True Pay-For-Performance Is Vital To School Reform: What Kids Learn Must Drive What Teachers Make (IP-13-1992)

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Issue Paper

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Executive Summary

- Teacher effectiveness is becoming a focal point of public dissatisfaction with the education system.
- Evaluation of teachers is seldom linked to their salaries, and merit pay when attempted usually fails because criteria are too subjective.
- Raises should be tied to what a given class learns in a given year, above an agreed baseline, adjusted for student aptitude.
- A district testing specialist would give fall tests for the baseline and spring tests to measure progress, blind from the teacher.
- Salary adjustments, up or down, would be figured from a board-approved table of pro progress/aptitude variables for a composite of all the teachers classes.
- Performance raises would then become the only kind given, since longevity arid graduate study are not in themselves relevant to school productivity.

Performance, the Missing Measure

Many objective measures show this countrys student academic levels to be on the decline. Parents and other taxpayers are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the education product.

Funding for schools is becoming more uncertain. Taxpayer dissatisfaction with teachers, among other factors, has led to revenue-constraining actions such as tax limitation amendments.

Teachers performance evaluation processes as currently applied in the public schools provide very little accountability. Neither teachers nor anyone else can be expected to prioritize something -- such as increasing students academic performance -- for which they have no real accountability.

This paper outlines a new procedure which could realistically evaluate teachers performance and adjust their salaries accordingly.

Presently, teacher evaluation methods promote "generally accepted" teaching methods, attendance, public relations, diction, and other areas that are considered effective teacher traits.

Salary schedules are tables of annual incomes in which teachers salaries are

adjusted for years of experience and continuing education credits, with no weight given to the individual teachers demonstrated ability to instruct.

Generally, no relationship is ever established between the evaluation instrument and the salary schedule. This breach implies that there should be no financial rewards associated with good teaching traits.

Moreover, neither the evaluation instrument nor the salary schedule addresses real performance. For the purpose of this paper, "real performance" will be defined as the improvement in a students academic knowledge and skills as a direct result of having attended a teachers class.

Parents, school administrators, and others concerned with educational quality frequently complain that there is no recourse against poor teachers, particularly those who have become tenured.

Salary schedules are usually implemented across entire school systems, without exception. Therefore, grievances against unsatisfactory teachers cannot be addressed through the paycheck.

In addition, the system of tenure (even under the recent pseudo-reforms which deleted the word "tenure" but left the job protection system virtually unchanged) makes it extremely difficult for a school district to terminate a poor teacher.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for the need of an alternative evaluation instrument centers around the question, "What makes a good teacher?"

There are undoubtedly numerous qualities which contribute to being an effective instructor. Rating teachers based on any proposed comprehensive list of "effectiveness" traits proves fruitless because of the distinct mix of qualities which make up individual teachers. For this reason, unfortunately, almost all teacher evaluation instruments essentially "pigeonhole" evaluated teachers without giving any objective evaluation as to students real performance.

Flaws of Conventional Merit Pay

In hopes of addressing the above concerns, various school districts around the country have attempted to implement "merit pay plans". A review of these programs indicates most utilize an evaluation instrument similar or identical to those already in use.

But rather than ignoring the relevance of the evaluation instrument, teachers performances as judged by this instrument are linked by one method or another to income adjustments. Depending on the teachers adherence to the characteristics promoted by the instrument, their pay is increased (most of

the time by non-renewing bonuses).

These merit pay plans have the apparent advantage of recognizing that a relationship does exist between superior teaching performance and financial compensation. Unfortunately, these plans have lacked a practical means of linking real performance to pay.

These merit pay programs and the evaluation instruments used demand adherence to a pre-established set of "effective teacher" characteristics. The evaluation instruments often ignore possible qualities not contained in the pre-established set of characteristics, such as: student-teacher rapport, ability to communicate relevancy of the subject matter, and ability to generate student enthusiasm. Also, the instruments prioritize certain characteristics that are not critical to effective classroom instruction (for example, public relations).

As a result, teachers who are subject to these plans still seek to improve (and to derive financial rewards) in ways that are somewhat irrelevant in terms of increasing students academic abilities.

