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The Salt Lake Tribune

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Teacher pay: Legislature should give across-the-board raises

Tribune Editorial

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The legislative bills on teacher pay dance all around that ugly elephant sitting in the state's kitchen: *all* Utah teachers are shamefully underpaid, and we face a critical teacher shortage because of it.

There are at least four bills making their way through the House and Senate. Two - Senate Bill 35, sponsored by Sen. Howard Stephenson, R-Draper, and House Bill 270, sponsored by Rep. Ron Bigelow, R-West Valley City - are aimed at increasing pay for teachers in math and science. That's all well and good - for math and science teachers. But what about English, history and music teachers? And those dedicated souls who teach kindergartners or who are trained in special education, other areas facing critical shortages?

Legislators are considering a meager across-the-board raise, but hardly enough to stanch the exodus of teachers or attract new ones.

SB35 would give full-time math and science teachers a \$5,000 annual pay boost; HB270 would create Utah Science Technology and Research Initiative (USTAR) Centers where math and science would be taught during the summer. Bigelow's bill has the added benefit of letting gifted math and science students progress faster through the curriculum, but does nothing for teachers in other subject areas. And neither would provide enough of a salary boost to entice college math and science graduates to choose teaching in Utah over work in the private sector.

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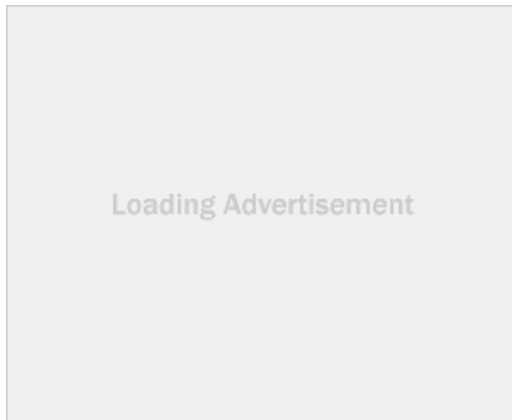
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House Bill 67, sponsored by Rep. Ronda Rudd Menlove, R-Garland, would provide \$2,000 each to special ed teachers who work an additional 10 days per year doing the mounds of paperwork required by federal and state laws. That's sensible enough, but, again, Menlove's bill would help only a small number of Utah teachers and likely wouldn't be enough to lure special ed teachers to Utah or get them to stay.

Another of Stephenson's bills, Senate Bill 41, takes a more innovative approach to boosting pay for all teachers - eventually. But it would have no immediate effect, and so would do little to stop the bleeding. His idea is to provide financial incentives to three districts that come up with the best plans to implement extended annual school schedules, and, in doing so, increase teacher salaries by 40 percent.

Utah pays its teachers among the lowest salaries in the nation. Legislators should act now to remedy that disparity - for all teachers.

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