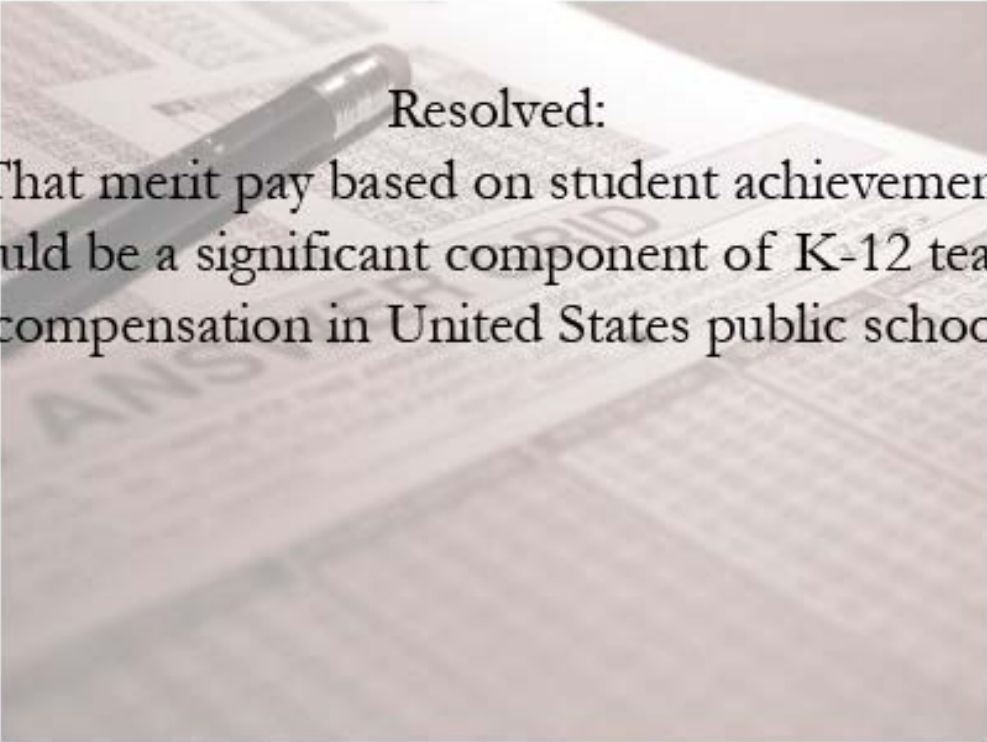2009/2010
Public Forum
Topic Analysis

Resolved:
That merit pay based on student achievement
should be a significant component of K-12 teacher
compensation in United States public schools

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Topic Analysis by Stephen Babb

This is a timely topic given the continued public dialogue concerning how to improve the public schooling system, a priority touted by the Obama administration as one of the key steps toward long-term improvement of the U.S. economy. As we'll explore later in more depth, the impacts of enhancing America's human resources are crucial as worldwide competition for markets and jobs stiffens amidst rampant globalization. Rather than bemoaning "unpatriotic" job-outsourcing, many now contend that it is simply up to Americans to step up to the plate and reclaim their share of the pie. Though improving the educational system is insufficient to accomplish this in the grand scheme of things, there is little doubt that it plays an important and perhaps essential role.

This is also a timely topic for students who had some exposure to the September-October LD topic, which questioned the legitimacy of high stakes standardized exams. To be sure, these are different topics with a number of different angles to explore. But, again students are being asked to actively investigate ways to improve the educational system of which they are either directly or indirectly a part.

Before addressing specific arguments, positions, and evidence on the topic, we should take some time to consider how the topic should (or could) be interpreted.

Merit based pay [as a] significant component of K-12 teacher compensation: The concept of 'merit based pay' is straightforward enough. Alternative compensation plans are typically based on experience (that is, years working with the public school system or in a similar job field) and the level of education attained by the teacher. This is a more or less egalitarian approach that differentiates almost exclusively on the basis of how long someone has been in the game. It is not 'merit based' insofar as there's no sense in which more experienced teachers have *earned* the right to be paid more. Instead, the incentives are directed at retaining teachers to the profession--not rewarding them for doing a particularly good job in that profession.

Thomas I. Ellis explains the basic outline of merit pay in his article "Merit Pay for Teachers," (found online here: http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-922/merit.htm):

> Merit pay in the broadest sense is a generic term for any device that adjusts salaries or provides compensation to reward higher levels of performance. It comes in many different forms, including merit-based salary schedules, bonuses, incentive pay, and differential staffing or "master teacher" plans. Merit pay can be linked to a district's regular single-salary schedule (teachers with high ratings advance up the scale more quickly), or it can be administered as a separate "merit pay schedule" (supplementing the regular salary). Participation by teachers can be either mandatory or voluntary.

Student achievement: Since teachers aren't producing items on an assembly line or selling goods to the public, their "output" can only be measured in terms of how well students perform. Ellis continues, explaining the nature of output-based merit pay:

> While past systems were largely based on input, current systems tend to be based on output, whereby the degree of progress in achieving specified goals determines the amount of benefits that the teacher receives. These goals may be measured by criterion-referenced tests to ascertain students' mastery of prescribed course content or their ability to perform certain skills. In some programs, teachers are responsible for proposing objectives for themselves or for their students, the fulfillment of which entitles the teacher to merit pay.

Measuring student achievement is difficult enough as it is, but tying it to compensation muddies matters considerably given how seriously people tend to take what they get paid. When discussing potential negative arguments, we will come back to the indeterminacy of student achievement and the practical problems with measuring it. For the time being, however, it only need be noted that both debaters should have a clear conception of what they mean by student achievement and how it is to be measured. The most common and realistic proposal would involve student achievement being assessed through standardized exams of some sort. A non-standardized option (e.g. a less quantitative evaluation of student performance) would be subject to harsh scrutiny given the increased opportunity for subjective judgements to be made.

The implications for workplace infighting and discontent would immediately

jeopardize such an arrangement. Accordingly, the measurement of student

achievement opens up ground involving not only the indeterminacy of the

achievement itself, but also the consequences of implementing assessment tools

like standardized tests.

With terms clarified, let's consider some issues and arguments!

Fairness: Perhaps the most basic reason to advocate or reject merit pay is

fairness. To those only interested in hard, observable advantages or

disadvantages, this may not be a compelling issue. However, it may be one of

the first considerations for the average person thinking through this kind of topic.

From an early age, most of us become quite familiar with the "but that's not fair"

mantra, and for those deeply affected by an unfair policy or practice, the

implications can be just as serious. Injustice is well-adept at adding insult to

injury; indeed, it is part of how we experience and interpret many of the wrongs in

our lives. So, it's not unreasonable to ask whether or not merit pay is fair in the

first place, especially if your judge is more or less unfamiliar with the policy-

focused world of debate.

That said, fairness is a difficult principle to apply in practice. For starters, it

means different things to different people. Those convinced that human action is

significantly influenced by external causes are likely to advance more egalitarian

accounts of fairness (as are those who attribute our personal attributes and

abilities to an arbitrary lottery of birth). Conversely, many traditional

interpretations of fairness suggest that because individuals are mostly if not fully

responsible for their actions, they should be rewarded or penalized in proportion

to how hard they work or how successful they are. Still other models (like that

proposed by Robert Nozick in the 1970s) hold that so long as actions or

transactions follow a legitimate process, the outcome is fair by default. And of

course, within these basic coordinates, there are countless variations. To

complicate matters even further, it is difficult to devise standards of fairness

flexible enough to provide operational guidelines for every unique circumstance.

The more universal (and therefore ostensibly legitimate) the principle, the more

difficult it is to actually apply it to real-life situations.

Still, there is an intuitive and even emotional appeal to fairness, and it seems

especially relevant to questions about how people should be compensated.

Simply assessing which options create the greatest social benefit might justify

entirely skewed compensation packages. At the very least, fairness is a good

barometer for when a scheme has gone too far in over- or under-compensating

someone for the sake of those social benefits.

One reason people typically defend merit-based pay is that hard work should be

rewarded. If someone works overtime, they're paid more. That hard worker has

incurred an opportunity cost by spending more time or effort on his or her job. To

ignore that opportunity cost would be to ignore the interests of the harder workers

and the decisions they make to benefit others (the company, customers,

stockholders, etc.) at their own expense. Failing to reward that extra expenditure

is no different from requiring people to act charitably or controlling what they do

with their time; in short, it sounds a lot like slavery. Teaching is one of those jobs

where work isn't really a "clock in, clock out" process. The best teachers spend

more time preparing, improving their skills, and serving their students, But that

time doesn't always happen "on the job" or at work. Such is the difficulty in

treating "better teaching" the same as working overtime. Nevertheless, doesn't

the same principle demand that teachers who do more deserve to be paid more?

Another fairness-based defense of merit pay involves the reward for the 'social

product' of a teacher's work. Regardless of how hard a teacher works, positive

results of his or her teaching benefit society. They're a service provided to a

community of tax-payers who have a shared interest those positive results. We

want our students to learn and learn the right way, and not just because many in

the community are parents of those students. Education is a public good: it

improves our economy, political system and democratic dialogue, social

interaction, government services, technology, health, and so on. Since the public

has such a strong interest in education succeeding and pays taxes to that end,

then shouldn't those who contribute more to that public good receive more in

exchange? It seems to be a fundamental flaw in how the teaching profession has

been traditionally conceived that unequal services are rewarded equally. This

has been the most basic precept of fairness since articulated as such by Aristotle

and goes to the heart of what a public servant (or anyone else) is *due*.

Fairness is sometimes derided by utilitarians as an antiquated deontological

concept. We will never agree about what it is, and it will inevitably be defined

according to the interests of those with the power to define it. Likewise, the notion

that people have property rights (e.g. to the fruits of their labor) or the degree to

which those rights take precedent has received a great deal of scrutiny from

communitarians and various brands of consequentialists. But, one should

respond that there is a strong public interest in people being treated fairly (or at

least believing that they are treated fairly). Those primarily interested in

consequences need only look at a dysfunctional educational system plagued by

systemic unfairness to see the consequences of ignoring what people deserve.

Incentives: Why should education be any different from other industries wherein

employees stand to benefit from improved performance? It doesn't take a study

or substantial evidence to demonstrate that employees in almost any profession

will be more productive given the opportunity to make more money or earn other

kinds of rewards. These are basic principles of psychology and microeconomics.

That said, not all incentive plans are equal, and their effectiveness often depends

on how adequately assessment mechanisms determine the value of someone's

effort or output. This is a relatively simple process in the world of manufacturing

or sales. When a worker produces or sells a certain number of widgets, they are

rewarded accordingly. For a classroom environment, however, assessing results

is far more complicated. Whereas the output in many scenarios is attributable

almost exclusively to the responsible worker(s), it would be absurd to suggest

teachers are fully responsible for their students achievement. This kind of

thinking would be tantamount to holding an assembly like worker accountable for

machinery breaking down and interrupting the production process. David Riegel,

who's worked as a teacher and administrator for 16 years, explains in a piece

published by the Huffington Post in August of 2007:

> The use of test scores for evaluation of teachers is fraught with difficulties
>
> that should be obvious to any outside observer. First among them, you can't
>
> pick your students upon whom your salary might depend. Those in favor of
>
> merit pay often use the private sector as a comparison point, saying
>
> essentially that most people are paid by how hard they work or how many
>
> cases they win or how much they sell. And all that's true. But a salesman isn't
>
> forced to spend his time on customers who clearly don't want to buy his
>
> products. Lawyers don't typically take cases they can't win. But the logic of
>
> paying teachers based on performance is similar to saying to a car salesman,
>
> "here are 30 adults chosen at random. Your salary depends on being able to
>
> sell all of them cars -- a standard car, at that -- regardless of their needs,
>
> desires, or ability to pay." Or to tell a lawyer, "you must win the next 30 cases
>
> that walk through your door, using limited resources, regardless of the merit
>
> of their suits, or the expense required to prosecute their cases."