Most merit pay programs have established bonus-type rewards. This is due, in part, to states requiring school districts to have district-wide salary schedules. Hence, individual salary adjustments based on performance have been unavailable. But the lack of a cumulative reward system serves to reduce and largely nullify the rewards effective teachers would acquire.

Most merit pay plans have continued to base teacher evaluations on evaluators discretionary judgements. This has served to create new divisiveness within schools faculties. Many teachers who do not receive bonuses in these merit pay schemes often perceive teachers who do receive bonuses as simply "working the system" to their advantage. Envy and jealousies are commonly generated among teachers due to the inherent, significant subjectivity of the system.

With all of this in mind, it is understandable why most merit pay programs have been scrapped in five years or less.

Designing a True Pay-for-Performance Plan

A good teacher motivates. There are innumerable ways to accomplish motivation, but all students who learn must want to learn. Recognizing this need to motivate and the broad range of motivation techniques available to teachers, an effective evaluation instrument would not seek to force a given set of characteristics on a teacher.

Rather, the instrument should determine whether the students were motivated by the teacher, and how well. Given this goal, an evaluation instrument should have the following objectives:

1. To assess as objectively as possible what the student (or class) has learned under the care of the teacher:
   a. Assessment should be class-specific;
   b. Assessment should be administered by a third party;
   c. Class average assessments should be used from the beginning and end of each class.
2. To characterize the class for academic potential by a standardized national test.
3. To derive the teachers evaluation and salary adjustment from a combination of each class groups academic potential and an objective assessment of progress. (Items 1 and 2 above).

The standardized national achievement tests are inappropriate for class assessments due to their general nature. While certain parts of these tests (S.R.A., C.T.B.S.) may very well probe subject areas closely aligned to teachers classes, the tests would poorly judge a students class-gained knowledge. Rather, it is imperative that evaluative testing should be class-specific and as objective as possible.

Evaluative tests should have the following characteristics:

1. They should be given "in the blind" from the classs teachers so as to avoid "teaching to the test," however inadvertent; and
2. Class average scores should be used for a homogenized measurement of all students academic strengths, weaknesses, and progress in the class.

Different groups of students will have various aptitudes for academic potential and growth. These differences must be accounted for in the process -- if not in the evaluative portion then in salary adjustment considerations. Standardized test subject areas, though not generally directly comparable with particular class curricula, do lend themselves to an evaluation of a classs potential for academic achievement in that subject.

Salary adjustments could be made in conjunction with the use of testing for evaluation of real performance. Using results from both the standardized national test and the class-specific exam, teachers annual salary adjustments can then be determined.

The instrument proposed here incorporates the objectives just described into an effective teacher evaluation/salary adjustment scheme.

In order to characterize a class academically, standardized test results (such as the S.R.A. or C.T.B.S.) will be used. The most recently available test results for class members in the tested subject area closest to the particular classs subject will be utilized. When no close correlation between subjects exists, composite test results will be used. A class average score will be obtained from the appropriate test section.

The school district will employ a counselor or testing specialist (C/TS) to administer class specific exams. The C/TS will meet with the teacher prior to the beginning of school for input on class contents. The teacher will transmit

syllabi for each class taught and discuss the classs objectives and goals. This information exchange will be done as thoroughly as possible within the allotted time (using class texts, if appropriate).

The C/TS will then design tests (independent of the teacher) for particular classes. The tests will be given to the classes at the beginning of the year by the C/TS in the absence of the teacher. No review of the tests with the students by the teacher would be allowed. As close to the end of the school year as possible the C/TS will administer the same tests to the classes, again in the absence of the teacher.

By separating the teacher from the testing process, the teacher would not be tempted to overemphasize those portions of the classes specifically covered by the exams. Also, tests will maintain their usefulness (at least in modified form) for several years, thereby reducing preparation and administration costs.

Two average scores can then be obtained for each class, one from the beginning and one from the end of the year. The difference between these two class averages will be incorporated into class grades to encourage students to prioritize the tests.

A teachers class-specific salary adjustment would be determined from Table 1, immediately below. This table would completely replace school-wide salary schedules.

