

January 19, 2016

House Education Committee
Representative Ron Highland, Chair
The Statehouse
Hearing Room 112-N
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Re: Testimony Regarding Merit Pay for Teachers

Dear Chairman Highland and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Office of the Governor and the administration, I rise in support of your efforts to find potential options for incentivizing and facilitating the use of merit pay for Kansas' teachers.

In his recent State of the State address, the Governor recognized the need for each of us to look for innovative ways to improve public education in Kansas. For many years, Kansas has provided high quality education to many students, but in order to build upon that history of success we must look for what comes next. As the Governor said, "education in the twenty-first century can no longer be based on nineteenth century models."

Education is the key to making Kansas stronger, safer, freer, and more prosperous. Last year, the Legislature established a two year block grant in order to create a pause in the litigation wars and focus on creating a new funding mechanism for public education. This was a prudent move which now affords this Committee and the Legislature the ability to begin building the foundation for the future success of our schools.

Teachers, who have dedicated their lives to fighting in the trenches to help give opportunity to Kansas students deserve to be supported, rewarded, and incentivized to continue their hard work, innovation, and commitment to our students. The quality of a teacher plays a critical role in student achievement. Attracting and keeping high quality teachers remains a high priority for our public education system. By structuring teacher compensation to reward high-quality teachers, our schools can do just that.

Merit pay is not a new concept. It has worked in private industry for quite some time. In the 1980s, international economic competition caused many U.S. corporations to want to regain their competitiveness. They began to find ways to measure individual worker performance and established pay incentives based on multifaceted criteria. By the mid-1990s, approximately half of major American corporations used such incentives. Though it took time to develop, these metrics resulted in higher outcomes for U.S. firms.

Creating evaluation systems that fairly assess individual teachers may be difficult, but it is not impossible. Over the past several years, the emergence of various models of performance metrics have made the task easier. These value added models, or the growth model, attempt to track a teacher's accomplishments with a specific group of students instead of relying on standardized testing or unfair comparisons. Experts at Harvard University, the University of Tennessee, and elsewhere have developed models of evaluation and performance pay that provide the framework for how to develop successful merit pay systems. They have been implemented in places like Florida, Tennessee, New York, and Washington D.C., and they are working.

Performance metrics should not be based on one individual evaluation or one standardize test metric. Rather, merit pay should be determined by a variety of factors determined by local school boards and local communities. By relying on local school boards and administrations to tailor a district-specific plan for merit pay, schools can leverage institutional knowledge to create a high quality merit pay system.

We encourage the Committee to continue your efforts in exploring a Kansas model of merit pay based on the experience and expertise of local schools.

Thank you, I now stand for questions.

Respectfully,



Brandon James Smith
Policy Director
Office of the Governor