The crux of incentive-based compensation, then, is the idea of "merit." Merit is

much easier to define and reflect upon in the abstract than it is in practice. We

usually need little more than common sense or contracts to know what someone

deserves or what someone has earned, at least in theory. But in this instance, it

is much more difficult to know how much teachers are to be blamed or praised

for the failures or successes of their students. For example, in socio-

economically disadvantaged school systems, at-home circumstances may put

students in considerably more challenging academic positions (due to lack of

family support, the need to take on part-time jobs, the absence of supplemental

educational resources, etc.). Even if compensation schemes were to somehow

account for this through a process that standardized achievement results *within*

socio-economically similar schools, the difficulty would become two-fold: (1) this

would result in endless speculation as to the legitimacy of the process--whether

or not poorer schools are given too much or too little slack; and (2), any shortfall

in correcting for the skewed results would deter the best teachers from teaching

at poorer schools. Needless to say, this kind of quagmire threatens to widen the

education gap even further rather than make any serious steps toward "leaving

no child left behind."

Compensating on the basis of output like student achievement also risks

reversing the traditional roles assigned to teachers and students. While

classrooms are becoming nurturing and student-centered to a sometimes bizarre

if not perverse degree, there remain real reasons to be concerned about ignoring

the extent to which students and their decisions (or personal circumstances) are

causally responsible for student performance. Though the failure of teachers

undoubtedly implicates the failure of students, it is also the case that a variety of

externalities outside the teacher's control may reflect upon the teacher unfairly.

Even if we are to grant that students are not truly the authors of their own

pedagogical experience, it would be overly myopic to assume teachers have any

meaningful opportunity to inspire the apathetic, differentiate their methodology

adequately, and overcome a wealth of social and familial distractions. Excepting

idealized narratives like *Dead Poets Society* and the quasi-mythical image of the

"teacher who makes a difference," we have all encountered enough real-life

classrooms to know there are intractable limits to the impact educators can have.

Even discounting these limits through rose-colored curricula, shouldn't we be a

bit frightened at the prospect of educators taking on ever-increasing jurisdiction

over the lives of students. There may be a popular conception that public

schooling can fill in the gaps for parents who lack the time, interest, or ability to

raise their children effectively, but if the alternative is giving public school

teachers carte blanche authority to mold those children, then we are at an

impasse. And yet, this seems to be the logical extension of a world in which

teachers are held increasingly to account for the performance of students. Surely

teachers whose paychecks are on the line would demand increased opportunity

to influence the students who are ultimately determining those paychecks. The

double-bind then becomes allowing this degree of teacher intervention on the

one hand and failure of the incentive scheme on the other hand. After all, why would teachers make any serious attempt at improved performance if they ultimately have so little control over the results?

Despite the seemingly endless list of concerns with using merit to construct incentives, the alternative to doing so (e.g. the status quo) may be even scarier. In fact, one Pro argument could be that almost anything is worth trying given that the current system is failing so dramatically. Empirically, the *prospect alone* of incentives have improved performance and results in almost any industry imaginable. While the practical implementation of such a scheme in public education may be imperfect and even create new problems of its own, aren't these outweighed by the potential benefits of teachers working harder, seeking more training, or otherwise going above and beyond the call of duty? In addition to this advantage, there are at least a couple of other reasons the advantages of merit-based incentives could outweigh the risks:

1. There are a variety of ways incentives could be constructed, giving the public increased ability to address problems in education. For example, even though the topic's wording ties merit pay to student achievement, it doesn't specify which students are in question. A policy that rewarded teachers for improving the achievement of students in socio-economically disadvantaged districts, for instance, might help to rectify inequality in our schooling. Or, a policy that rewarded student achievement in particular fields might attract better teachers to

fields in which students need to be more competitive (e.g. math and science).
The potential for strategically designed incentives to address important public
interests could be extremely valuable.

2. Though there's some risk that a poorly implemented merit-pay scheme could
deter skilled people from entering the profession, there's also a very good
chance one that is reasonably well-implemented could have the very opposite
effect. Many of the best teachers stop teaching because there's such a low
ceiling for earnings while other options in the private sector pay so much better.
Those high-quality teachers would likely be the ones benefiting the most from
merit pay, so it reasons that many could be recruited or retained should such a
system come online. The potential to fundamentally redefine the quality of
learning taking place in our public classrooms is arguably limited only by the
talent pool who avail themselves to work in those classrooms.

Measuring student achievement: Many will find this to be a convenient chance
to recycle arguments that they or their teammates used on the September-
October LD topic. As mentioned near the beginning of this overview, some kind
of standardized test is the mechanism most likely to be used for measuring
student achievement. From the Pro perspective, standardized exams could
become all the more meaningful if teachers have a financial incentive to
adequately equip students for taking those exams. If it's demonstrated that these
exams help focus curricula and keep classrooms on track, then providing

incentives to teachers would certainly increase the effectiveness of the exams at

actually doing so (since all the advantages of narrowing curricula are ultimately

contingent upon a teacher's willingness to implement those curricula). This

bottom line ensures that classrooms remain productive, limits the jurisdiction of

teachers to waste or misallocate classroom time, places certain demands on

teaching method, and equalizes the experience of students so that fewer slip

through the cracks of basic knowledge and skills. In spite of accusations that this

kind of standardization is draconian, one would be hard pressed to defend the

'liberty to teach horribly'. And yet, while the upside to quality control can't go

ignored, neither can the bureaucratic nightmare and practical inefficiencies

endemic to administering standardized tests and then using those tests as

teacher assessments.

First of all, a number of teachers resent the top-down and often centralized way

these exams are administered. They may feel constrained and less likely to do

their best when it comes down to carrying out the "company policy." On the other

hand, teachers on the opposite end of the spectrum may be so eager to claim the

best results (and compensation associated therewith) that they cheat or distort

test results. And at the very least, these kinds of exams are likely to discourage

teacher innovation and sustained engagement with their discipline. Why

endeavor to do better than the norm when the norm is all that needs to satisfied?

Second, while it is hard enough to measure student achievement on any broad, standardized scale, it is that much harder to do so in a way legitimate enough to assess merit and compensation.

Third, every teacher and school meets unique needs. It is impossible to compare how one teacher does his or her job with another. The softer the discipline, the more difficult this becomes (how is student achievement measured in the arts, or even writing?).

The list goes on, and debaters should see this aspect of the topic as a golden opportunity to cast doubt on the practicality of merit based pay. As good as this idea may sound, it just doesn't seem realistic.

Counterplans: There has been no shortage of public debate about how best to improve classrooms, so the Con side will have access to a variety of well-defended options to propose as alternatives to merit-based pay. Insofar as merit based incentives presuppose that teachers could take steps that they aren't currently taking, they discount the possibility that a more accurate estimation of causality involves either (a) schools' access to quality educators or (b) educators' access to quality training.

Some counterplans could be predicated upon the presumption that problems in classrooms have more to do with who our teachers are than how hard they try.

As with any counterplan, the first step is demonstrating that it is competitive (or mutually exclusive) with the proposal outlined in the topic. This counterplan could establish competitiveness in at least a couple of ways: (a) by showing that more skilled teachers would be deterred from entering a workforce in which their compensation was tied to student performance; or (b), by showing that limited funds would be sucked away by merit-based compensation and trade off with the ability to fund the increased base-pay needed to attract more skilled teachers. With good evidence, it might also be defensible to argue that any kind of misdiagnosis would set back superior policies by redirecting the attention of policy-makers and administrators from attracting skilled educators to "motivating" current educators.

Another kind of counterplan that would capture much of the Pro's advantages would be to defend merit-based pay that is tied to something other than student achievement (teachers' pursuit of continued training, mastery of their disciplines, administrative assessment, peer assessment, student assessment, combinations thereof, etc.). Many of these alternatives evaluate the effort or methodology used by a teacher that are *input* into the classroom rather than the results of that input. After all, as we discussed previously, those results are often attributable to numerous interceding variables and assessing those results is a mess. Merit pay that avoided that process altogether in favor of other kinds of incentives might achieve most if not all of the same results without incurring the same headaches.

Conclusion: Many educators come down on both sides of this topic, and it's important to remember that many of your judges will be teachers, coaches, or parents. All have unique perspectives on these issues, and might even care about them or have a personal stake in the debate. Having a sensitivity to who your audience is shouldn't be forgotten in the rush to make the best arguments. Also, keep in mind that the implementation of "No Child Left Behind" has colored how many view federal solutions to education in general. A prime Con argument, in fact, is that these kinds of policy questions shouldn't be settled at the federal level--state or municipal governments should be making these decisions and implementing them instead. The best Pro debaters will be able to sufficiently distance their advocacy from empirical failures that may have been more attributable to bad implementation than the thrust of the policies themselves. That said, demonstrating that this compensation isn't just a 'merit pay pipe-dream' is a tall order and the debaters who do their homework on intricate and pragmatic policy issues will no doubt sound more in touch with reality... and perhaps the judge's ballot.

Topic Analysis by Ryan Hamilton

I think this is easily one of the best topics in the past several years. What is very heartening about some of the recent topics is that they encourage students to research issues that are relevant to them. This topic will likewise encourage students to go beyond their primary source for educational funding opinions and information -- their own teachers – and look at a multiplicity of view points that hopefully will inform the next generation of policy makers about teacher's pay.

 This topic is also good because I think it tends itself away from empirical examples and towards theoretical debate that questions systems of remuneration for what I think a majority of people feel is probably one of the United States' most valued public institutions: primary and secondary schools. There are probably many good studies that exist on the issue, and particularly good analysis of market-based reforms like the one suggested in the resolution coming out of places like Washington, DC, where Michelle Rhee – a teach for America volunteer turned superintendent – has been implementing cutting edge policies to try and produce results in one of the country's most dismal school systems. These studies are good and will probably be useful to bear out individual arguments in round, but they don't address the fundamental issues of whether or not 1) such a correlation between performance and remuneration is fair to educators or 2) accurate.

The affirmative really only has one straight forward argument going for it: that affirming the resolution will incentivize teachers to improve the academic performance of their pupils. The primary place of formal education – that is to say, the education on which students are formally tested – is the classroom. Teachers are largely responsible for creating assignments, motivating students to complete these assignments, grading these assignments, and constructing plans for improving performance should grades prove to be less than satisfactory. In the United States, it is typical that teachers who have been teaching for similar amounts of time get paid the same, regardless of whether or not they produce (or are lucky enough to inherit) a class of geniuses or a class of uneducated pupils.

This plan would tie the pay of teachers directly with what is measured to be their performance in the classroom: teachers who have students that earn higher grades in the class and on exams would be rewarded for increasing performance – or, to put it another way, teachers who merited more pay on the basis of their pupils' grades would earn more money. The implicit argument is that teachers will be more motivated to increase student achievement if they are rewarded on the basis of their failure or success to do so. The implicit inverse is that teachers are only motivated to stick around to get pay increases and pass students along at a rate that draws little negative attention on them in systems which do not allocate pay on the basis of merit. It introduces market pressures to try and encourage teachers to take a more active role in the education of their pupils, how they do it is not particularly important. In this way it appeals to the teachers'

interest for themselves, and does not rely on their altruism for educating others

for their own sake. It is in this way that it is beneficial: good teachers will still be

good teachers, but their pay will reflect it. Bad teachers, however, will either

have to shape up, ship out, or be content with being low paid and being

recognized (as their students must be) as under-achieving.

There are several ancillary arguments in support of this primary position. First

among them is that it will bring teachers in line with their counter parts in most

private sector occupations: it rewards them on the basis of performance. If a

stockbroker performs poorly, he gets lower rates of return. If a car salesman

sells no cars, he gets no commission. If people make a product no one wants to

buy, they go out of business – should it not also be true of teachers who cannot

produce results in students that they should be rewarded less than those

teachers who are able to produce results? Even if one separates the idea of

encouraging or incentivizing teachers to help produce better results, isn't it just

true in terms of justice or fairness that those who can do better get rewarded

better – that we use merit as a standard of pay as opposed just length of career?

One is a whole lot less arbitrary than the other, and it is more than reasonable

that we should prefer less arbitrary over more arbitrary.

