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Teachers who get police training could get extra pay, carry guns

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A proposal that Nevada teachers be allowed to carry concealed weapons garnered a lot of notoriety but little traction among state lawmakers this year. Now comes this idea: Give bonus pay to teachers - from kindergarten to college - who would be trained and armed as reserve school police officers.

Faculty-turned-campus cops would supplement the thin ranks of campus police and be in position to respond quickly to campus emergencies, the two champions of the idea say.

Others worry about allowing teachers to be put in that kind of position.

The idea will be taken up at separate meetings this month by Nevada System of Higher Education regents and the State Board of Education.

The proposal was initiated in June ago by Regent Stavros Anthony, a Metro Police captain, who was thinking in terms of college campuses. State Board of Education member Anthony Ruggiero, an investigator with the state attorney general's office, wants to extend the concept to the state's K-12 teachers as well.

It expands the idea, proposed during the 2007 legislative session by Sen. Bob Beers, R-Las Vegas, that teachers be allowed to carry concealed weapons on campus, provided they had undergone 40 hours of training. The bill died in committee.

To become reserve campus police officers, teachers would have to pass a physical and psychological evaluation, as well as a comprehensive background check. Those who make it through the selection process would have to pay about \$1,190 for classes at the community college's Law Enforcement Training Academy, including "Firearms I & II" "Defensive Tactics/Physical Training" and "Introduction to Juvenile Justice." An additional \$1,000 would be required for the academy uniforms and equipment.

After completing the training, teachers would be responsible for \$1,500 in uniform and equipment costs, although their guns would be provided by the school police department. School districts would then have to pay the auxiliary officers \$3,000 annually.

Ruggiero said he met with School Police officials in Washoe and Clark counties, and he assured them that the reserve officers would be expected to follow the directives, rules and regulations of each individual school district police department.

The idea is a win-win, Ruggiero said: Teachers would have an opportunity for more training and pay,

and schools would solve the perpetual shortage of campus cops.

"Rather than trying to reinvent the wheel, why not use the resources you have in place?" said Ruggiero, who is himself a reserve officer for UNLV's campus police. "I'm sure there are teachers out there that have thought about becoming officers. We shouldn't restrict them. We should train them."

Education officials say so far there are more questions than answers about the proposal.

If a child becomes violent during class, would the teacher-officer be allowed to use more aggressive means of restraint than a regular teacher? In a campus emergency, would the teacher-officer leave his classroom unattended to respond?

"I'm a common-sense guy, but it's hard to wade through this," said John Jasek, executive director of the Clark County Education Association, which represents most of the district's 18,000 teachers. "Right now this isn't passing the initial sniff test."

Clark County Schools Superintendent Walt Rulffes said he would like to see how the proposal plays out at the university level.

"There may be some value in having teachers who want increased security training to receive that training," Rulffes said. "But it's too soon to say whether they should actually be able to carry firearms."

Rulffes said he's not even wholly comfortable with regular school police officers carrying guns, even though he realizes it's a necessary response to the level of violence and criminal activity in the community at large, which often spills onto campuses.

He also wonders whether the program would encourage teachers to leave the classroom in pursuit of better-paying jobs in law enforcement.

Ken Trump, president of National School Safety and Security Services based in Cleveland, said the proposal to turn teachers into reserve officers is misguided.

"Teachers get into education to teach, not to be cops," Trump said. "Teachers are already overwhelmed with all of the academic, behavioral and administrative tasks they have to perform. To say you're going to add a whole other role and mind-set is unrealistic."

Debate about arming teachers surfaces periodically in other states, usually in the wake of a high-profile campus shooting, Trump said.

"Rather than off-the-wall proposals, how about our legislators focus on stopping the cuts to funding for school safety and emergency preparedness, mental health services and support programs," Trump said. "That might actually provide an improved learning environment, instead of trying to make teachers into cops."

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