



**KANSAS ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL BOARDS**

Serving Educational Leaders, Inspiring Student Success

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Testimony before the
House Education Committee
on
Informational Hearing on Teacher Merit Pay

by

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the issue of merit pay. KASB members, at our Delegate Assembly meeting December 6 of last year, voted to adopt the following positions:

1. Professional Negotiations Act

KASB supports the current professional negotiations act as amended by the 2015 Legislature.

This means our members support the changes in the Professional Negotiations Act passed last session, and do not support any further changes to that law. In addition, delegates amended the following policy by adding the last sentence:

2. Performance Criteria for Teacher Compensation

Boards of education should have authority to deal with issues such as merit pay and differentiated staffing outside the professional negotiations process. Any plans for merit pay and differentiated staffing should be locally devised and not mandated by state legislation as part of the school finance plan or otherwise.

Our members have indicated current law should and does provide ways for boards to provide performance-based compensation to teachers, and the state should not attempt to impose such policies on districts.

There are several ways local school boards and administrators can pursue performance-based pay under current state law.

- Boards can negotiate such provisions through the regular collective bargaining process in the Professional Negotiations Act.
- Under that law, boards have the final authority to offer unilateral contracts to teachers if negotiations fail.
- Under current law, boards may provide performance bonuses without going through the negotiations process.
- Boards may seek “innovative district” status under state law, which would exempt them from the requirements of negotiations in order to set compensation. If school boards and the communities that elect them wish to pursue more performance-based compensation, the means to do so are available.

Although these options are available, such efforts seem to be relatively rare. We can offer some reasons why this is the case, not because of statements adopted by our members but based on observations of district practices, involvement in the negotiations process and conversations with our members.

Many school board members who are elected with a background in the private sector probably begin with an idea that “it just makes sense” to try to link compensation to performance as a reward, encouragement or both. That concept also appears to be generally popular with the public - although it is far from universal. Two recent public polls have asked questions about teacher pay and performance. Last year’s annual PDK Gallup poll on public education found that over 80 percent of respondents said evaluating a teacher’s performance in the classroom was very or somewhat important for using performance to determine salaries or bonuses. However, the polls did not specifically ask if respondents actually supported performance to determine pay.

From [2014 PDK Gallup Poll](#) (Second part):

TABLE 7. In your opinion, how important is each of the following reasons for evaluating a teacher’s performance in the classroom — very important, somewhat important, not very important, not at all important? How about:

7B. Using teacher performance to determine salaries or bonuses.

	National totals '14 %	Public school parents '14 %	Rep. '14 %	Dem. '14 %	Ind. '14 %
Very important	46	43	51	41	44
Somewhat important	36	38	34	39	35
Not very important	13	15	12	16	13
Not at all important	5	4	4	4	7

This year’s [2015 Education Next](#) survey did ask specifically if respondents favored or opposed basing salaries in part on student learning. A bare majority of all respondents - 51 percent - completely or

somewhat favored, with 35 percent opposing and 16 percent neither favoring nor opposing. However 75 percent of teachers were opposed.

27. Do you favor or oppose basing part of the salaries of teachers on how much their students learn?

	Public	Parents	Teachers	African Americans	Hispanics	Whites
Completely Favor	15%	18%	3%	11%	17%	14%
Somewhat Favor	36	32	16	33	35	38
Somewhat Oppose	21	21	28	25	15	22
Completely Oppose	13	15	47	12	14	13
Neither Favor nor Oppose	16	14	6	20	20	13

However, actually applying performance concepts to teacher pay becomes much more difficult for the following reasons:

- Most boards want a collaborative relationship with teachers. If teachers, through their designated representatives, oppose performance pay, most boards are hesitant to try to force through policies their employees seem to oppose.
- School boards must consider the impact of compensation policies on all teachers (and staff). The most common reason for linking pay to better performance is the idea that if they reward something, you get more of it. However, if merit pay only rewards teachers who are already high performers (by some measures) and has no impact on other teachers - or even contributes to lower morale for other teachers - district leadership may conclude the overall impact of a merit pay system would not be positive.
- There is no clear consensus on how performance pay should be determined. Almost everyone has an idea about what makes a great teacher, and remembers their own “best” teachers. However, that doesn’t mean everyone would agree on who those “best” teachers are. To evaluate schools, we often use indicators like test scores, but there seems to be growing agreement test scores provide a very limited view of student success. Furthermore, only a limited number of teachers could be evaluated using the same set of tests. Without a common set of benchmarks, it is challenging to measure performance in a way that both employees and public could trust.
- In the private sector, higher performance can usually be translated into something that results in higher revenue or results - which in turns, allows higher compensation. In public education, however, higher performance does not result in more revenue to the system. As a result, compensation is a “zero sum game.” Paying some teachers more means less for everyone else. That is particularly true when school district operating funds are actually declining when compared to inflation.

KASB is not aware of any research-based consensus that pays for performance improves overall results. Nor are we aware of any research that shows the opposite. For the reasons listed above, teacher merit pay has rarely been attempted; therefore it is difficult to draw conclusions about what it would really mean for public schools.

As noted above, KASB would oppose a merit pay “requirement” as part of a school finance plan or otherwise. That does not mean, however, there is no role for the state to play in exploring whether a performance pay concept could be adopted and have a positive impact on student success. For example:

- The Governor and Legislature could encourage education organizations to address this issue on a collaborative basis. Two years ago, the Chairman of the House Commerce Committee asked KASB, Kansas National Education Association, United School Administrators of Kansas and the Kansas School Superintendents Association to seek a common position on the changes in the Professional Negotiations Act. The result was a compromise bill that passed last session with overwhelming, bipartisan support.
- The Legislature could restore funding for the program, created in 2000, that allows local school boards to pay \$1,000 annual bonus to teachers who receive national board certification. Under the law, boards are to be reimbursed by the state, but such funding was eliminated by budget cuts following the 2008-09 recession and never restored - creating an unfunded state mandate.
- Once the funding to the current program is restored, the Legislature could create an incentive program for local districts to where boards, administrative leadership and teachers collaboratively develop a plan to experiment with performance-based pay, provide a research base and allow other districts to learn from the results.

These steps could address the interest of state leaders in finding ways to reward outstanding teachers that could build support of educational leaders.

Before concluding, I want to share with the committee some additional information regarding teacher compensation.