Affirming the resolution would make a public institution – schools – more

accountable to the public. Certainly when the system was devised no one had in

mind that students would go to school and get social promotions and receive

education so meager than they wouldn't be able to pass basic proficiency

examinations after 11 years. The public, the people, who have devised this

institution and authorized the government to use coercive force to collect the

funds necessary for its maintenance, have a right to expect that there will be

noticeable and significant results in educational improvement from the same

institution. The only reason that people consent to paying taxes to support this

effort is because there is an underlying presumption that they will benefit from the

overarching good produced by an educated population – but if the population

isn't educated, if the school isn't accomplishing it's primary function of producing

citizens who are educated and enlightened enough to contribute to that

overarching good, there is a serious kink in the social contract between a citizen

and his or her government what runs the schools.

Moreover, this policy will likely force bad teachers out and reward teachers who

produce results, encouraging them to stick around. This means that people who

are not attracted to the education profession because they don't think they'll

make very much money might give it a try – it has the added bonus of attracting

people who think they'll be good teachers to a profession that typically has low

pay compared to private sector work (though this is discussed in more detail

below) and there will be room for fresh blood because underperforming, and

thusly lower paid teachers will probably opt out of the profession for greener

pastures.

The strongest argument the negative has going for it is that its seems that other factors seem to have a much larger impact on academic performance. More than anything else, a child's home life/structure seem to be the most reliable indicator for poor school performance, crime, and other things considered markers of success or failure. In particular, children from single-parent homes seem to do less in school than their peers – something with which the teacher has nothing to do. Study after study in country after country has shown that even when people control for race, immigration status, income, geography, nationality, etc., the most likely indicator of success or failure is whether or not the a young person comes from a home in which two parents are present or one.

It stands to reason, then, that teachers should not be rewarded or punished for academic performance when the primary influence of academic performance is almost entirely out of their control (unless they are teaching their own child, entirely out of their control). It is patently unfair that we adopt a system that rewards and punishes teachers under the guise of merit when merit has little if anything to do with it – which means that merit pay would be even more arbitrary than years in the classroom (probably based on the lottery that exists when students are put into teachers' classrooms at the beginning of the year), and we should stick with this system or find a better alternative.

Bearing the above argument in mind, enacting this policy would be reckless. It would transfer incentives from the home to the schools – ultimately it is the

parent(s) who should be accountable for the education of their children. School

is just a tool established by the government to make it easier and better – but if

parents are disinterested in educational accomplishment, whether or not

homework gets done, whether or not a student is even present in class – it is

unlikely that any amount of money paid to even the best teachers is going to help

a student from that environment excel at school. Establishing a merit pay system

would be just one more transfer of incentive from the private (home) to the public

(school) where there is little likelihood that it will make a major impact. It would

make more sense to provide a financial incentive to the parents of children than it

would to the teachers. This would be more likely to spur out of school school

study, increase attendance, and generally improve the quality of education that

children receive. Giving merit pay to teachers just removes any remaining

concern for low-achieving students' homes and puts it in the schools – where

incentives perform at dramatically lower rates.

Further, I think anyone who works in education will tell anyone interested that the

primary problem isn't that teachers aren't assigning work or giving enough

information during school time – it's that students aren't interested in improving

their own scores or motivated to absorb the information presented and complete

the assignments toward that end. If that is the case, and if that is what the

academic literature bears out, then it would be absurd to try and motivate

teachers to improve academic performance – the money would be better spent

on motivating students (as Michelle Rhee is trying to do in Washington, DC, right

now) and parents to assist in the good work already being done by teachers right

now.

Finally, many pro debaters will try to argue that teachers are underpaid and

therefore merit pay is somehow making the system more just. However, when

compared with hours worked (and on the clock) teaching is actually a pretty well-

paying job. There are not many jobs in which a person can work 8 hours (usually

7) a day for only 180 days a year and get paid a living wage. Additionally, at what

other job do you get off holidays, two weeks for Christmas, a week in the Spring,

and three months off during the summer and also get what are usually first class

benefits? Even if one were to assume that teachers worked 5 days a week

during the school year, and each day they worked for ten hours – they would still

only work for 1,800 hours. This is less than the 2,080 hours expected of a

person who works 52 weeks – even if we assume these people get two weeks

paid vacation, that's 2,000 hours. A full 200 hours less is worked by the teacher

who works ten hours a day for 180 days. To put it another way, they work 5 less

weeks at fifty hours a week than someone who works in another job that does

not have the time perks of being a teacher.

The system also creates a whole boondoggle about how to apportion students to

classes as well – this is important because if implementation generally negates

the usefulness of a thing, then it calls into question whether the thing ought to be

implemented in the first place. For instance, since merit based pay would track

and reward teachers based on performance, it would stand to reason that the

same information should be used to help strategically place students with

teachers – but what is the fair match up between under performing student to

high performing teacher? No parent, regardless of the performance of their child,

would ever want their son or daughter in the classroom of a teacher who has

been ranked lowest among his or her peers.

Topic Analysis by Fritz Pielstick

I actually like this topic very much. That is not a statement that I can make about some of the other debate topics I have written about recently, particularly in Public Forum. As the son of two school teachers, education subjects such as this are subjects that I hold a strong opinion on, and wish were more heavily explored in the world of academic debate. I was happy that the NFL decided to make LD debaters talk about exit exams for two months, and now I am happy that the NFL is making Public Forum debaters spend their holiday season discussing merit pay. This is a topic that is relevant to our current education climate, and is one that can produce some very stimulating and interesting debates. There are a number of compelling arguments that can be made here. Good debaters will research the topic heavily and will be prepared to debate about our public education system on a number of different levels.

If you do not know what merit pay is, it is important that you do. Teacher merit pay is a system wherein teachers are given bonuses for outstanding performance on standardized tests. The logic behind teacher merit pay is that teachers will be incentive to work harder and teach more effectively if there is a strong financial incentive to do so. It is one of the more hotly contested issues in our current education system.

In this analysis, I will explain some of the most common arguments made for and against the use of merit pay, as well as some strategy for affirming and negating this particular topic.

There are a number of arguments to be made in favor of teacher merit pay. Most of them are various permutations of the same simple argument that drives the merit pay movement in the United States: that teacher merit pay incentivizes better performance on tests, and thus improves the quality of education. The financial bonuses offered to teachers gives them the swift kick in the pants they need, and encourages them to teach material more effectively. There is conflicting evidence out there over whether or not this is true. If you are affirming this resolution, it is in your best interest to find the statistical data that would support the claim that merit pay actually improves teacher performance. The negative is likely to respond with counter statistics that seek to prove the opposite of your claim, that teacher merit pay hurts school performance, or at the very least does not alter it. In round, it is in your best interest to weigh out the quality of evidence. There will likely be many debates on this topic that have two statistics indicating opposite conclusions. To make the decision easier on the judge, good debaters will directly compare evidence, and make arguments not only as to why their argument is true but why their evidence is better. One good area to clash over in terms of evidence comparison is methodology. Ask how their researchers reached their conclusion. If the methods they employed were a little shoddy, make that argument. This may seem trivial and elementary, but on

a topic like this it is probably hugely important. There will probably be *many*

debates where the core issue in the round will be whether merit pay hurts or

harms school performance, and that issue will be resolved by an evidence

comparison.

However, there will also probably be some debates where the central issue in the

round is not whether merit pay harms or hurts school performance. If you are on

the proposition, and your case simply advocates that merit pay makes more

merit-worthy teachers and schools, you also want to be ready to explain why the

debate should focus on the quality of education within schools and the need to

improve it. In essence, you want to establish that "improving school performance"

is the best framework with which to evaluate the round. It is likely in your best

interest to do this in case. In this instance, the affirmative case proves two things.

First, it establishes the importance of improving scores on standardized tests.

There are logical and intuitive arguments about why this is a good thing. One of

them would be that as per the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), school funding is

heavily based on performance on standardized tests. School funding is the basis

for school functioning, and so it is important that schools raise their performance

on standardized tests. Another argument is that teachers, much like any other

professionals, can be relieved of their duties for poor performance. It is obvious

that we desire higher quality teachers in our public schools, so it is important that

we have a mechanism to sort the good teachers from the poor teachers.

Standardized tests allow school administrators to do that. There are many other

arguments that can be made as to why improving school performance on standardized tests is a good thing. When affirming, you ought to explore these. Good cases will highlight the importance of ensuring that schools up their game on these tests.

After you have established the importance of standardized test improvement, the next step is to prove how merit pay accomplishes this. This is where most debates on this topic will matter the most. Do research and find evidence that illustrates how merit pay makes schools perform either better or worse on these tests. Statistical data and historical examples outweigh analytical claims from even the most credible authors any day. Empirical evidence is your friend.

For the negative, there are a number of arguments that can be made about why merit pay either harms, or does not affect, school performance on standardized tests. One such argument is that the reward of earning bonuses for performance on tests discourages teachers from teaching in lower performing schools— schools that need quality teachers the most. The impact of this is that certain schools do worse on tests because the teachers that would normally be teaching there and facilitating strong performance there have moved elsewhere in hopes of making some more dough. There is evidence out there that would support this claim. Find it.

Another argument is that the mechanism of arbitrating merit pay is meaningless and arbitrary. It often relies on a system where students' performance on standardized tests is assessed, and then a projection is made of how the student ought to perform in coming years. At this point, if their performance exceeds this projection, their teachers are rewarded. If it falls below this projection, the teacher is punished. I think it is fairly intuitive why this is a flawed system. It is incredibly arbitrary. If students in 4th and 5th grade have terrible teachers, their performance on tests will be low. If their 6th grade teacher is an average-quality teacher, their performance will go up, probably substantially. At this point, the 6th grade teacher is being rewarded not for being a good teacher, but for being less awful than the previous teachers, which is hardly an accomplishment. Similarly, if the students 4th and 5th grade teachers are superb, their performance on tests will be high. If their 6th grade teacher is merely above average, their performance will likely go down. As such, their sixth grade teacher will be punished for failing to meet projections. This particular teacher is in no way a bad teacher, in fact she is above average, but she is punished for failing to meet the standards of some of the best teachers in the district.

Now, imagine if the two sixth grade teachers I just mentioned in my example teach at the same school. One teacher is markedly better than the other, but is being paid less as a result of the teacher merit pay system. In this instance, the system has not served to elevate scores, but to misrepresent them, and only further the division among teachers within the school context.

If your goal as the negative is to prove that merit pay does not improve school performance, there are plenty of arguments to be made here. Just as if you are affirming, do research and find evidence—preferably empirical. In round, directly compare the quality of your evidence to that of your opponents.

There are other options for negating this resolution, however. One such argument that could be compelling is the argument that standardized tests in general are harmful to education, and that teacher merit pay only serves to further entrench the dangerous emphasis our education system places on standardized tests. If your team also has an LD squad, talk to your LD homies. They just spent two months debating about standardized tests and probably have a lot of evidence that indicts them. There are obvious arguments to be made here, ranging from the proven racial, cultural, and socioeconomic biases on these tests, to the argument that standardized tests merely encourage children to bank information, like computers, rather than become *educated.*

The strategy here is that you can indict the very underlying assumption of the affirmative case. If their case argues that merit pay improves performance on standardized tests, argue that improving performance on standardized tests means we are hurting the overall quality of education.

There is plenty of literature available that criticizes the concept of "teaching to the test." Proponents of merit pay would generally argue that teaching to the test is a good thing. In fact, one of the most common arguments in favor of merit pay is that it encourages teachers to adhere to curriculum more closely—curriculum that is almost invariably determined by some sort of standardized test. Negative cases could argue that we ought not have merit pay because it simply furthers our emphasis on teaching to the test. Some of the most obvious arguments about why it is bad to teach to the test is that students are denied an opportunity to build critical thinking skills, and that teachers, especially the most talented ones, are not given an opportunity to express their talent and ability for educating children. I think that cases that indict the desirability of teaching to the test could be very compelling, and as such, good affirmative debaters will be prepared to answer these arguments. If your case argues that merit pay improves performance on standardized tests, you must be prepared to defend why improving performance on standardized tests is a good thing to do.

