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## LOUISIANA MAY BE FIRST TO DRAW LINK

Plan ties student success, teacher training

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Louisiana may become the first state in the nation that rates teacher training based on how students fare in the classroom.

The plan, outlined to the Board of Regents on Wednesday, could pinpoint successful programs in the state's 19 public and private schools with education colleges as well as those producing teachers whose students are low achievers.

The change could also make it easier for principals to hire an elementary school teacher, for instance, by reviewing which colleges and universities produced students with high marks in that area.

Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie said Louisiana is already a national leader in its bid to improve teacher training.

"This is really, truly cutting-edge," Savoie said of the latest plans. "It is extremely exciting."

LSU associate psychology Professor George H. Noell, who plays a key role in efforts to link student performance with how schools train teachers, said Louisiana has a massive amount of student achievement data because of recent efforts to improve student performance.

"If we do this, we will be the only state in the union that is linking student performance in the classrooms back to teacher preparation programs," Noell told regents. Experts say teacher quality is the most important issue in shaping student performance.

However, the effort may also spark controversy. Even backers of the effort said there will be criticism that any measuring stick the state adopts -- those decisions have not been made -- is simplistic.

Jayne Fleener, dean of LSU's college of education, said Wednesday the plan is related to national talks on how to ensure new teachers are ready for the classroom.

"It is very controversial," Fleener said.

"You don't want to get into a situation where you tell students that because our success is determined by their success that we don't want them to go into high-risk (teaching) situations," she said.

"Then you start really snowballing them into a situation where some of their very best teachers are being told not to go into the places that need you the most," Fleener said. However, Fleener also said the idea is interesting and she wants to see the data used in Noell's research.

Linking student performance to teacher training is just the latest step since 2001 to overhaul the way teachers are prepared for the classroom.

All 19 schools spent nearly two years redesigning their programs. They addressed national standards for

teachers. All 19 schools are also subject to annual school performance scores and labels even though some have questioned the rigor of those reviews.

Those changes stem mostly from a blue-ribbon commission, which is part of a statewide effort to improve Louisiana's long-troubled public education system.

Noell concluded that developing a state system that links student performance and teacher training is feasible after a yearlong pilot study of test scores from 10 parishes. The review involved about 40,000 students in grades four through nine.

Noell studied how student achievement related to teachers while also accounting for issues like race, poverty, prior achievement and classroom conditions. The review focused on the LEAP exam and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

In one case, Noell said, students with experienced teachers scored 10 or 15 points higher on the English portion of the Louisiana Education Assessment Program than those taught by new teachers from two universities. But in another case, he said, students taught by new teachers from a third university scored five points higher than the veteran teacher on the math part of LEAP, which officials said is highly significant.

Pinpointing teacher preparation methods in that third school could pave the way for similar success stories elsewhere, officials said. Noell declined to identify any of the colleges and universities.

Jeanne Burns, associate commissioner for teacher education initiatives at the Board of Regents, said policy-makers may have enough statewide results in two years to start developing an assessment system. However, exactly how and whether the plan moves from the laboratory to colleges and classrooms is unclear.

Linking student performance with teacher training would likely involve the Board of Regents, which oversee colleges and universities and the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, which oversees about 700,000 public school students. Members of both groups sounded intrigued by the idea during briefings on Wednesday and last week.

Burns said college deans, faculty members and others will be briefed on the effort soon.

College of Education deans at Southern and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette were unavailable for comment or did not return telephone calls Wednesday.