

Senate Education Committee

Peter Mulvey 271-4063

SB 217-FN-A, establishing a rural and underserved area educator incentive program for higher education and making an appropriation therefor.

Hearing Date: February 14, 2023

Time Opened: 9:00 a.m.

Time Closed: 9:22 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Ward, Gendreau, Lang, Prentiss and Fenton

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill establishes the rural and underserved area educator incentive program and makes an appropriation therefor.

Sponsors:

Sen. Fenton

Sen. Whitley

Sen. Innis

Sen. Rosenwald

Sen. Soucy

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Sen. Watters

Sen. Chandley

Rep. Cordelli

Rep. Myler

Rep. Cornell

Rep. Wheeler

Who supports the bill: 91 individuals signed in-support for SB 217-FN. For a complete copy of the sign-in sheet, contact Legislative Aide Pete D. Mulvey (peter.mulvey@leg.state.nh.us).

Who opposes the bill: 6 individuals signed in-opposition for SB 217-FN. For a complete copy of the sign-in sheet, contact Legislative Aide Pete D. Mulvey (peter.mulvey@leg.state.nh.us).

Who is neutral on the bill: None.

Summary of testimony presented:

Senator Donovan Fenton

NH Senate District 10

- SB 217-FN-A was written to establish a rural educator incentive program, providing a subsequent appropriation.
- Sen. Fenton reported that there were currently 104 rural school districts in the state which had found difficulty in recruiting and retaining teaching staff.

- The program being established by SB 217-FN-A was comparable to preexisting policy which offered incentives for health care workers to find employment in under-served areas.
- The rural educator incentive program originated from The Committee to Study New Hampshire Teacher Shortages and Recruitment Incentives.
- Sen. Fenton added that similar legislation had been passed in Idaho, among other states in the Union.
- The incentive described was a repayment of outstanding loans in return for commitment to a particular school or district.

Megan Tuttle and Brian Hawkins

NEA-NH

- NEA NH is composed of over 17,000 K-12 educators across the state.
- NEA NH was in firm support of SB 217-FN-A.
- Ms. Tuttle noted that the educator shortage in New Hampshire predated the pandemic, although the protracted event exacerbated the crisis by magnitudes.
- New Hampshire must compete with its neighbors for labor.
- Idaho passed a law comparable to SB 217-FN-A during its 2022 session, subsequently receiving 764 grant applicants in its first year.
- SB 217-FN-A could distribute potentially \$12,000 over a four-year period for educators.
- In New Hampshire, the median starting salary for a teacher with a bachelor's degree was \$40,000. A master's degree produced a marginal improvement for income.
- Importantly, Ms. Tuttle clarified that figures varied from district-to-district.
- According to data collected in 2021, the lowest starting figures in the state were approximately \$30,000.
- Ms. Tuttle utilized those income metrics to underscore the imperativeness of the grant.
- Barriers to entry ought to be lowered in order to mitigate the shortage.
- Nearly half of all educators took out student loans to finance their degree according to NEA. On average those borrowers still owed \$58,700.
- The Division of Public Health under DHHS established a successful loan repayment program for those in the medical field being employed in under-served areas. NEA proposed that as a proof-of-concept, considering it to be evidence for the efficacy of this kind of aid.
- Although American Rescue Plan Act funds facilitated the aforementioned DPH program, Ms. Tuttle believed state funding to be all that is necessary to sustain the program detailed in SB 217-FN-A.
- Ms. Tuttle referenced that the city of Keene had done this before, and gave \$1,500 to educators for their first five years of employment.