Ultimately, this is a topic that I believe will produce some very interesting and exciting debates. Public Education is does not always receive the attention that it rightfully deserves in academic and competitive debate, despite the tremendous significance it bears for countless all Americans. Good debaters will seize this opportunity to explore this often neglected facet of American domestic policy. They will do good research and they will become knowledgeable on this topic. Happy debating!

Topic Analysis by Todd Rainey

Merit pay based on student achievement should be a self-explanatory concept.
This resolution supposes a policy for public schools which would measure
student performance and provide bonuses to teachers based on those
performance measures.

Currently, merit pay initiatives are implemented on a state-by-state level (if at all),
which makes it hard to use specific empirics to support one argument or another.
The TEEG program (see below) failed in its mission, but that is not to say that
such programs cannot work. Likewise, the success of a pilot program is worth
looking into, but doesn't conclusively mean that such a program can work
everywhere. During research, use case studies to find a pattern that is constant
in all others. This essay will focus on the economic theory behind merit pay – it
is your job to apply the lessons here to your own evidence. Remember, general
arguments must be supported by specific ones, but specific arguments do not
conclusively mean anything one way or another.

If this sort of system sounds familiar to you, it's likely because the idea is
somewhat similar to that of the No Child Left Behind Act, which varied funding to
schools based on the performance of its students. The resolution's mandates
are slightly different from NCLB in that most merit pay comes in the form of a

bonus rather than pay deduction. Just keep in mind that the theory behind each

is somewhat similar.

Economic Theory

The idea of merit pay for teachers is based on the economic theory of supply and

demand, specifically falling under the umbrella of supply-side economics. The

most basic rule of supply is that the more money that is offered for a good or

service, the greater the supply that will become available. Applied to merit pay,

the idea is that quality teaching is a service – the more money offered for it, the

more of it that will be offered. Understand that such a theory is not heartless at

its core – everybody, to some extent, is willing to devote more effort to something

if it pays more. Consider how much more work you might put into this event if

the prize for first place at a tournament were $1,000. Now ask yourself if a

teacher is a fundamentally different person than you are.

Merit pay agreements could hypothetically run in the opposite direction as well.

Under some proposals, teachers would make less money if their students do

poorly on standardized exams. The argument seems different from the first, but

largely it works along the same principle. If somebody is willing to work harder

for more money, they're also less likely to slack off if they stand to lose money for

low performance. However, even though the principle is the same, some of your

judges and competitors could perceive deduction of pay to be a different matter.

It is up to you to determine whether such an argument would favor or disfavor you.

In economic theory, there is another principle known as the **law of unintended consequences.** Its meaning shouldn't be hard to divine; when a policy is implemented, it may have consequences that are different than those that were expected. This makes sense. Nobody on earth knows everything about human behavior, let alone its application to something like the education system. It stands to reason that such policies can have unintended effects. When looking through evidence that some sort of effect arose from a disastrous program, consider it to fall under a branch of the law of unintended consequences. This is important because many such disastrous programs are "fixed" when they are redrafted (such as Texas's transition from TEEG to DATE as a merit program). However, previous failures point to the fact that just because a program has a goal does not mean that it will actually meet that goal.

Another idea in economic theory is that of the **externality**. An externality is any time where a supplier or consumer does not fully pay for the costs of a product. Externalities are becoming a more popular term during the global warming debate, as many manufacturing companies don't have to pay for their CO_2 emissions, even if such emissions, by contributing to global warming, raise costs for people in other areas of the world. In the merit-pay debate, both sides can discuss externalities. For instance, it could be argued that because teachers

face relatively flat pay rates (focused more on seniority than merit), they do not

realize the full costs of their efforts, and thus aren't given the incentive that a

better measure could provide.

On the flip side, merit pay systems could create new externalities if they

disproportionately reward or punish teachers. For instance, how can the same

merit system determine pay for honors teachers, as opposed to special

education teachers? What about art or physical education? If merit pay favors

math teachers more, then market forces might cause teachers to abandon the

arts in favor of math. If the system overcompensates, teachers may move from

math to art. Keep in mind, since merit pay argues that money dictates human

behavior, that pay guidance could have adverse effects.

Determining Performance

This debate will likely focus more on how performance is determined than how

payment will be made – after all, pay scales are an intricate part of real-world

policy that cannot be addressed in a four-minute speech. Nobody would want to

collapse to such a nuanced policy debate for the one-minute speech, so the

trend will likely focus more on the fact that merit pay needs to determine merit.

Most systems that use variable pay (such as NCLB's method of varying pay to

schools based on performance overall) will use standardized testing to determine

performance. These measures have been criticized in the past – there's a huge

body of literature opposed to No Child Left Behind based on the idea that standardized testing is flawed. If you want to go more in-depth on this argument, there are plenty of resources outside of this essay that you can use – and they will be much more qualified to discuss the nuance of performance measures. I'll try to summarize the important arguments here.

Standardized tests aren't perfect measures. That's fine – but standardized tests do represent a particular level of accomplishment. It's fine if a teacher wants to go above and beyond the call of duty, or encourage their students to expand their thinking in new and creative ways, but if a teacher fails to get his or her students to understand basic mathematical thinking, or to grasp the idea of a simile, odds are something is wrong. Despite its flaws, standardized testing can provide a baseline for what everybody ought to know. Even if the measure isn't perfect, it only has to be good enough to indicate generic trends. Is Mrs. Smith at Western Middle School teaching her students mathematical operations? Is Mr. Jones at Eastern High School teaching his students to use lateral thinking to solve problems? If not, should they be incentivized to do so?

Standardized tests tend to be…standardized. Since these tests need to be the same to provide a reference point for comparison, they don't have a huge degree of flexibility. This can make it difficult to fairly separate "good" performance from "bad" performance. After all, how can one be sure that the English section of the ISTEP (Indiana's standardized performance exam) is exactly the same difficulty

as its math section? If not, math and English departments will be subject to

effectively different pay scales. And how on earth can one objectively evaluate

art? The constant standard could also lead some teachers to "teach for the

exam." A teacher whose pay grade rests on student performance for an exam

may feel pressured to teach only material that is critical to the examination. Why

teach the political argument present in Shakespeare's *Othello* when you could

improve test scores (and your pay grade) by just a half of a percent? Ironically,

efforts to improve teacher performance could have the opposite effect,

preventing teachers from expanding the curriculum and opting for more a more

standard educational environment.

Policy and Utopia

Obama's support for merit pay is accompanied with the statement that

standardized tests should not be the determinant of pay. Unfortunately, nobody

has yet called out Obama on the lack of an alternative. In policymaking, we can

find ourselves forced to choose between a number of unpopular options. A

utopia isn't one. This means that neither side should, in good conscience, argue

for a policy that nobody knows. There is a reason why nobody has come up with

another measure for student performance than standardized testing.

It's entirely okay to say that the flaws in a system don't justify abandoning the

concept. It's cool to say that we ought to put our efforts into solving some of the

problems outlined in this essay. And there is no ethical problem with arguing that

failures in the past cannot prevent us from implementing a system in the future.

But an idea cannot be supported in the abstract if it remains stranded in utopia.

Policymaking is an ugly process. Sacrifices are made, and some evils are

accepted as marginally better than the evils of the status quo. No debater should

advocate a lofty system grounded in theory if its implementation is a constant

failure. For the pro, this means that you cannot just ignore empirical failure

arguments and dismiss them as irrelevant to *your* case, because *you* somehow

know something that thousands of educators don't. For the con, this means you

cannot argue that a failure in one area or another makes the resolution a bad

idea. Nothing is perfect, and you shouldn't force the pro to offer an unrealistic

option for the education system. In other words, keep debating in the real world.

Avoid utopia. The world of utopia is pretty stupid; it's why nobody lives there.

Directionality

Texas has worked with two merit-based systems. The first was the Texas

Educators Excellence Grant (TEEG) plan, which limited merit programs to

teachers in schools with low-income student bodies, and limited itself to a certain

range of teachers within those schools. The second, currently in place, is the

District Awards for Teacher Excellence (DATE) program, which involves an opt-in

bonus program for merit pay. Currently, only a few number of schools have

opted in but the number of participants is growing.

The TEEG program was an absolute failure. The DATE program has received

more positive reviews, but isn't as widespread. Programs just like DATE show

that no one policy is ever the pinnacle of legislative efforts. Lawmakers are

ignorant plenty of times, and wrong just as much, but they aren't idiots. When

TEEG didn't raise test scores, Texas refused to renew it, and now they're starting

to make some progress. The idea present here is that of directionality. During

the course of your research, dates are extremely important – you can use it to

your advantage in a number of ways. If your opponent reads evidence from

2006 that says merit pay systems in Texas don't work, it might help to point out

that since then, Texas has made progress, and their argument is no good.

Likewise, if a merit pay program that seemed fairly productive has since been

denounced, you may want to find out why. The down economy may have

changed people's priorities, and you'll want to keep up on whether scores are

going up or down, as well as why.

Earlier this year, Congress tried to pass a merit-pay system as a part of its

education bill. Education organizations across the United States opposed it while

think tanks such as CATO stood in support of the measure. As stated above,

Obama is in favor of teacher merit pay, but we're not quite sure how. The matter

to understand is that the level of jurisdiction for merit pay might change from

state to federal hands. This could have a number of implications. First, if the

direction of merit pay moves from state to federal power, the means by which

merit pay is determined might change. Keep in mind that states currently hold

more power over their educational curriculum than the federal government.

Thus, a federal system would not have curriculum control in the specific sense.

Second, federal merit pay systems would eliminate regionalism. Right now,

different states with merit-based systems offer different merit pay amounts. In

Texas, as stated above, the minimum is 3,000 dollars, but this amount is not a

national standard. Another implication of a federal direction would be budgetary

– the federal government can deficit spend, so it may be better equipped to

honor its commitments to teacher pay raises, but political control over an

educational budget gives them more power to direct state policy. It's up to you to

decide whether merit pay is moving in a federal direction, but understand that the

jurisdictional direction affects how you should be debating.

Conclusion

You shouldn't have to spend too much time debating what merit pay actually is –

it's a fairly wide open matter which is implemented in a number of different ways,

and focusing on one individual policy should only be used as a means of making

the more generic argument. Just as you shouldn't force your opponent to argue

in support of a specific implementation of merit pay, you should know how to

prevent your opponents from doing the same.

If you want to debate in the more abstract sense, try to use economic theory in

support of your positions. Economic keywords can help you in your google

search, and if you feel comfortable explaining economics to your judging pool,

you can take such an approach and lean much more on the theory of pay scales

rather than the specifics. The advantage of this is that you cannot be pegged to

one policy, and you have a broader pool of literature upon which to draw. As a

downside, economic theory is a lofty system which can go over some people's

heads and might not be as focused as you may like.

If you want to use lots of evidence to debate, you don't have to avoid economic

theory altogether, but you'll want to probably highlight down the cards being put

out in this publication. Specifically, group evidence into patterns that you wish to

demonstrate, and don't limit yourself to one field. You want source variety if

you're taking the evidentiary route, and this is best achieved when you are ready

for anything your opponents throw at you. Leave time for an underview – most of

our evidence displays opposition to specific policies rather than the abstract

ideal. You want to make the point that repeated empirical failure hints at a

system flaw.

Regardless of the debate you find yourself in, this is a fairly balanced topic.

Don't run away from debate or take some sort of argumentative shortcut. If you

simply sell your argument better than your opponents, you'll win. The best way

to do that is to be honest and just show that you're the best.

