

Pay for Performance

Teachers and administrators salary increases should be tied to student performance. What other business enterprise other than education gives set salary increases without any regard whatsoever to the recipients work? School districts in Texas and Colorado have finally been able to convince the majority of their teachers that pay for performance is not unreasonable. Will the day ever come in New York State? I hope so.

For nearly fifteen years I have been an advocate for pay for performance for everyone involved in education. Unfortunately it has been a difficult concept to negotiate with the labor unions. I think I have heard most of the “reasons” not to have pay for performance. These include: “We don’t trust the administration to be fair in the distribution of the dollars. Teachers are equal in ability and it would be unfair to have some teachers receive more money than others based on performance. Teachers don’t have control of which students are in their class so it isn’t fair to tie their salary increases to student performance.” The list goes on and on.

Since teachers gauge performance all the time through report cards, surely teachers can be evaluated too, counters Gaynor McCown, executive director of The Teaching Commission, a bipartisan group in New York that works toward improving the quality of instruction. She wrote in a commentary last year: "If recognition of this sort is so troubling, divisive, and unfair, why do we continue to give grades to students? We give grades because they help us understand which areas need improvement and because they acknowledge superb effort and ability."

Houston Texas recently became the largest school district in the country to adopt a pay for performance plan for teachers that focuses on students’ test scores. This plan offers teachers up to \$3000 in extra pay if their students show improvement on state and national tests. At the Board meeting where this plan was unanimously adopted by the school board some teachers spoke against the plan claiming it was flawed. Other teachers and local business leaders spoke in support of the plan.

In Denver Colorado teachers can now sign up for a groundbreaking new pay plan that city voters endorsed by accepting \$25 million in new property taxes. A small group of teachers opposed the plan. They charged that the complex system was unfair to teachers who would have fewer opportunities to earn more money because of their assignments and for encouraging teachers to teach to the test.

While the emphasis on improved student test scores to attain the additional salary increases may be of concern to some, simply giving increases because one has worked another year or completed another graduate course should be of more concern. Some day, hopefully sooner than later, tax payers in our state will realize that while teachers and administrators should be adequately compensated, they also need to be accountable for their performance. Tax payers also need to realize that in addition to above inflation rate salary increases contracts also include very generous health insurance and retirement provisions.

Isn’t it time for school districts to start looking for professional ways to compensate our professionals and leave the labor union model of the past years behind?