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Riley May Urge U.S. Teacher Licenses

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- In his yearly speech on the state of American schools, Education Secretary Richard Riley will propose a national teacher licensing system to raise the bar on teacher quality, a newspaper reported today.

The plan, to be outlined in the speech to be delivered at California State University, Long Beach, would also tie a teachers' pay to the certification, which could be carried from state to state, USA Today reported in today's editions.

In testimony before congressional education panels last week, Riley offered no specifics about what stick or carrot the federal government might use to get states to follow a national teacher certification plan.

Riley did say that the department's proposals this year for the law governing most education programs would include some way of making sure states adopt tougher, more-relevant teacher exams. He cited a recent department survey of teachers showing that many feel unprepared to teach specific subjects.

"States receiving (federal) funds should adopt challenging competency tests for new teachers, phase out the use of uncertified teachers, and reduce the number of teachers who are teaching 'out of field,'" Riley told a House committee.

The plan would be state-operated and would go as follows:

--New teachers would get a three-year maximum initial license after passing a written exam and an evaluation of classroom performance. Teachers who perform poorly could be fired.

--Other new teachers could get a professional license, provided they meet state standards and win the approval of a panel of teachers and one supervisor.

--Finally, the nation's top-paid teachers would be certified under a voluntary advanced license. Experienced teachers could choose to undergo a tough certification program under the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

States and districts would have to base a teacher's salary on the teacher's type of license, years of teaching experience and demonstrated knowledge and skills valued by the district.

The plan also includes a national job bank to match teachers with school districts. Education officials expect that many new teachers

will be needed in coming years because of the growing number of young students expected from the "baby boom echo."

National Education Association President Bob Chase told the newspaper that he supports Riley's ideas of stricter licensing requirements and tying salaries to tougher state standards. Chase said he believes Riley is not calling for federalization of the teacher licensing process, an idea the NEA opposes.

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