



Testimony to the House Education Committee  
Merit Pay for Teachers Informational Meeting  
January 19, 2016  
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Chairman Highland and members of the committee,

I am testifying today in support of the concept of merit pay for teachers. Prior to joining Kansas Policy Institute, I was an elementary teacher for 20 years, 17 of those here in Kansas. Something that has become crystal clear to me is that not all teaching positions are the same and certainly not all teachers are equally effective. In this aspect teaching is like other professions. Not all lawyers, architects or engineers have the same roles and responsibilities nor are they equally effective, and they certainly are not all paid the same. A system that includes teacher merit pay would recognize the differences among those in the teaching profession. We all realize that the most important factor in a child's education is the teacher. It follows logically that teacher compensation be designed to recruit and retain the highest-quality educators. Merit pay is one means to that end.

The current system is a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to recognize differences among teachers and teaching assignments. Teachers don't make widgets, they don't work on an assembly line. It makes no sense that they get paid as if they do. Merit pay for teachers is an issue that has broad support across the political spectrum from President Obama and the Center for American Progress to the Heritage Foundation and the Manhattan Institute.

There are two important things that need to change to have an effective merit pay system:

- The matrix system of paying teachers needs to be replaced. The current practice only values inputs to the system – years of experience and education level. This has led to the cliché that the “more experienced” and “higher educated” teachers are more effective, thus they get paid more. Unfortunately, the data doesn't bear that out. Research by the Center for Education Compensation Reform, a group funded by the U.S. Department of Education found that years of experience and educational attainment had no impact on student achievement.
- Teacher evaluations must be changed to recognize and reflect the differences among varieties of teaching assignments. Again, the typical one-size-fits-all approach to evaluating teachers has a widget-like assumption. Essential to this point is that it is imperative building principals and others who may evaluate teachers have the requisite skills to set goals, monitor and measure progress, and make objective judgments of teacher performance.

Merit pay would also provide a new incentive to teachers, whom heretofore have not experienced compensation tied to performance.

Ultimately, it becomes a matter of trust. We should have faith in our local school boards and their appointed administrators to recognize teacher quality and assume the responsibility to reward it.



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Kansas is one of only a handful of states that does not have any kind of a state-sponsored merit pay initiative. It's time we join the rest of the country.

Thank you for your time.

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