Background-Importance of Education

Education including quality teachers is a human right.
Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights reports in December 2007,
"Education Fact Sheet," http://www.mnadvocates.org/sites/608a3887-dd53-4796-8904-997a0131ca54/uploads/Education_Fact_Sheet__National.pdf

The human right to education guarantees every child access to quality schools and services without discrimination, including quality teachers and curricula, and safe and welcoming school environments that respect human dignity. Education must be aimed at developing each child's personality and abilities to his or her fullest potential and preparing each child to participate in society and do work that is rewarding. 2 The UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights has stated: "As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty, and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities." 3 Individuals cannot exercise their civil, political, economic and social rights unless they have received a certain minimum education. The right to education is guaranteed under numerous United Nations documents including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

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Adequate staffing is a critical component to ensuring that a quality education is available to all children. Thus, the lack of competitive teachers' salaries limits the fulfillment of the right to education. Over the last decade, teacher salaries have remained nearly flat, averaging $44,367 in 2003, just about 2,598 above what they were in 1972 (after adjusting for inflation).16 Southern states lag behind the most; for example more than 1 in every 3 of Arkansas' 311 school districts had an average teacher salary below 67% of the national average.17 Furthermore, poor districts, with high percentages of students of color, usually have the lowest teacher salaries.18

As education increases, voting increases.
National Center for Education Statistics and the US Department of
Education Institute of Education Sciences last accessed November 15,
2009 "Fast Facts," http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=88
The more education people have, the more likely they are to vote in presidential
and congressional elections.

In the 2000 presidential election, 70 percent of the U.S. voting-age citizen
population (18 years of age and older) was registered to vote and 59 percent
voted. Among these citizens, the more education a person possessed, the more
likely that person was to be registered to vote and to vote. For example, 52
percent of voting-age citizens who had not completed high school were
registered to vote in 2000, compared with 83 percent of those with a bachelor's
degree or higher. Thirty-eight percent of citizens who had not completed high
school voted in 2000, compared with 77 percent of those with a bachelor's
degree or higher.

The voting rate in presidential elections has historically been higher than in
congressional elections, so it is necessary to consider these two types of
elections separately (U.S. Department of Commerce 2002). Among U.S. citizens
18 years of age and older, the voting rate increased between 1996 and 2000
(from 58 to 59 percent), while it decreased between 1994 and 1998 (from 48 to
45 percent). In all four elections, there was a positive relationship between
educational attainment and voting; citizens with more education were more likely
to register and to vote.

Education is key to addressing economic inequalities.
Economic Policy Institute, a nonprofit economic think tank, reports on July
8, 2004 "Investment in Education Best Route to Stronger, Fairer Economy,"
http://www.nsea.org/CORE/media/040708-schweke-pr1.pdf
At a time when our knowledge-based economy demands increasingly higher
skills to stay competitive, support for well-resourced schooling and training is key,
Schweke says. This strategy is also an important tool for advancing economic
inequality. As more public school students are poor, minority, or new immigrants,
they need good education as a foundation to avoid many social problems,
stemming from poverty and inequality, and to eventually become productive,
highly-skilled workers.

Background-Merit Based Pay System

Merit based pay for teachers has been used in 7 states.
Henry Aubin writes in the Montreal Gazette on February 19, 2009, "Teachers' merit pay is a bad idea; Better to hike the salary of all educators in problem schools," accessed via Lexis Nexis

"Perhaps it is time to seriously consider merit pay for teachers," wrote Sal Lancione, who has taught physics for 39 years and is now at the English Montreal School Board's Lauren Hill Academy in St. Laurent. "It should not be viewed as immoral or unjust to offer teachers merit pay. To the contrary, I believe it is unjust not to offer teachers merit pay."

Is rewarding teachers for their performance a good idea?
The idea was tried here and there in the U.S. a generation ago, then it died out. Now it's catching on again. Since 2001, seven states have started giving bonuses to teachers based on their performances, and several other states have launched pilot projects. The Bush administration and some foundations (including Bill Gates's) have helped fund the concept. Barack Obama voiced support for it during the election campaign.

Texas has had two different merit based pay systems based on different funding mechanisms.
Terrence Stutz reports in the Dallas Morning News on November 4, 2009, "Study: Texas' teacher merit pay program hasn't boosted student performance," website can be found at <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/education/stories/110409dn metmeritpay.41442db.html>
TEEG: The Texas Educators Excellence Grant plan was for teachers in schools with a high percentage of low-income students. It involved an estimated 50,000 teachers at 1,148 campuses in its first year and similar number of teachers and campuses in its second and third years. Teachers received average bonuses of $1,982 in the first year and $2,094 in the second year, far less than the $3,000 to $10,000 range recommended by the Legislature. Bonuses for this past year were distributed this fall. Districts were not required to match the funds.
DATE: The District Awards for Teacher Excellence plan began last year and was open to all school districts, but only one in five chose to participate, including Dallas. The plan recommended a minimum $3,000 bonus per teacher and was designed to provide enough money to reward as many as 50,000 teachers – about one of every six in Texas – for improved test scores and other signs of student achievement. Some funds can also be used to recruit teachers to hard-to-staff schools or in high-demand subjects like math and science. There is more state funding this school year, and more districts are opting in. The grants require a local match.

Teacher salaries have increased over the past 20 years, but student achievement has declined.
Darcy Olsen writes for the CATO Institute on May 22, 2001, "Teachers Deserve Merit Pay, Not Special Interest Pay" at < http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=4287>
Teachers need more money, according to a new survey by the American Federation of Teachers. Noting that teacher salaries last year climbed 3.2 percent, or 0.2 percent less than inflation, AFT president Sandra Feldman said, "Salaries must at least become competitive to attract and keep quality teachers." But at $42,000, the average teacher's salary is not bad, particularly for a job with a three-month summer vacation. Still, the union's pleas for higher pay are not surprising. After all, unions exist in part to negotiate higher wages. But U.S. Department of Education data show teacher salaries have increased steadily over the past 20 years, while student achievement has steadily declined. This raises the question: If students are learning less, should teachers be getting paid more?

Obama supports merit based pay systems for education.
The Cleveland Leader reports on March 10, 2009 titled "Obama Supports Merit Based Pay for Teachers. Public Approves, Teachers Unions Do Not" at < http://www.clevelandleader.com/node/9252>

Today President Barack Obama unveiled some of his plans for education system reform in a speech before the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. In doing so, he may have just made enemies of a large portion of his party's constituency: teachers' unions. Obama proposes spending additional money to reward effective teachers in up to 150 school districts, and embraces the idea of merit pay. This campaign promise also once earned him jeers from the National Education Association.

Teachers' unions say that merit pay causes teachers to compete against each other, rather than collaborate, and is unfair to those who work in disadvantaged areas where it can be harder to boost student performance.
While teachers strongly oppose this in large numbers, the policy is overwhelming supported by the public according to recent polls.

In addition to rewarding effective teachers, Obama also wishes to push out those who are not getting results. Officials haven't elaborated on how Obama proposes to weed out the bad teachers.

In an attempt to make the merit pay proposal more acceptable to teachers' unions, Obama spoke out against the current standardized tests that are greatly disliked by educators in favor of upgraded assessments and better data systems for tracking student progress. He also plans to tough grants in his budget that would bolster data collection among early education programs.

Merit based pay and incentive based pay are not the same.
Carleton College reports on their website on September 25, 2008 "Care to Vote 2008: Getting Smart About Getting Smart,"
<http://www.carleton.edu/departments/educ/Vote/pages/Teachers.html>
Defining an Important Issue: Incentive vs. Merit-based Pay. What Is Merit-based Pay?
Merit pay provides increased salaries or compensation to reward good performance. For teachers, this might include "master teacher" plans, and bonuses (to give a few examples). Teacher performance might be judged by their performance (lesson planning, classroom management, subject knowledge, ethics, growth, etc.) or the performance of their students.

Merit pay offers teachers the opportunity for professional advancement. They will be motivated to become teachers when they know they will be compensated for their growth and expertise.

What is Incentive-based Pay?
Incentive pay offers teachers an incentive for working in low-income districts or other areas that arte usually difficult to staff.

Other types of incentive-based pay offer teachers rewards for student performance (specifically on standardized tests)

Pro- Student Achievement

Teacher quality is the strongest indicator for student success.
Carleton College reports on their website on September 25, 2008 "Care to Vote 2008: Getting Smart About Getting Smart,"
<http://www.carleton.edu/departments/educ/Vote/pages/Teachers.html>
Many studies have shown that teachers have a very important influence on their students:

"The difference between having a good teacher and having a bad teacher can exceed one grade-level equivalent in annual achievement growth" (Hanushek, 1992). "Teacher quality more heavily influenced differences in student performance than did race, class, or school of the student; disadvantaged students benefited more from good teachers than did advantaged students (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004). Teacher quality is the most important predictor of student achievement. "In comparison, class size, teacher education, and teacher experience play a small role" (Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain, 1998). "Achievement gains from having an effective teacher could be almost three times as large for African American students than for white students, even when comparing students with the same prior school achievement" (Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

A merit based system, even with a few flaws, is much better than the current system at fostering student learning.
Dr. Gary Ritter, Endowed Chair in Education Policy at the University of Arkansas, writes for PBS on May 1, 2009, "Issue Clash: Merit Pay,"
http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/518/merit-pay-debate.html

Merit pay is attractive to policymakers precisely because of the unfairness embedded in current teacher compensation policies, which pay teachers simply for time served and degrees earned rather than for their ability to foster student learning. The problem is that there is little evidence that these factors make for better teachers. Alternatively, merit pay represents a promising strategy for rewarding and encouraging teacher effectiveness. As a discipline, we do have reasonably good tools to assess the "merit" of a teacher; we should use these tools. While it may not be perfectly fair, a pay system based on merit is certainly more equitable than the status quo, which discourages talented teachers and shortchanges students.

Even if some faculty go unrewarded, every outcome will benefit students by focusing on school-wide gains.
Dr. Gary Ritter, Endowed Chair in Education Policy at the University of Arkansas, writes for PBS on May 1, 2009, "Issue Clash: Merit Pay,"
http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/518/merit-pay-debate.html

Critics of merit pay are often concerned that such plans cannot adequately incorporate teachers of "non-core" subjects. The most effective merit pay plans ensure that all teachers are eligible for rewards so as to organize the entire faculty around the school's ultimate objective of enhancing student learning. There are a variety of ways to assess the "merit" of teachers of subjects such as technology and art; one reasonable approach is to give these teachers credit for school-wide learning gains. Other faculty may go "un-rewarded" because their students do not show learning gains. At the end of the day, these teachers will either improve their performance or choose to pursue another profession. Either outcome will benefit the students.

Pro-Answers to "Studies Prove Failure"/Testing Bad

Merit based pay systems in Texas failed because they were not fully implemented.
Terrence Stutz reports in the Dallas Morning News on November 4, 2009
"Study: Texas' teacher merit pay program hasn't boosted student performance," website can be found at
<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/education/stories/110409dn metmeritpay.41442db.html>
Lori Taylor of Texas A&M, one of the authors of the study, said one possible cause of the program's failure was that bonuses were relatively small and were given to most teachers at each school – about 70 percent – so that the incentive for individual teachers to push for higher scores was "relatively weak."
In addition, campuses that qualified already had to be higher performers, so it was difficult to register much improvement. "There were no significant declines at the schools, but there were no significant improvements, either," Taylor said.

Criteria other than student tests scores can be used to measure a teacher's worth.
Darcy Olsen writes for the CATO Institute on May 22, 2001, "Teachers Deserve Merit Pay, Not Special Interest Pay" at <
http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=4287>

Opponents of merit-based pay say that measuring a teacher's value is a difficult task. True enough. There's no single definition of what constitutes a "good teacher." Non- public schools, however, evaluate teachers every day. Sometimes criteria include peer review, student testing, parent feedback, education levels, all or none of the above. Surely if schools can be trusted to educate children, a much more complex task, finding ways to grade teachers should be achievable.

A merit based system with standardized testing would be a good indicator of teacher achievement.
Dr. Gary Ritter, Endowed Chair in Education Policy at the University of Arkansas, writes for PBS on May 1, 2009, "Issue Clash: Merit Pay," http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/518/merit-pay-debate.html

In each state across the nation, educators and policymakers have gotten together to develop learning standards for students. Testing experts have joined in to develop standardized assessments aligned to these standards so that educators, policymakers, and parents can gauge student progress. Student performance on these assessments serves as an excellent indicator of student learning; student gains on these assessments provide a good measure of the teacher's contribution to student learning. Thus, merit pay would most certainly mean providing rewards for teachers who are effective at fostering improvements on these exams. In this way, a merit-based compensation system is designed to encourage and reward good teaching—just as the NEA suggests. Indeed, it remains puzzling to me that the NEA continues to support the unjust uniform pay scale and oppose the common-sense idea that the best teachers be rewarded for doing a great job.

