

Aaron Estabrook  
Vice President  
USD 383 Manhattan-Ogden

Testimony for “Merit-Pay”  
Informational Meeting  
January 19<sup>th</sup> 2016

Honorable Members of this committee:

As a US Army Combat Veteran, field promoted to NCO (Sergeant) in the theater of the Afghanistan War, I know what it means to need to have a strong “esprit de corps” or morale when you are moving toward a target and being attacked by all sides all day. Like Soldiers, Teachers are Public Servants. You need to hear that again. Like Soldiers, Teachers volunteer to be paid public servants. It’s highly important for you to treat public servants with respect and its highly necessary for you to not knowingly create rifts that unbind the value of public service to a point where money is the determining factor for the majority to show up for work rather than the passion and love for teaching students.

Merit-pay unbinds this invisible force that some refer to as a “calling” to teach. It creates doubt, suspicion, and ass kissers. It creates more losers than winners and no where do we have research that it works.

This is a BAD idea. Keep the control of incentivizing great work Local! We know at the local level when we see great teaching and it rarely has anything to do with a test score. We find ways to recognize that work and if you fully funded education we could recognize that work through salary increases as well.

Please read the following from *John H. Wilson, a professor emeritus at the College of Education at Wichita State University*.

Gov. Sam Brownback demonstrated his notable ignorance about the complicated nature of classroom teaching as he called for [merit increases](#) in compensation based upon the performance of a teacher’s students.

Educators had heretofore assumed that the governor simply misunderstood the relative importance of effective public schools to our society. Now Brownback is even more convincing about his general misunderstanding of our public schools’ mission and the role of classroom teachers.

Let me present a brief scenario that should point out how a “merit pay” process cannot accurately identify excellence in teaching.

Let's consider two classroom teachers at the same grade level within the same school district, at a similar level of academic preparation, and with identical years' experience.

Teacher A enjoys a class with 25 students, the same number as Teacher B. Within A's class are a majority of students working at or above grade level in readiness, coming from homes in which parents regularly communicate with the teacher about their children's schoolwork, and with ready access to electronic machinery that supplements the curriculum. A's class has two special-needs learners, each with a part-time paraeducator. His school is blessed with a media-specialist/librarian, a half-time school counselor, an assistant principal, a part-time nurse, and an active parent-teacher association that provides lay tutoring and monetary support for enrichment supplies. The building principal is omnipresent and available for consultation and the dispensing of her expertise in curriculum, instruction and classroom management.

Teacher B learns early in the school year that her students' stages of readiness vary from two years below to two years above grade level – more typical than A's class cited above. Her class includes five special-needs students, but only one paraeducator to share support with instruction. To her dismay, it becomes apparent to her upon communicating with the students' parents that most consider their children's education the full responsibility of the teacher. A plea for parental involvement or supplementary material aid produces minimal help, even some resentment. The library/media center is underdeveloped, a nurse comes once a week for emergencies, and the parent-teacher association is defunct. Being a smaller school, it has no assistant principal, and the building principal's energies and talents are stretched thin by demands.

How could one justify the awarding of greater or lesser compensation based upon the test-score performance of the students in the classes taught by Teacher A versus Teacher B?

With this proposal, the governor has once again communicated a message to our public schools that clearly underscores an attitude bordering on scorn. This is a proud profession that deserves far more respect and encouragement.