

QUALIFYING OUR TEACHERS

Three-tier licensure system now makes sense

VANGE PERRYMAN
NEWS-SUN

When the state's three-tier licensure system was first introduced, Hobbs assistant superintendent for personnel Pam McBee had her doubts about the process.

But these days she finds herself singing a different tune.

"I was fighting this tooth to toenail," McBee said. "Now I see that this is the right thing to do for teachers and our kids."

The system was not really new as the state had been tossing around "teacher quality initiatives" since 1998.

Some of those initiatives became the backbone for the creation of the three-tiered licensure that Gov. Bill Richardson and the Legislature passed in April 2003, according to documents from the New Mexico Public

Education Department.

The plan calls for teachers to be "highly qualified" through a tier system, or levels. A Level 1, beginning teacher starts at \$30,000 and has three years to move to a Level 2 teacher. In those three years, a Level 1 teacher must achieve positive annual evaluations, have been mentored, have teaching assignment verification and endorsements before applying for the Level 2 license.

A Level 1 teacher must also complete a Professional Development Dossier or work portfolio.

"These are incredibly detailed and require a lot of effort," McBee said. "I think it helps teachers realize best practices and how to incorporate them into their classrooms."

The PDD has several elements or "strands" that must be completed and satisfactory to

reviewers in order to be issued a Level 2 license. Teachers must finish the PDD and submit it within three months of completing their third year of teaching.

If the teacher fails to gain a Level 2 license then they lose their teaching license, according to the state law.

Recently a bill passed in the N.M. Senate to allow Level 1 teachers four years before having to apply for a Level 2 license.

"I think even one more year will make a difference for new teachers and could also help current Level 1 teachers have more time to finish all the requirements," said Sen. Gay Kernan, R-Hobbs.

Once a teacher has reached Level 2, in 2004-05 they should earn minimum of \$35,000 a contract year and in 2005-06 they should be making \$40,000 a contract year.

To advance to a Level 3 "master teacher" a Level 2 teacher must have taught at that level for three years. They must complete either their master's degree or the National Boards for Professional Teaching Standards. They must also have met positive evaluations and have district recommendation.

It is not required that a teacher become a Level 3 teacher. They can remain a Level 2 teacher throughout the remainder of their career.

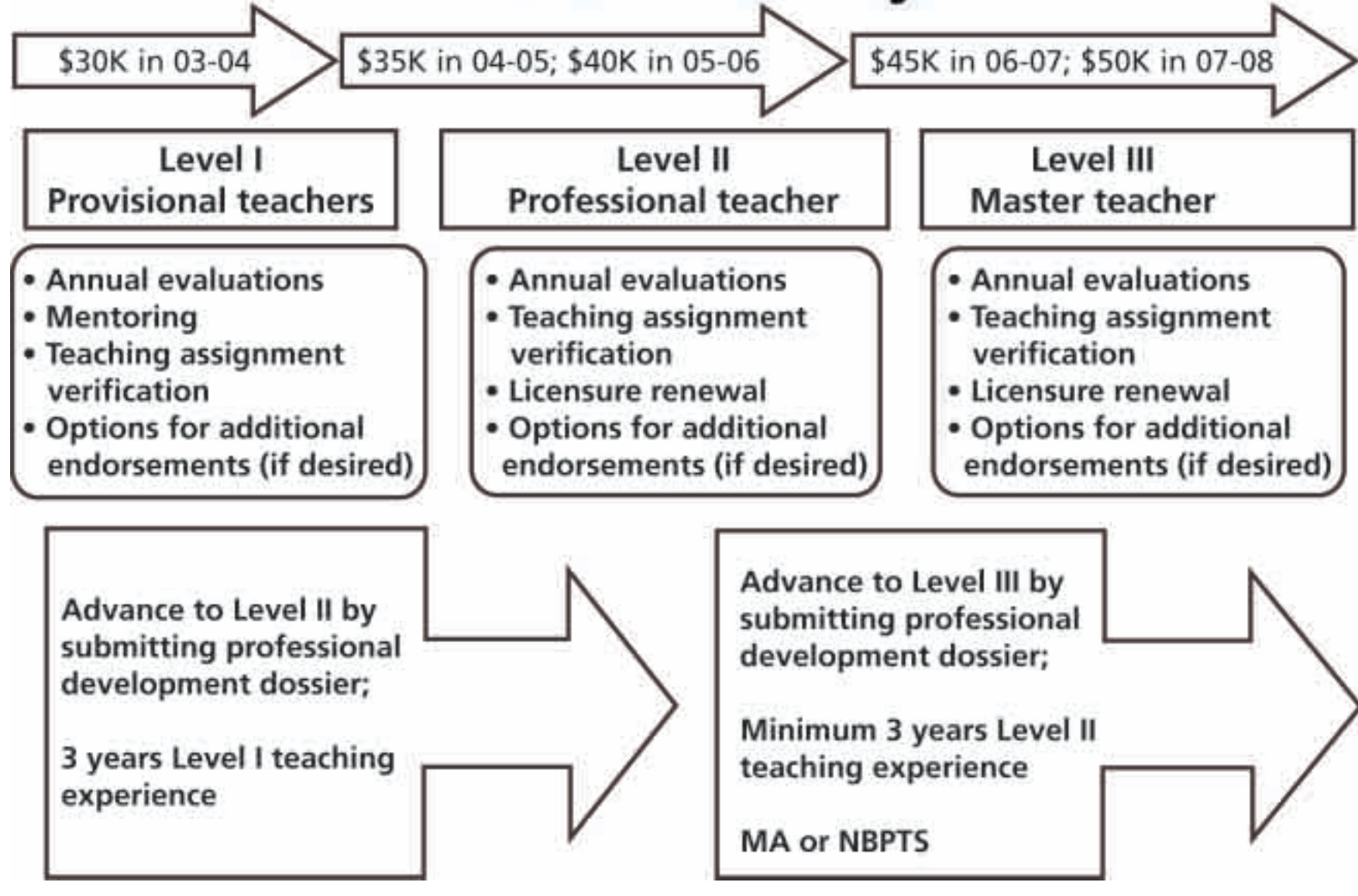
A Level 3 teacher in 2006-07 should make a minimum of \$45,000 a contract year and make a minimum of \$50,000 in 2007-08.

"Not everyone is going to be a master teacher," McBee said. "But our highly qualified teachers are going to be the best because of this process. Is it a lot of work? You betcha. But it will pay off and get us as close as we can get to leaving no child behind."

"I was fighting this tooth to toenail. Now I see that this is the right thing to do for teachers and our kids."

*- Pam McBee
Hobbs assistant superintendent for personnel*

An Overview of Key Elements of NM's 3-Tiered Licensure System



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