

[Home](#) » [News](#) » [Education](#)

 [Education](#)

New teacher rules hitting classrooms

Educators give mixed reviews on revised state license requirements

By [Amy Hetzner](#) of the Journal Sentinel

Posted: June 12, 2010 | [\(25\) Comments](#)

Ten years after Wisconsin overhauled its licensure system for public school educators, the first big wave of teachers is set to advance under the rules - and reports are mixed on whether the change has made a difference.

Expectations for the new licensure regulations were high when they were first approved in 2000. In addition to requiring that teachers pass basic knowledge and skills tests and receive mentors for their first year in the profession, the rules also provided that teachers would have to demonstrate they had grown enough in their careers to attain a "professional" license.

For some beginning teachers, the new rules have been stressful additions to the start of an unfamiliar career with many bugs still left to be worked out. Others say they appreciate that they could set their own teaching goals and pursue related professional development activities while also reflecting on their experiences.

"I think teachers who really take the process seriously and do it with fidelity - they choose a goal that they really believe in and they want to achieve - that's fine, that's good, it serves its purpose," said Judy Gundry, a citywide mentor for educators with initial teaching licenses in Milwaukee Public Schools.

"I think it can be bad if there's someone who's going through motions and not doing anything to improve their practice. And the way it's set up, it's possible not to pursue your goal very rigidly."

Before the new rules, teachers had to receive six college credits to renew their license.

Now, school officials say the process is targeted to individual teachers' needs and involves more oversight.

Teachers with initial licenses are required in the first five years to identify a set of goals they wish to work on from among 10 standards and pursue these goals through a variety of activities. Finally, the teachers have to establish before three-member panels that they have developed professionally under their plans and link that growth to student learning.

License renewal is based on continued professional competence, with the possibility of advancing to a 10-year "master educator" license, namely by receiving certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

"I don't have any quantitative evidence to show that it's making any difference, but I would say that the process itself that includes reflection and a direct connection to student learning is a step in the right direction," said Tanya Kotlowski, director of instructional services for the Kettle Moraine School District in Waukesha County.

But Racine Unified School District Superintendent James Shaw, who in 1999 called the new rules "the most important education reform the Legislature has addressed," said that today he doesn't think the system has done enough to promote the development of master teachers as models for their peers.

The use of student data in helping to identify effective teachers also is conspicuously absent in Wisconsin's licensure process, he said.

"Our practice has been to go into classrooms and make observations about teaching practices," Shaw said. "To me, that's not enough. We need to go to the next step and see what impact are those teaching practices having on the learning of specific kids."

Although the rules were first approved in 2000, the Class of 2005 was the first group of education school graduates hit with the new requirements.

Nearly 3,000 educators on initial licenses are expected to make their move to professional licenses this summer. More than 700 already had been approved and another 700 had sent their paperwork to the state Department of Public Instruction by the end of May. All state licenses issued in 2005 expire on June 30 unless teachers receive extensions.

Erin Chadek, 27, a special education teacher at Edgewood Elementary School in Oak Creek, recently finished the process and is waiting to hear back from the state on whether her application for a professional educator license has been approved.

She said the process was made difficult because few colleagues knew what to do in the new system and because she had to take the initiative to set up her own review panel. For her goal, she chose to incorporate using teaching strategies to reach students who learn in different ways.

She read books, observed teachers and even searched the Internet as part of her plan. In the end, she said she wasn't sure that she learned any more than she would have from taking college classes under the old system.

"To be honest, I don't feel like I benefitted from it a lot," Chadek said.

Heidi Marie Miller, a special education teacher for two MPS alternative high school programs, is still trying to finish up her portfolio before it can go before a review panel. A 12-week maternity leave and a change in assignments once had her questioning whether she would be done this year or need to file an extension.

But she said she found the process rewarding and that it helped improve her job performance.

The best part of the portfolio that she will send to the state, Miller said, is the piece that deals with the

progress her students have made with a new behavioral modification curriculum.

"My strongest evidence is the student data that reflects improved attendance, reduction in behavior incidents .&ensp.&ensp.&ensp and our graduation rates," said Miller, 41, who changed careers seven years ago to become a teacher. "I'm real blessed to work with some amazing students that, if I can supply them with interventions that they can benefit from, then they respond real positively."

Find this article at:

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/96228979.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.