

BILL AIMS TO ATTRACT TEACHERS

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The Salt Lake Tribune. Salt Lake City, Utah: Jan 19, 2001. pg. A.18

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Gov. Mike Leavitt's vision for boosting Utah's economy through education became more concrete Thursday.

Sen. Lyle Hillyard, R-Logan, introduced a bill that outlines how the state plans to shore up the shortage of math and science teachers in public schools and boost the number of engineering and computer science students in higher education. The bill sets aside \$10.5 million for higher education and \$19 million for public education.

Leavitt says such initiatives are a way to rejuvenate the state's economy.

Hillyard's bill establishes a Public Education Job Enhancement Program to attract and retain "highly qualified" secondary teachers in math, physics, chemistry, physical science and information technology.

In general, currently employed teachers with backgrounds in those fields or who are willing to be trained in those areas would get up to \$20,000 if they promise to teach in Utah for four years.

They would get \$10,000 upfront and \$10,000 at the end of that period. Teachers who don't fulfill that commitment would have to repay some of the money.

The bill creates a Job Enhancement Committee to prioritize critical teaching needs, review applications for the bonuses and award them on a competitive basis. A school district superintendent or a principal would apply for the money.

The committee would include two members from the state Board of Education, two from the Board of Regents and three from the general public.

Most public education groups have signed on to the proposal with one notable exception -- the Utah Education Association, which says it will demoralize teachers in other fields.

"If the bill passed I would be foolish not to take that money," said Barry Lehto, a chemistry teacher at Bingham High School and a union member. "It would be at the expense of English teachers and social studies teachers. I don't think it's fair to them that I would be getting a bonus like that."

Gerald Stringfellow, dean of the University of Utah's engineering school, sympathizes but has a different take. "English teachers are important, there is no question about that. But they don't get hired away," he said.

A supporter of the bill, Stringfellow said, "We really need to put some resources into public education, especially at the junior high and high school levels, to make sure children get the necessary math and science skills" to prepare them for high-tech college programs."

He acknowledged, however, that the bill's call to double Utah's high-tech college graduates in five years is "a tall order."

The bill pledges \$5 million toward faculty recruitment, which would be matched by internal funds shifted within the nine public institutions. It also sets aside \$550,000 to establish new high-tech degree programs and a one-time appropriation of \$4.2 million for equipment.