Student information through the Data Quality can link student achievement to teachers.
National Center on Performance Initiatives reports in February 2008,
"Collective Bargaining in Education and Pay for Performance," http://www.performanceincentives.org/data/files/directory/ConferencePapersNews/Hannaway_et_al_2008.pdf
But things are different this time around. For one, the costs of instituting a reasonably credible system have gone down dramatically. Today, information on student performance is frequently and systematically collected as a consequence of school accountability policies. And, increasingly, student information can be linked to teachers.

Such a link is one of the essential data system characteristics promoted by the Data Quality Campaign, a national effort to improve data collection and utilization in education.

Empirically, teacher evaluation tools in merit based systems can be chosen by teachers and evaluated by a third party.

<u>National Center on Performance Initiatives reports in February 2008,</u>

"Collective Bargaining in Education and Pay for Performance,"
http://www.performanceincentives.org/data/files/directory/ConferencePapersNews/Hannaway_et_al_2008.pdf

<u>The most comprehensive, established, and well-known performance-based initiative is the Denver ProComp plan</u>. <u>Denver's Board of Education proposed a plan to the Denver Classroom Teachers Association</u> (DCTA<u>) and, after negotiations</u> and concessions by the Board and the extensive involvement of local and national philanthropists, DCTA <u>agreed to a pilot program. DCTA insisted that performance be based on objectives chosen by teachers, with the approval of their principals, rather than objectives identified by some authority. They also insisted that the pilot be evaluated by a third party, and that the final plan be submitted to DCTAs members for a general vote.</u>

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Pro-Current System is Bad

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Merit-based pay would address the shortcomings of traditional pay schedules.
Darcy Olsen writes for the CATO Institute on May 22, 2001, "Teachers Deserve Merit Pay, Not Special Interest Pay" at < http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=4287>

Like the rest of us, if teachers want higher salaries, they should earn them. Don't get me wrong: Millions of talented teachers across the country are "earning" those higher salaries through their skilled and dedicated work. But union rules prevent them from getting paid for it.
Unions have long insisted on uniform pay scales based almost exclusively on degrees earned and years on the job. All the while, a teacher's most important job--teaching--goes unmeasured and unrewarded. When a teacher who can't teach simple addition not only doesn't get fired but actually gets paid the same as the "Teacher of the Year," is it any wonder many of the most talented teachers are leaving the profession?
The AFT acknowledges this: "The traditional salary schedule does not reward additional skills and knowledge that benefit children ... does not respond to market forces ... nor does it provide incentives for teachers to assume differentiated roles." Yet it rejects merit-based pay, the one reform that would begin to address those shortcomings.

Merit based pay would be better than the uniform pay in the status quo.
Darcy Olsen writes for the CATO Institute on May 22, 2001, "Teachers Deserve Merit Pay, Not Special Interest Pay" at < http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=4287>

Pay for performance is not a new concept. It works for businessmen, lawyers, waitresses, travel agents, journalists, athletes, accountants, in fact, for most of us. Why not teachers? If a school faces a teacher shortage, let wages increase to attract them. Let schools compete to secure, retain and reward the best teachers. Let schools say "sayonara" to those unable or unwilling to get the job done.
Like any other profession, teaching contains individuals who are remarkably talented and others who are remarkable only for their incompetence. Uniform pay protects the worst at the expense of the best. Why do union leaders support this? Simple self-interest. Merit-based pay would destroy the heart of the collective bargaining process. If every teacher negotiated his own salary, there would be less need for unions.

Teachers play a large role in shaping a student's ambition.
Darcy Olsen writes for the CATO Institute on May 22, 2001, "Teachers Deserve Merit Pay, Not Special Interest Pay" at < http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=4287>

Under the status quo, teacher salaries bear little relation to student performance. For instance, at $48,304, the average teacher salary in Washington, D.C., tops 44 other states. Yet student achievement is among the worst in the nation. Such low achievement suggests there might be a few teachers in that lot who deserve no pay at all.
Of course there's more to student achievement than good teaching. Family background, student motivation, and natural ability all play a role. But at the margins, teachers do make a difference. And many of us can remember teachers who made a great difference. Skilled teachers can instill students with a desire to learn and inadequate teachers can snuff out the strongest dreams. Most of us have encountered both types of teachers along the way.

The current pay system does not provide the best educational system. Change is needed and a merit system is the logical part of the solution. Florida Keys and The Citizen News reports on October 27, 2009, "Merit pay is needed to improve education," <http://keysnews.com/node/18064>

But even more clear is the fact that the current compensation system based on longevity -- a system that harkens back to the 1940s -- is not conducive to providing the best education possible to our children. In fact, rewarding teacher incompetence in the classroom is just as damaging as passing to the next grade students who lack the proficiency to do so.
Burke and the board are in the process of negotiating pay increases for school district personnel, and these negotiations can't be separated from the movement toward performance-based pay. Agreement will be difficult.
The superintendent has acknowledged these challenges, and promises to bring creative solutions forward.
If our nation's education system is to recover the educational edge lost to other nations, merit pay for teachers logically will be part of the solution. We are confident that Burke, a supporter of the merit pay concept, can set the Monroe County district in the right direction.

**The current system disenfranchises minorities and the poor.
Dr. Gary Ritter, Endowed Chair in Education Policy at the University of Arkansas, writes for PBS on May 1, 2009**, "Issue Clash: Merit Pay," http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/518/merit-pay-debate.html

First, the NEA would like us to support the profession of teaching. As President Obama argued last month, treating teachers like professionals means that "good teachers will be rewarded with more money for improved student achievement." If Obama is correct, the NEA could support the profession by supporting merit pay. Additionally, the NEA makes a priority of protecting student access to educational services. In fact, the antiquated uniform salary structure supported by the NEA is one of the biggest reasons that poor and minority students do not have access to the same high quality teachers that their middle class peers do.

Perhaps the NEA should aim to protect students by actively advocating for differentiated teacher pay. Finally, the NEA claims to prioritize high quality research and best practices. In that light, the NEA should consider a 2008 research review published in the non-partisan Journal of Policy Analysis and Management. In this study, the authors conclude that merit pay plans are effective at improving student achievement. Paying attention to evidence would be a great start for us to improve our schools!

Pro-Attracts Quality Teachers

Merit systems attract more teachers to poverty schools and increase the general applicant pool.
Kristin Graham writes for the Philadelphia Inquirer on March 30, 2009,
"Second look at merit pay for teachers; President Obama, Phila. schools chief on board," accessed via Lexis Nexis
Denver's merit-pay system has been around since 1999 and has shown student gains in an internal evaluation.
It is called ProComp, and under the plan - mandatory for new teachers and optional for veterans - teachers start at higher salaries and can move up the pay scale quicker than they could under the traditional system, said Phil Gonring, an official with Denver's Rose Community Foundation, a nonprofit group that helped design the system.
Applications, both for the district and its hard-to-staff schools, are up, Gonring said, and a number of surrounding districts are also considering adopting similar pay structures. He said he expected the movement to grow nationally.
"Eventually, we're going to get to a point - maybe under the Obama administration - where enough districts adopt performance-pay plans that we'll get to a tipping point," Gonring said.
Traditionally, high-poverty schools across the country have had a disproportionate share of inexperienced teachers, but merit pay would make it more attractive for veterans to pick those schools, Gonring said.
And because a teacher can rapidly jump from making $35,000 to $60,000, sharp young people who might otherwise shy away from classroom jobs are thinking twice about teaching, he said.
"You can suddenly compete with the other professions with which you're not currently competing," Gonring said.

Performance pay increases the quality and retention of educators.
Lucinda Blumenfield writes for Scholastic in January 2009, "Weigh In: Does Performance Pay Work?
A panel of education leaders give their gut-level reactions,"
http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3751075
"We have schools filled with pivotal personnel working relentlessly for children, and we need to reward their efforts and accomplishments," says John Barnes, Executive Principal, Bronx Early College Academy. "It is my belief that my staff members received recognition in a very small way in comparison to their daily contributions to the school. I would like to see more incentives implemented for educators in our schools throughout the country. The debate continues when determining how we measure climate, enrichment opportunities, and the validity of standardized testing year to year to assess student progress. I support recognizing these people with monetary compensation and believe the only way to drive student achievement is through collective ownership in accountability shared amongst a school community."

"I believe performance pay, when implemented collaboratively with transparency and equity, is an excellent way to retain faculty and attract highly qualified people to the noble profession of educating our students. The goal of having students achieve their maximum potential certainly, increases by working with the most qualified, motivated teachers available."

Obama's merit based plans would reward quality teachers, cut bad ones, and have union support.
Laura Meckler writes for the Wall Street Journal on March 11, 2009,
"Education Push Includes Merit Pay,"
http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123668036405881929.html
"It's time to start rewarding good teachers, stop making excuses for bad ones," Mr. Obama said. "If a teacher is given a chance or two chances or three chances but still does not improve, there's no excuse for that person to continue teaching."

Mr. Obama said that teachers who are rewarded for excellence should help their schools improve.

Teacher unions said Tuesday that they welcomed Mr. Obama's overall approach and could support merit-pay plans as long as they are fair to teachers. The presidents of the two largest teachers' unions said they were confident Mr. Obama would only support proposals that meet that test.
"This is a president who actually respects teachers for who they are and what they do. We can work many of these things out," said Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers.

A merit based system improves teacher quality and retention while encouraging teachers to pay closer attention to student achievement data. Dr. Gary Ritter, Endowed Chair in Education Policy at the University of Arkansas, writes for PBS on May 1, 2009, "Issue Clash: Merit Pay," http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/518/merit-pay-debate.html

The research on elementary and secondary education points to one factor as absolutely critical to student learning: the quality of the classroom teacher. We also know that teachers, like other professionals, respond to incentives. As a result, we should design compensation policies to attract and retain the best teachers by directing our resources toward these effective teachers and away from their ineffective peers. Merit pay is one such policy. This policy is even more appealing because it can improve student learning by encouraging teachers to pay closer attention to student achievement data.

**Empirically in Denver, previous teachers were allowed to opt in the program. There is no financial downside. New teachers could choose schools with the merit based program by applying.
National Center on Performance Initiatives reports in February 2008,** "Collective Bargaining in Education and Pay for Performance," http://www.performanceincentives.org/data/files/directory/ConferencePapersNews/Hannaway_et_al_2008.pdf

During the pilot phase, 85 percent of teachers in a school had to agree to participate in order for the school to become part of the trial. Only 16 schools, less than 10 percent of the district, joined. When the full program took hold in 2004, with the terms described above, participation became mandatory for new teachers. In effect, teachers made a program participation choice by choosing to work in the district. Teachers already employed can still choose to opt into the program, but are not required to do so. For them, the standard salary schedule will remain in place until the last teacher covered by it retires or leaves the district. In the first year of the program, 28 percent of veterans opted in, and since then about another 10 percent have joined.Since there is no financial downside to opting into the program, the likely explanation for more veteran teachers not joining is a preservation of autonomy, a long standing norm among teachers, as well as lingering opposition to the program among many Denver teachers.

