

Representative Highland,

I wanted to voice my objections to the concept of merit pay. I've been a high school teacher for the last 17 years. I have been nominated for many teaching awards, both locally, within the state and nationally and I pride myself on preparing engaging lessons EVERY DAY. My students receive timely feedback on formative and summative assessments, and data drives what and how I teach. I work many hours a week outside of my contract time to be exceptional at my job and even have a second part-time job to supplement my income.

Now, I've seen a lot of teachers in my time who get paid on the same scale as I do, but do half the amount of work. They might have one course they teach (while I have had up to 5 different courses in one year), they arrive every day when the contract begins and leave the minute it ends and never take anything home. It IS frustrating to be paid the same, BUT it's better for the students this way. Let me explain.

One thing that I think people outside of the education field fail to realize is how collaborative teaching is. I'm the only one in my building who teaches the courses I teach, but for example the US history teachers work together each day to collaboratively plan lessons so all students are getting the same/similar experiences. With merit pay, I fear that the collaboration that teachers do will turn to competition with everyone holding their ideas, resources and assessments close to their chests. This will be terrible for the students. What collaboration does for the weaker teachers is provides them with samples of the right way to do things, it ensures that ALL students have access to best practices and equalizes the instruction so that one teacher's class isn't easy while another teacher is pushing for excellence.

I asked my advanced placement psychology students what they thought about merit pay. While the students agreed that teachers should get paid more, they were bothered by the idea that test scores, the course one teaches or other factors that may really have nothing to do with the teacher would be factors in deciding salary. Some of the questions they asked:

- A lot of students don't do well on the tests because there's nothing in it for them. If students LIKE their teachers and they know the teacher's salary is tied to it they MAY try, but what if the kids don't show up that day or they don't try?
- People who are math minded do well in math, so why would math be a harder class for a teacher to teach if it's something of interest to them?
- Who gets to decide what "merit" means?
- What if the principal likes another teacher more and decides to give them more pay than someone who is truly a better teacher?
- If a teacher has all students who are lower in skill level, that would be harder to teach student-wise than someone who has all advanced students which is harder to teach because of the level of knowledge the teacher needs, how do they decide who is more deserving because the test scores couldn't be close to comparable?

- If one teacher earning more money means that there is less for everyone else, why would any teachers share any of their materials? Teachers are better when they work with other people who teach their same subject.

Teachers who are motivated to earn additional graduate hours or work on outside professional development projects have the opportunity to earn higher salaries. While I'd love to be paid what I'm worth (which I'm not sure what that is anymore) and quit my part time job, but an environment where teachers are competing instead of collaborating is bad for the students.

Respectfully,

--

Jennifer Schlicht
Olathe