- Sen. Lang asked Ms. Tuttle to produce a map detailing what areas qualified as rural.
 - Mr. Hawkins of NEA NH offered a map from DPH, which was also the source for the definition for rural used in the SB 217-FN-A.
- Sen. Lang observed two different definitions in SB 217-FN-A:
 - One being fewer than 20 students enrolled per square mile in the district's boundaries, and the other being the DPH definition.
- Sen. Lang wanted to know what percentage of the state's landmass was eligible considering the two definitions.
 - Mr. Hawkins responded by stating that Title 1 would detail the communities eligible. Mr. Hawkins offered to produce the document in question. Further, Mr. Hawkins added that Idaho utilized a rubric to determine need and priority for those considered eligible.
- Sen. Prentiss asked Sen. Fenton if the appropriation detailed in SB 217's fiscal note was brought forward by the Department of Education as a priority for the biennial budget.
 - Sen. Fenton deferred the inquiry, indicating that he was uncertain of the answer.
- Sen. Ward commented that SB 217-FN-A was the result of a preliminary study from the Committee to Study New Hampshire Teacher Shortages and Recruitment Incentives. Sen. Ward alluded that more reports may detail factors affecting retention of educators aside from salary structure.
- Sen. Lang asked Ms. Tuttle and Mr. Hawkins if they could submit the document detailing salaries across districts.
 - Ms. Tuttle stated she would submit the document to be copied and distributed amongst the committee.

Dr. Jay Kahn

Former NH Senator

- Dr. Kahn affirmed his support for SB 217-FN-A.
- Dr. Kahn was chair of the Committee to Study New Hampshire Teacher Shortages and Recruitment Incentives and served alongside Sen. Ward.
- Some preliminary observations were made by the committee:
 - There were chronic shortage areas in the state. Particularly in the fields of science and mathematics.
 - There were approximately 1,000 vacancies in the state for para educator and special educator positions.
 - Rural areas, where there were smaller enrollments and fewer courses, required instructors to be shared among courses and institutions, and additionally required said instructors to hold multiple certifications.

- Teacher turnover rates were highest in low paying districts, with lower student performance recorded as well.
- Lower performing districts usually neighbored wealthy areas- which in turn siphoned the labor away.
- Dr. Kahn attested that the Commission to Study School funding found a positive correlation between performance and the magnitude of wealth for any given district.
- Retirements rates rose in the pandemic. Accordingly, student loan repayments had been utilized to retain and attract talent in order to mitigate the shift in the labor market.
- The criteria necessary for these grants were adapted from other rural states.
- Dr. Kahn expressed that these criteria served a purpose beyond the educator incentive program, namely transportation.
- Dr. Kahn asserted that the state needed a replacement measure for economically disadvantaged school districts, believing merely subsidized lunches to be insufficient.
- Dr. Kahn suggested that eligibility could further be based on federal Title 1 funding. Dr. Kahn supported the idea of using federal Title 1 funding information as an additional measure for economically disadvantaged schools.
- The state had already established a pattern of allocating extra funding to disadvantaged school districts in the past two biennial budgets. Dr. Kahn specifically referenced the extraordinary need grants and disparity grants.
- A Dec. 2022 Education Commission of the States report determined 37 states had at least one scholarship program for teachers who committed to instructing in under-served areas.
- According to the same report referenced by Dr. Kahn, 25 states had loan forgiveness programs for recruitment in under-served areas.
- The described programs were what the state of New Hampshire had to compete against for recruitment.
- Dr. Kahn shared his belief that SB 217-FN-A would provide a sufficient avenue for the state to direct funding to public schools for greater performance.
- Many vacant positions were filled with conditionally licensed instructors. SB 217-FN-A would supplant those conditionally qualified individuals with bona fide, properly certified individuals.
- Sen. Lang asked if the state would be stepping on the toes of teachers unions by mandating something that was typically a contractual provision under the purview of the union.
 - Dr. Kahn conceded that SB 217-FN-A did, to some degree, determine how funds ought to be directed yet said the program was a tool for professional development which existed in half of the country.
- Sen. Lang brought up Newfoundland district, whose teacher union provided \$1,300 of loan repayment annually. Sen. Lang reiterated his concern towards the state taking contract items and altering them with indifference to the union.

- Dr. Kahn offered a distinction between professional development and loan repayment, and suggested that the program was appropriate for school districts to incorporate.

PM

Date Hearing Report completed: February 17, 2023