student wants to open enroll to a smaller school.

If the small-school factor bill passes, Avon will have seen a loss of \$111,000 in state aid during a two-year period, counting both the overall state aid cuts and the loss in open enrollment funding, Culver said.

"We haven't attempted an opt-out yet, and we're trying to avoid it as long as we can," he said. "So far, we have been fortunate in that we don't have to do that."

Alvey is waiting to see the edu-

cation bills in their final form.

"We don't foresee any real changes to the way we do business," he said. "Once we get the final details, we will discuss with our teachers and school board the impact this bill will have on education and we will adjust accordingly."

Knudson sees a more pressing need for increasing the funding in the state aid formula.

"Being the last in the nation in regards to student funding, our teachers continue to work very hard in providing the best they can with the funding received, keeping in mind that the states who are gaining on South Dakota in regards to student achievement are funded at much higher levels," he said.

"As (State Rep.) Bernie Hunhoff so aptly stated, the average of our six neighboring states is much higher than that in South Dakota. Should that not be the goal? South Dakota is so far behind, how can our schools compete with other states in which student funding is a priority? How can post-secondary students be attracted to the teaching profession with average state salaries so much less than other professions?"

The Bon Homme school district, and South Dakota in general, has been fortunate in keeping good teachers, but more funding is needed to keep those teachers, Knudson said.

"The formula needs to be funded to get us back what we lost in the past couple of years and give districts the funding required to continue improving student achievement," he said.

Culver said he felt a deep sense of frustration on his ride home from testifying at the Legislature.

"I think our school board runs a very frugal budget," he said. "But this (funding) issue doesn't get solved in Pierre. These problems just keep getting carried on from year to year."

Neb. Contractor To Stop Managing Child Cases

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — The fourth of five contractors that manage child welfare cases in Nebraska said Tuesday it would quit in March, citing the same shortfall in state funding that led the other private organizations to stop participating in the system.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and KVC Nebraska announced they had agreed to end the contractor's case management services for children who were abused, neglected or suffering from behavioral issues and other problems. The company has handled cases in a 17-county area in southeast Nebraska, plus one-third of the cases in Douglas and Sarpy counties, which encompass Omaha.

The company's withdrawal marks another setback for Nebraska's privatization effort, which has faced criticism amid mounting costs and complaints from some families in the system. It leaves only one lead contractor, Nebraska Families Collaborative, to manage the remaining two-thirds of cases in the Omaha area.

The state has already reclaimed control of case duties on western, central and northern Nebraska, and Gov. Dave Heineman has said he will not try to reinstate private lead-agency services in those areas.

Scot Adams, interim director of the state's child services division, said the state could hire 370 staff members from KVC to take control of the case management duties. But he said the exact number will depend on a possible

deal with Nebraska Families Collaborative, which might supply some of its own workers.

KVC has roughly 490 employees in Nebraska, but will continue work in the state as a private child placement service.

Kerry Winterer, who heads the Department of Health and Human Services, said the split between KVC and the state stemmed from a disagreement over additional money KVC had requested to continue providing services. KVC ran into problems because of higher-than-anticipated costs driven by the number of children in the system, Winterer said.

"They stepped up to a challenge that could not have been fully known at the time, and performed well at substantial cost to their organization," he said.

The loss of another contractor comes as some lawmakers have pushed to reform the statewide privatization effort, which has faltered under financial problems since it began in 2009.

Lawmakers who have sought changes said they weren't surprised by the announcement.

Omaha Sen. Gwen Howard, a former state social worker, said the workload problems prior to privatization stemmed from a lack of state funding. Howard said the privatization effort wasted money that could have been paid for more state-based services for children.

"I've waited to see this day come," said Howard, a Democrat and outspoken critic of the privatization effort. "I knew this was a poor decision in terms of managing children who are wards of the state. This didn't ensure delivery of services, and it cost us far more money for a low-quality product."

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