

News Article
NATIONAL CERTIFIED EDUCATION PERSONNEL

Thank you for your editorial opinion regarding the salary stipends for National Certified Education Professionals. I also read the reply from Commissioner Davis. Hopefully, I can clear up some facts that have been distorted.

In 2000, when our state was at the near bottom of the list of states for quality education, the Legislature agreed that we had too few nationally certified education professionals. (school psychologist, school diagnosticians, speech & language audiologist, social workers and counselors.) Most were being educated in Louisiana and leaving for higher salaries in neighboring states.(approximately \$10-\$15,000). The Legislature offered Nationally Certified Educational Professionals a salary supplement of \$5000 per year with the requirement to increase and retain our numbers. The national certification process is expensive and difficult to attain, demanding at least one masters degree and many hours of teaching experience. Certification has to be updated every three years. Since then their numbers have doubled and they have contributed to the elevation of Louisiana's rise in education excellence.

These educators are masters plus, with specialist degrees or doctorates in special education and related fields such as learning & speech disabilities. They are highly qualified to do student testing, evaluations, educational assessments and interventions. They work in the classroom with the classroom teacher administering to students with special needs, learning and behavioral problems. They evaluate student problems and interact with families outside of the school when necessary. These are the highest level of educated personnel in the school system. Their salaries are based on that of a regular beginning teachers with a BA degree. The \$5000 stipend brings their salaries up even to the Southern Regional Average, as the Legislature did by way of the pay raises in the MFP for regular classroom teachers. Most classroom teachers will tell you that without these teaching professionals they would not be able to teach their class.

Their salary supplements were not protected by the MFP as other national certified teacher's supplements were and in 2009 were subject to being cut. The Legislature, in its wisdom amended the Department of Education's budget in the Appropriations Bill to include the stipends in opposition to Superintendent Pastorek. Additional Federal funds from The American Recovery & Reinvestment Act sent to the state were given to the Department of Education and specifically stated that it could be used for teacher's salaries. Superintendent Pastorek's actions have caused a financial hardship on teachers and the local school systems. The school systems do not have ample surplus to pay the stipend and have already stated that if given a choice they could not and would not pay them. It is now another appropriation process. The 2009-2010 fiscal year is almost gone and he has still not distributed the funds. He is again throwing it back on the local school systems to avoid cutting his budget as the Legislature intended. Superintendent Pastorek selectively chose to proposed National Certified Education Professional's salary supplement be cut from the state budget for 2010-2011.

Our Governor and Legislators have put education first. Why would they allow a superintendent of education whose first responsibility should be to the teachers and students to bypass legislative intent to promote his own ambition. Pastorek publicly stated to the Streamline for Government Commission that, "he sees no evidence where a masters degree has any benefit to either classroom or student." He recently told the Senate Finance Committee that, "he has "extensive" research that shows nationally certified educators are not effective in the classroom." He said in a newspaper telephone interview that, "he doesn't believe it is inappropriate for anyone to come to their Legislators, but I do think the Legislature should be thoughtful about stepping into situations where they've delegated control to others to handle them." In other words, the legislature should stay out of his business. Does he think he has authority over the legislature? I think the legislature would like to see his extensive research and know from where his sources come. Does he not realize that he has insulted the integrity of every university of higher education in our state and nation, not to mention these dedicated professional educators?

We already have an abundance of duplicate programs which do not justify their cost, yet he would rather spend funds available for teacher's salaries on new unproven programs. He owes every student a quality education. Give us the best teachers in the classroom and allow the experienced and qualified national certified teachers and professional educators to help our students achieve their goals.

Bre Noland
Legislative Consultant
Louisiana National Certified Education Professionals Assn.
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Brenoland@AOL.com