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Three education bills OK'd by Senate



Joe Pyrah - DAILY HERALD

A trio of high-profile education bills got cooking Tuesday after a three-day stint on the back burner.

Year-round school, a \$5,000 raise for math and science teachers, and the creation of a math and science task force easily cleared the Senate on their way to the House after a few amendments.

All three are sponsored by Sen. Howard Stephenson, R-Draper, who has campaigned ceaselessly for improving math and science in the state. Of concern in the teacher salary bill was what would qualify a teacher for the raise and whether a teacher with only one class would get the same pay as those teaching math all day long.

Senate Bill 35 now includes language that ensures a teacher must have either a college degree specializing in those areas "or a course work equivalent of a major in the subject taught."

Sen. Karen Mayne, D-West Valley City, and other Democrats objected to singling out teachers in a specific subject, suggesting that teachers in elementary schools would jump to high school to get the raise, leaving behind a hole.

"If I was an excellent math teacher in the lower skill level, I would think 'Boy, I want to jump up there and get that \$5,000.' "

Stephenson's Senate Bill 41 to open up year-round school options was better received. It sets up a pilot program to test the demand for school during the summer, when students can go to school to get ahead or catch up, and teachers could expect a 40 percent bump in pay if they stay on.

"I believe that we can no longer stay in the 19th century," Stephenson said, and provide "reasonable salary for all our teachers, including P.E. teachers."

He had previously maligned P.E. teachers when comparing them to math teachers who deserve high pay.

The pilot program would set aside \$32 million for three school districts of varying sizes to gauge teacher/student interest and discover the cost of keeping schools open year-round.

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One issue would be the summer heat. Most schools are not equipped with air conditioners and would likely need something to make working in them bearable.

Senate Bill 39 creates a math and science task force to explore teaching methods and review standards.

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