Reward systems for educators can revitalize the profession.
Lawrence Ingvarson, Elizabeth Kleinhenz, Jenny Wilkinson of the
Teaching, Learning and Leadership Program, Australian Council for
Educational Research writes in 2008 "Research on Performance Pay for
Teachers," http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/D477C6A5-C8EF-4074-8619-
FF43059445F8/25208/ACERPerformancePayPaper.pdf
There is an increasing desire among all stakeholders in Australia to develop
policies for 'revitalising' the teaching profession (DEST, 2003). This includes
pay systems that are more effective in giving incentives for highly
accomplished teaching, for keeping excellent teachers working in
classrooms and for providing professional leadership to colleagues. There
is increasing recognition, nationally and internationally, that career paths and
pay systems can be, and need to be, linked to evidence of increasing capacity
to promote valued student learning outcomes and, thereby, stronger levers
for ensuring professional development and quality learning outcomes for all
students (Sclafani & Tucker, 2006; OECD, 2005b). Representatives of eight
countries, including Australia, recently attended an international seminar on
Teaching Policy to Improve Student Learning convened by the Aspen
Institute. Australia stood out as a country where teachers' careers plateau
very quickly and at a relatively modest salary. A report summarising the
conference proceedings (Olson, 2007) concluded: Each of the nations
participating was seeking ways to recognise expert teachers, reward them for
their abilities, and take advantage of their skills. Creating a stronger connection
between individual teacher contributions and what they are paid lies at the
heart of redesigning teaching for the next generation. (p. 5)

A merit system improves teacher quality and consequently student achievement. The current system results in qualified teachers fleeing poor areas, leaving novices to fill the gap.
<u>University of Missouri-Columbia reports on March 13, 2009</u>, "Performance pay is a good lesson for education, expert finds,"
http://www.physorg.com/news156161087.html
Tuesday, President Barack Obama announced a new education reform, calling for a merit-pay system for teachers in hopes of improving student performance. As the nation's public schools spend $187 billion in salaries, based on the latest Department of Education data, <u>University of Missouri researcher Michael Podgursky has found a link between teacher pay and student achievement</u>. <u>"The evidence certainly suggests when you offer appropriate pay incentives to teachers, you're likely to get better results," said Podgursky, professor of economics in the MU College of Arts and Science.</u> "In addition, the single-salary pay schedule is particularly inefficient because the factors it rewards, teacher experience and level of education, are not strong predictors of teacher productivity. <u>Without consideration of the logic or unintended consequences of current teacher compensation policies, school systems will continue to face financial and performance efficiency challenges."</u>
<u>Podgursky has conducted many studies on the effect of teacher pay and has surveyed all research studies of merit-pay systems in the United States, as well as programs in Israel, Africa and the United Kingdom. He has found that single-salary pay schedules can cause a shortage of teachers in specific subject areas like science and math, an inequitable distribution of novice teachers and makes it harder to recruit and retain effective teachers.</u>
<u>"Because single-salary pay schedules does not adapt to teaching field demands, the teacher market adjusts in terms of quality</u>," Podgursky said. "<u>The pay schedule also allows teachers with more seniority to exercise the option to move to better working conditions, migrating away from high-poverty schools. Novice teachers frequently fill the subsequent openings in these high-poverty schools. Economic theory also suggests that if more effective teachers are rewarded on the basis of performance, incumbent teachers would have an incentive to work more effectively to raise their performance."</u>
Traditionally, teacher pay is based on a salary schedule - years of experience and education level. Nationwide, there are roughly 3.1 million public school teachers. <u>Podgursky said the current salary system increases expenditures without directly impacting student achievement. He advocates school districts to emulate private sector employers, who understand that strategic pay policies are a very important lever in raising firm performance.</u>
Podgursky has published numerous articles and reports on education policy and teacher quality, and co-authored a book, Teacher Pay and Teacher Quality. The primary focus of his recent work has been on personnel policy in schools and the effects on teacher quality. Podgursky is the lead investigator on several research contracts on teacher compensation funded by the U.S. Department of Education and private foundations.

Minority students at high-poverty schools are most likely to be denied quality teachers.

Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights reports in December 2007, "Education Fact Sheet," http://www.mnadvocates.org/sites/608a3887-dd53-4796-8904-997a0131ca54/uploads/Education_Fact_Sheet__National.pdf

Minority and low-income students are still denied a quality education more than 50 years after Brown v. Board of Education.28 They are the least likely to have qualified teachers and administrators.29 Turnover of
professionals is high and teachers in high-poverty schools are twice as likely to have only 3 years of teaching experience or less.30 Secondary-level students in high-poverty districts are more likely to be taught by a teacher who has not completed a college major or minor in the subject they teach.31 Schools whose students are 70% or more low-income are twice as likely to be overcrowded as schools whose students are
less than 20% low-income.32

Pro-Promotes Teacher Collaboration

Merit based systems rewarded all staff members, provided customized student education for success, and allowed teachers to identify their own strengths and weaknesses.
Lucinda Blumenfield writes for Scholastic in January 2009, "Weigh In: Does Performance Pay Work?
A panel of education leaders give their gut-level reactions,"
http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3751075
"We reward all staff members—teachers, assistants, custodians—for success,"says Karen Carter, principal at Meadowcliff Elementary School in Little Rock, Arkansas. "Meadowcliff began a merit pay program during the 2004–05 school year. After much discussion, we designed a plan that would provide monetary rewards based on student growth to all staff members, including teachers, specialists, custodians, nutritionists, etc.
"Two aspects of this program set it apart. First, we base our program on individual student growth over a one-year period. Secondly, every staff member can receive the highest incentive amount available. There is no competition for a pot of money.
"As with most new, innovative programs, we did meet with some negative publicity. The Classroom Teachers Association felt that it was unfair it was not available to the entire district. Other educators felt it detracted from the true meaning of education.
"Now, the staff feels that the positive outcomes from this program far outweighed any of the negatives. Teachers, for the first time, had a full battery of data for each student at the beginning of the year. This allowed them to determine each child's strengths and weaknesses and develop a plan for each student. It allowed teachers and staff members to look at their own strengths and weaknesses. Collaboration across the building and student achievement increased. In three years, achievement increased by 8 to 18 percent."

Not all merit systems create competition-numerous programs including Arkansas bases improvement off of individual teachers which promotes collaboration.
Dr. Gary Ritter, Endowed Chair in Education Policy at the University of Arkansas, writes for PBS on May 1, 2009, "Issue Clash: Merit Pay," http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/518/merit-pay-debate.html

The NEA is correct to point out the obvious: it is possible to devise "bad" merit pay schemes. However, the NEA is absolutely wrong to assert that all merit pay programs are designed this way. Indeed, there are numerous good programs across the country, and Mr. Van Roekel must realize this. In good merit pay programs, often designed by educators, teachers do not compete against each other but instead are measured against their own improvement goals. Our Arkansas programs are designed this way. All teachers who meet their objectives can earn the maximum reward. In fact, teachers in our merit pay schools are rewarded for the improvement in their own classrooms and for the gains of students throughout the school. Thus, teacher bonuses are enhanced—not limited—by the good work of their peers throughout the school. Mr. Van Roekel also wrongly claims that he would be incentivized by merit pay to teach calculus. When merit is based on learning gains, teachers of all students can earn rewards, as long as they nurture student improvement. Indeed, Mr. Van Roekel might prefer to teach basic-level students in our merit system since these students have the most room for growth. An example of a merit pay plan, developed by educators, that highlights the flaws in the NEA argument, is posted here

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Con-Student Achievement

A National Center on Performance Incentives study showed that merit based pay systems in Texas had no effect on student achievement.
Terrence Stutz reports in the Dallas Morning News on November 4, 2009
"Study: Texas' teacher merit pay program hasn't boosted student performance," website can be found at
<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/education/stories/110409dn metmeritpay.41442db.html>
For the $300 million spent on merit pay for teachers over the last three years, Texas was hoping for a big boost in student achievement.
But it didn't happen with the now-defunct program, according to experts hired by the state.
The Texas Educator Excellence Grant, or TEEG, plan did not produce the academic improvements that proponents – including Gov. Rick Perry– hoped for when the program was launched with much fanfare in 2006, a new report from the National Center on Performance Incentives said.
"There is no systematic evidence that TEEG had an impact on student achievement gains," said researchers for Texas A&M University, Vanderbilt University and the University of Missouri.

There is no evidence that merit pay works.
Thomas Toch, executive director of the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington, writes for the Washington Post on October 11, 2009, "Myths About Paying Good Teachers More," accessed via LexisNexis
But over the years, there have been few long-term performance pay experiments in public education, so we don't know for sure whether the change would indeed improve the teaching profession. Some evidence linking merit pay to higher student test scores has trickled in from Kenya and from Israel. Patrick Schuermann at Vanderbilt's Peabody College and James Guthrie at the school's National Center on Performance Incentives, funded by the George W. Bush administration to study performance pay in education, have surveyed U.S. research and warn that there's no conclusive evidence on "the power of financial awards in promoting more-effective teaching and elevating student performance" or on "the long-term effect of performance awards on the supply of effective teachers." Nor, they write, do we know the "effects of group awards relative to individual performance" or the "preferable mix of financial and non-pecuniary awards" -- important secondary questions.

Con-Merit Based Pay Creates Bias

A merit based approach would create bias in the school system and be costly.
Henry Aubin writes in the Montreal Gazette on February 19, 2009, "Teachers' merit pay is a bad idea; Better to hike the salary of all educators in problem schools," accessed via Lexis Nexis

"Merit" is hard to define. If principals decide who's worthy, there's a risk of arbitrariness and favouritism. Staff morale will suffer if subservience defines merit.If the criteria for merit are students' scores on standardized tests, many teachers might well focus on test preparation. The teaching that often ignites students' intellectual curiosity, however, often deals with material that testing does not cover.School administrators can influence test results in subtle ways. As Ruth Rosenfield, head of the teachers' union at the EMSB, notes it, "You can set up a class for failure or success by the way you choose the students." The cost of tests and "associated" teacher-development programs can be staggering. A study of the plans south of the border by the British Columbia-based Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education says costs range from $115 to $500 per student annually.Merit pay, then, might be terrific in principle, but the devil is in the details. Little wonder that this study found that bonuses for individual teachers are unpopular with teachers. Many see them as breeding unhealthy competition among teachers and lowering staff morale.

Pay for Performance is Unfair – Teachers don't get to pick their students.
Dave Riegel, a member of Ohio's education field with sixteen years experience as a teacher and administrator, writes in the Huffington Post on August 31, 2007, "The Problem with Merit Pay," accessed online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-riegel/the-problem-with-merit-pa_b_62553.html
The use of test scores for evaluation of teachers is fraught with difficulties that should be obvious to any outside observer. First among them, you can't pick your students upon whom your salary might depend. Those in favor of merit pay often use the private sector as a comparison point, saying essentially that most people are paid by how hard they work or how many cases they win or how much they sell. And all that's true. But a salesman isn't forced to spend his time on customers who clearly don't want to buy his products. Lawyers don't typically take cases they can't win. But the logic of paying teachers based on performance is similar to saying to a car salesman, "here are 30 adults chosen at random. Your salary depends on being able to sell all of them cars -- a standard car, at that -- regardless of their needs, desires, or ability to pay." Or to tell a lawyer, "you must win the next 30 cases that walk through your door, using limited resources, regardless of the merit of their suits, or the expense required to prosecute their cases."

Pay for Performance measures don't address teacher collaboration, the arts, different student personas, and teaching performance in earlier grades.
Dave Riegel , a member of Ohio's education field with sixteen years experience as a teacher and administrator, writes in the Huffington Post on August 31, 2007, "The Problem with Merit Pay," accessed online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-riegel/the-problem-with-merit-pa_b_62553.html

Teachers don't get to choose who walks in their doors, like the hapless lawyer or car salesman in the examples above. It's the luck of the draw. Teachers (good ones) certainly believe all children can learn, and want them to. But success in terms of test scores depends on many factors, mostly too obvious to mention, outside the teachers' control. Not the least among these, and perhaps less obvious to outside observers, is the support of fellow practitioners. In many cases, a child's learning requires the support of others besides just the classroom teacher. It depends on an administrator who can effectively create an climate for learning in the school. It may depend on reading specialists who can help students comprehend their textbooks. It may depend on intervention specialists who help devise strategies for learning disabled students to make more effective gains. It even depends on successful foundations provided by teachers in previous grade levels. How do merit pay advocates propose to disaggregate the work of a classroom teacher from the support staff around her? For that matter, how would art, music, physical education or special education teachers be judged under a pay for performance system? Would we need to implement standardized tests in those areas?

Con-Kills Teacher Collaboration

Merit pay destroys teacher collaboration.
Joshua Petchtalt, the Vice-President of United Teachers of Los-Angeles AFT writes on November 9, 2007 in United Teachers Volume XXXVII, accessed online at http://www.utla.net/node/930
Any merit pay proposal would effectively destroy collaboration at the workplace. If teachers knew that student test scores would result in higher pay, why would anyone want to share good ideas with their colleagues?

