

## Statewide evaluation good for teachers

1:00 am

detroitnews.com



*If done fairly, teachers should be evaluated on student success and growth.*

The council tasked two years ago with creating a model teacher evaluation in Michigan turned in its report this past week. The group of evaluation experts, commissioned by the Legislature in 2011, toiled extensively and their work has been largely met with praise. Overall, the council's recommendations would place the state on much firmer ground when it comes to grading teachers.

And that could open doors to other worthwhile changes, such as rewarding the best teachers with bigger paychecks. In addition, a statewide evaluation could help identify "master" teachers

who excel at the craft and who could help work with struggling colleagues — an idea floated by Gov. Rick Snyder several years ago.

The evaluation recommendations are now in the Legislature, and lawmakers will have to adopt all or parts of the model before schools can start putting the program in place. They should act soon. Those discussions are likely to start this fall, with implementation ideally by fall of 2015.

Michigan-based education advocacy groups Education Trust-Midwest and StudentsFirst have applauded the council's work, as has state Sen. Phil Pavlov, R-St. Clair Township, who chairs the Senate Education Committee.

The idea of improving instruction is the impetus behind the council's recommendations. The Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness, led by Deborah Loewenberg Ball, dean of the University of Michigan School of Education, put together an evaluation system that revolves around improving teachers' craft — not punishing them for shortcomings. "The goal is to improve teaching and learning," Ball says.

That's something Ball has stressed before. She believes teaching isn't an innate ability, but rather a complex skill that requires intense training and practice, much like flying a plane or brain surgery. Ball says the council's evaluation brings "a lot of professional structure" to teaching.

Yet the recommendations still hold teachers more accountable, which was what lawmakers sought to do with their reforms to Michigan's teacher tenure law in 2011. Those reforms brought major changes to how a district could remove an under-performing teacher and made it more difficult to achieve protections of tenure.

A significant part of that law is built around how teachers measure up on annual evaluations. And at least half of the evaluation will depend on student growth in a teacher's classroom. Measuring growth can prove tricky. That's why the Legislature wanted to be sure all school districts used a consistent, fair model. The other half of the evaluation is based on teacher observations.

Right now, nearly every school district is using a different evaluation, which makes district comparisons nearly impossible.

Under current evaluations, nearly every teacher is rated effective or better, pointing to their perfunctory nature.

Lawmakers may run into some problems. For instance, the council's model changed the number of categories for rating teachers and administrators. The recommendations include three categories — professional, provisional and ineffective. That terminology may sound esoteric, but the Legislature made changes to the tenure law based on four categories — highly effective to ineffective. So if lawmakers adopt this change, they'll have to rewrite quite a few portions of the law.

Ball defends the shift to three categories, saying there's not enough room for distinction between four groups, but other experts in evaluation research disagree. That's something lawmakers should examine closely.

Another issue will be money. Implementing a new system will take time and effort. Since the state is requiring this, it seems fair to offer schools additional funds for training administrators. Also, the state should cover the cost of the tool used to measure student growth.

Teacher evaluations are a hot topic, and Michigan has just made huge strides in the development of this model.

- **[Schuette right to defend Detroit pensions](#)**

Schuette filed Monday to intervene in the bankruptcy proceedings on behalf of pensioners.