

THE PLAIN DEALER

With collective bargaining law in place, Ohio teachers already cutting pay, according to study

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By Joe Guillen

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Wages paid to Ohio's teachers dropped nearly 4 percent in recent years while teachers across the country saw pay increases, according to a new study that criticizes a Republican-backed effort to weaken public workers' collective bargaining rights.

Innovation Ohio, a new left-leaning think tank, also found that student achievement suffers in states where teachers are not required to collectively bargain their contracts.

"If teachers are already agreeing to the kind of reforms we need to improve the system and student performance, there is no compelling reason to repeal or weaken a law that has been in place since the Reagan administration," Dale Butland, spokesman for Innovation Ohio, said.

Innovation Ohio officially launched today with the release of its analysis of education and Ohio's collective bargaining law. Janetta King, a deputy chief of staff for policy under former Democratic Governor Ted Strickland, is the organization's president. Former State Rep. Stephen Dyer, a Democrat from the Akron area, was a primary author of the analysis.

As a nonprofit, Innovation Ohio is not required to disclose its funding sources, and King said the group will keep its donors confidential.

A plan to limit public workers' collective bargaining rights — proposed by Sen. Shannon Jones and supported by Gov. John Kasich, both Republicans — has drawn intense opposition from unions and Democrats. Thousands are expected to protest the bill during a Senate hearing on Tuesday. While Innovation Ohio questioned the economic benefit of Senate Bill 5, Kasich's administration recently projected the bill could save state and local governments more than \$1.3 billion. Republicans have argued the bill is needed to give governments more power at the bargaining table so officials can cope with tightening budgets. Labor groups and Democrats say the plan is an attack on the middle class and a political strike aimed at labor, a traditional Democratic base.

The Ohio Department of Administrative Services' Office of Collective Bargaining released an analysis on Friday that showed state government would have saved about \$217 million and local governments, including cities and school boards, would have saved more than \$1.1 billion if the provisions of Senate Bill 5 were in place during the most recent 12 months that ended on June 30.

The study examined three provisions of Senate Bill 5: a mandate that government workers pay 20 percent of their health premiums; the elimination of step pay increases; and the elimination of longevity pay, which entitles state workers to a 0.5 percent annual pay increase after five years of employment.

The accuracy of the study, however, was immediately questioned.

King said the report contained false statements about pay increases to state workers. Dyer pointed out the study included payroll costs for both union and nonunion state workers.

"There seemed to be some problems with that analysis," Dyer said.

Pieter Wykoff, a spokesman for the Department of Administrative Services, said conservative estimates were used for local governments because the department did not have detailed data for local governments' payrolls.

"We have real numbers for the state," Wykoff said. "We don't have real numbers for the locals." Innovation Ohio did not reach specific conclusions about the economic impact of Senate Bill 5. It found Ohio's teachers, on average, saw a pay cut of 4 percent in 2008-2009. The national average over that time was a 2 percent increase, according to Innovation Ohio.

Innovation Ohio also found teachers' collective bargaining rights coincide with student achievement. The 13 highest-achieving states all require collectively bargained contracts for teachers, the group concluded using student achievement rankings in the publication Education Week.

Conversely, seven of the 10 lowest-ranked states in student achievement had laws that either ban or do not require collective bargaining for teachers.

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