Merit pay would divide teachers instead of uniting them.
Joshua Petchtalt, the Vice-President of United Teachers of Los-Angeles AFT writes on November 9, 2007 in United Teachers Volume XXXVII, accessed online at http://www.utla.net/node/930
From a labor perspective merit pay would also divide the work force and in the long run lessen our ability to fight collectively to improve public education. If salaries were not simply based on years of experience and number of college credits earned or additional services provided, the teaching force at any workplace would be more stratified (differentiated) and much less willing to stand together during a conflict with school site management or during a contract struggle. The role of the union would be seriously compromised.

Con-Evaluations

There are no credible systems to gauge teacher performance for merit plans.
Thomas Toch, executive director of the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington, writes for the Washington Post on October 11, 2009, "Myths About Paying Good Teachers More," accessed via LexisNexis
Local, state and federal spending on public school teacher salaries and benefits has reached an estimated $220 billion a year, yet the typical teacher evaluation in public education consists of a single, fleeting classroom visit by a harried principal who is often more interested in classroom behavior than quality of instruction. The result is reflected in statistics such as those in Chicago, where the nonprofit New Teacher Project found that 88 percent of the city's 600 schools did not issue a single "unsatisfactory" teacher rating between 2003 and 2006. The absence of credible systems of evaluating teachers' performance is a major barrier to successful performance pay plans.

Standardized tests are not a good way to gauge teacher performance.
Thomas Toch, executive director of the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington, writes for the Washington Post on October 11, 2009, "Myths About Paying Good Teachers More," accessed via LexisNexis
But standardized test scores pose as many problems as they solve. Less than half of public school instructors teach subjects or grade levels in which students are tested, eliminating the prospect of a system that applies fairly to all teachers. Most standardized tests measure a narrow band of low-level skills -- such as recalling or restating facts -- rather than the ability to analyze information and other advanced skills. As a result, the tests privilege low-level pedagogy, leaving the best teachers, those with wider repertoires and the ability to move students beyond the basics, at a disadvantage.
Comprehensive evaluations are especially important for making key decisions such as granting tenure, and they're critical to winning teacher support of performance pay. In surveys, only a tiny fraction of teachers are willing to have student test scores play a role in pay levels. But their opposition to performance pay drops significantly when ratings are based on evaluations of how well teachers plan, teach, test, manage and motivate.

Merit based pay systems rely on student test scores, which cannot accurately measure teacher performance over a school year.
Terrence Stutz reports in the Dallas Morning News on November 4, 2009
"Study: Texas' teacher merit pay program hasn't boosted student performance," website can be found at
<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/education/stories/110409dn metmeritpay.41442db.html>
Although lawmakers discontinued TEEG, they provided nearly $200 million a year for another merit pay plan that began last year – the District Awards for Teacher Excellence, or DATE. Several North Texas districts, including Dallas, are participating in what is one of the largest merit pay plans in the nation.
In all, about one in five districts in the state signed up for the program and has distributed the first bonuses – based on 2009 TAKS scores and other factors – to qualifying teachers this fall. More than 800 districts skipped the plan last year, but some are opting in this year.
But teacher groups remain skeptical of the new plan, particularly its heavy reliance on student test scores – also a key feature of the TEEG plan.
"The problem is that these tests aren't designed for this purpose," said Jennifer Canaday of the Association of Texas Professional Educators. "You can't take a snapshot of students' performance on one day and extrapolate from that whether their teacher is highly effective over the entire school year."

Merit based payment entrenches the ideals of NCLB that the testing environment best determines good teaching.
Dave Riegel is a member of Ohio's education field with sixteen years experience as a teacher and administrator. He writes in the Huffington Post **on August 31, 2007**, "The Problem with Merit Pay," accessed online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-riegel/the-problem-with-merit-pa_b_62553.html

I could go on and on about practical and logistical difficulties associated with merit pay. But the strongest arguments against it are philosophical. At a time when many progressives are questioning the effectiveness of high stakes testing mandated by NCLB, should we really be talking about entrenching that drill and test regime taking over education today by connecting it to teacher compensation? The real debate today should be about whether the schools created under the tyranny of NCLB are the kinds of schools we want to have. Do we really want high stakes tests driving our definition of education? And driving our definition of quality teaching?

Merit pay encourages teachers to "teach to the test"
Joshua Petchtalt, the Vice-President of United Teachers of Los-Angeles AFT writes on November 9, 2007 in United Teachers Volume XXXVII, accessed online at http://www.utla.net/node/930
Rewarding educators based on student test scores would further exacerbate the "teach to the test" syndrome that has narrowed the curriculum and dulled the educational experience for students and teachers. It could also create conditions that would encourage cheating.

Merit pay shifts responsibility from school administrators who are more critical to gauging teacher performance.
Dave Riegel , a member of Ohio's education field with sixteen years experience as a teacher and administrator, writes in the Huffington Post on August 31, 2007, "The Problem with Merit Pay," accessed online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-riegel/the-problem-with-merit-pa_b_62553.html

I find that merit pay advocates also hope that a compensation structure will do that job of evaluating teachers that should properly be done by effective building administrators. We shouldn't simply withhold monetary rewards from teachers who are ineffective: we should help them improve or evaluate them out of the profession. The canard that teachers' unions protect bad teachers from dismissal is not true: bad administrators protect bad teachers from dismissal or non-renewal. But teacher evaluation is more complicated than simply looking at test scores. It requires careful examination of specific teacher behaviors in the classroom, of how a teacher relates to students, and his or her command of the subject matter they are teaching. This cannot be judged simply by looking at test scores, which may be high in some cases in spite of uninspiring instruction: it requires an effective and highly skilled administrator who knows what she is looking for when she observes a teacher interacting with her students, and who is skilled at helping teachers improve. In short, pay for performance provides an easy way out when quality supervision of instruction is what should really be taking place.

Con-Rich Get Richer-Rich/Poor Divide

A merit based pay study in Florida proved that rich schools benefited from the program while poor schools didn't.
Letitia Stein reports for the St. Petersburg Times on February 24, 2008,
"MERIT PAY FLOWS TO AFFLUENT SCHOOLS," accessed via LexisNexis. Hillsborough County's 15,000 teachers agreed last year to be guinea pigs in Florida's controversial experiment with merit pay, an issue dividing politicians and educators across the state.
The results weren't at all what officials expected.
A St. Petersburg Times investigation shows that almost three-fourths of the nearly 5,000 teachers who received merit pay worked at the county's more affluent campuses.
In contrast, only 3 percent of the educators deemed worthy of the $2,100 bonuses worked in the low-income schools that struggle most, where at least nine in 10 students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.
And almost two-thirds taught in A-rated schools, where they arguably were least needed.
That wasn't how it was supposed to work. State and local officials promised that the merit pay program, tied heavily to FCAT scores, would reward outstanding teachers wherever they taught, regardless of how advanced or behind their students started out.

A Florida program review revealed that merit based pay disproportionately favored high-income schools.

Letitia Stein reports for the St. Petersburg Times on February 24, 2008,

"MERIT PAY FLOWS TO AFFLUENT SCHOOLS," accessed via LexisNexis.

Under Hillsborough's plan, teachers were compared only to peers in the same subject area. To level the playing field, they earned points based on a student's learning gains, regardless of where the student started out. The points were then converted into a ranking, and the bonuses were doled out until the money ran out.

That left a lot of good teachers out in the cold.

Half of this year's finalists for Teacher of the Year - supposedly the best of the best - did not qualify for merit pay.And only two of those that did are working in low-income schools.

Then there's Kelly Campo, an English teacher at Bloomingdale High who made the cut, but hardly felt like celebrating.

"I can understand why for some of the teachers it hurts," she said. "I give my time. I give my energy. I give my money. Everything I can, I give to them. And then the district says, 'You're good, but not good enough. Sorry, we ran out of money two rows above you.'"

Even though district officials have not publicly detailed the results, teachers couldn't miss the program's disparities.

Schools with the most merit paywinners were concentrated in Hillsborough's middle to upper-class suburbs. Top award-getters included places like McKitrick and Claywell elementary schools in the northern county, where families flock to homes that feed into top-rated schools.

The numbers were less rosy at struggling Title I schools, known for the federal funding they receive to help the large numbers of students - many of them minorities - who live in poverty. About half of Hillsborough's schools qualify for Title I money. But they employed fewer than one-third of merit pay recipients. School officials acknowledge the inequities.

"Even though we had hoped - and mathematically it should have worked the way we wanted it to - it didn't have the level of equity that we had hoped to achieve," said Michelle Watts, Hillsborough's supervisor of data analysis, who oversaw the merit pay calculations.

At least one high-poverty elementary school, Sulphur Springs, had no award winners when the district ran the numbers last spring. At almost two dozen schools, fewer than 10 percent of eligible educators received the bonus. All but one of them were high-poverty schools.

Merit pay would move high-skilled teachers from poor schools to rich ones.

Joshua Petchtalt, the Vice-President of United Teachers of Los-Angeles AFT writes on November 9, 2007 in United Teachers Volume XXXVII, accessed online at http://www.utla.net/node/930

In fact, merit pay would create a disincentive for the very teachers we want going into the most challenging schools and communities. Such teachers might want to move to the most affluent schools because the monetary rewards would be greater. This could have a devastating impact in our poorest communities.

Con-Special Education

A merit based system would decrease the number of teachers in special education.
<u>Dana Hull writes for San Jose Mercury News on Stanford's website on May 3, 2005</u>, "Initiatives Target Tenure, Wage System," < http://ed.stanford.edu/suse/faculty/displayFacultyNews.php?tablename=notify1&id=390>
<u>There are also questions about how ``performance'' would be quantified in an uneven academic playing field: how would a special education teacher get merit pay?</u> Many say designing a fair system requires years of planning and an infusion of money the state doesn't have.
<u>``If doctors were paid based on mortality rates, no one would work with cancer or AIDS patients and everyone would go into pediatrics,'' said Linda Darling-Hammond, an education professor at Stanford University and director of the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future. ``If you reward teachers based on test scores, teachers would avoid teaching the kids with the greatest needs.''</u>

Merit pay would prevent good teachers from entering challenging fields like special ed and English proficiency.
<u>Joshua Petchtalt, the Vice-President of United Teachers of Los-Angeles AFT writes on November 9, 2007</u> in United Teachers Volume XXXVII, accessed online at http://www.utla.net/node/930
<u>Merit pay would also hurt the very students with whom the authors of the legislation seem to be concerned. Within schools, teachers might want to teach those students whose skill levels would translate into higher test scores. Skilled, veteran teachers might be less likely to work with students with limited English proficiency or special needs children for fear their students would not test well</u>.

Access to quality teachers is one way to reverse discrimination against those with special needs.
The UCLA's Civil Rights Project reports on June 2002 "Racial Inequity in Special Education: Executive Summary for Federal Policy Makers," http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/specialed/IDEA_paper02.php
The research suggests that the observed racial, ethnic, and gender disparities are the result of many complex and interacting factors including: unconscious racial bias on the part of school authorities; large resource inequalities (such as the lack of high quality teachers) that run along lines of race and class; unjustifiable reliance on IQ and other evaluation tools; educators' inappropriate responses to the pressures of high-stakes testing; and power differentials between minority parents and school officials.

Recommendations
Following the example of federal education reforms that focus on reducing racial disparities in achievement the IDEA policy debate on racial disparities in special education should focus on ways to reduce these inequities and not on whether discrimination is the primary cause. Moreover, the federal education reform concepts, that racially disparate outcomes can be remedied through public reporting of disaggregated data, school district accountability, and required assistance and interventions, should likewise be applied to remedying the gross racial disparities in special education identification and placement. Require data collection and public reporting from every school and district: The law should require every state and school district to collect and publicly report disaggregated data by race, gender, and English language learner status with disability category and educational setting. With such data readily available our understanding of these issues and where help is most needed would be improved many times over. Remedy the inequity in access to high quality teachers: The federal government should insist that states receiving Title I and IDEA grants make substantial progress toward ensuring minority students in both general and special education have equitable access to high quality teachers.