Table 1: Adjustments In Salary Based On Testing Results
(Expressed in percentage adjustment for a given class)

Change in class average on test administered by C/TS					
Aptitude Level of Class Group	<10	10-25	25-50	50-75	75-100
0-10	0	+0.3	+0.75	+1.1	+1.5
10-20	0	+0.2	+0.65	+1.0	1.4

20-30	-0.1	+0.1	+0.5	+0.9	+1.3
30-40	-0.2	0	+0.4	+0.8	+1.2
40-50	-0.3	-0.1	+0.3	+0.7	+1.1
50-60	-0.4	-0.2	+0.3	+0.6	+1.0
60-70	-0.5	-0.3	+0.2	+0.5	+0.9
70-80	-0.6	-0.4	+0.1	+0.4	+0.8
80-90	-0.8	-0.5	0	0.3	+0.7
90-100	-1.0	-0.6	-.01	0.2	+0.6

Particular class salary adjustments may be found in Table 1 by locating the intersection of: (a) the row beginning with the applicable classs average S.R.A. score, and (b) the column headed by the academic gain in that class, determined as described above.

Example to illustrate the use of Table 1:

Ed Brown, a social studies teacher, has six classes per day in history and geography at a middle schooL

The S.R.A. test scores for Mr. Browns six classes (taken from the S.R.A. subject area of Social Studies) yield average scores for his classes populations 52, 76, 35, 47, 28 and 63, respectively.

The changes in class average C/TS test scores were 57, 70, 80, 65, 41, and 22, respectively.

The combinations of these test results would give class-specific salary adjustments of: +0.6, + 0.4, + 1.2, + 0.7, + 0.5, and -0.3.

The sum directs the based raise total is +3.1, which is read as a percentage and administration to give Ed Brown a performance-of 3.1% for that year.

Each class taught would contribute an individual adjustment. Negative adjustments should be incorporated into the plan to penalize poor teaching performance. A teachers total annual salary adjustment would be determined

by the sum of individual class salary adjustments.

The specific percentage changes found in the table are suggested for a school district which is determined to reward superior teaching significantly. Good teachers would benefit from this type of matrix.

From the table it can be seen that no teacher who improves a particular classs C/TS scores by at least 50 percentage points will receive a negative salary adjustment. Except for classes whose S.R.A. aptitude level was 80 or better, an improvement in class average C/TS score of 25 or better will also lead to a positive salary adjustment.

The table contains several places where no salary adjustment is shown. Also, many cases of a negative salary adjustment may be found in that portion of the table with small C/TS test gains combined with higher S.R.A. scores. These negative adjustments are a vital part of the tables motivational power.

The salary adjustments shown in Table 1 may need to be modified following implementation. The modification requirements could be due, for instance, to a school districts need to match total salary adjustments with funds budgeted specifically for this purpose. But in modifying the percentage adjustments shown, the general number and location of positive and negative adjustments should be maintained.

For genuine educational accountability, the pay-for-performance table once introduced and fine-tuned should become the only guideline for teacher pay raises and cuts. Longevity and graduate study should no longer enter into the pay equation. If the learner hasnt learned, as the saying goes, the teacher hasnt taught; in which case the teacher too should go.

Responses to Possible Objections

One argument against the use of this instrument is an increase in administrative costs due to design, administration, and evaluation of C/TS tests. In the long run, however, administrative activities overall will be altered (and streamlined) by the use of this instrument.

The use of the old evaluation instrument will likely be curtailed or ceased altogether, as academic improvements resulting from this instrument make evaluating specific teaching behaviors unnecessary. Indeed, as administrators become more acclimated to the use of this instrument, administration costs should decrease.

There is a difference in the relative difficulty of evaluating various classes. Some classes will lend themselves excellently to the use of the type of objective testing described herein for evaluations. Others, such as music, art and some shop classes, will be more difficult to apply this instrument to. However, this concern may be mitigated by a well-organized and insightful

meeting at the beginning of the year between the C/TS and class instructor.

Should higher thinking skills be a primary objective of a class or school, appropriate test questions may be developed to address this. That is one of the major advantages, among many, of having tests custom-designed for particular classes.

This instrument will lead to the significant rewarding of good teaching. While districts around the country wrestle with a myriad of vital issues in education, causing effective teaching in the classroom is arguably the most important issue.

By rewarding superior teachers / motivators, school districts have reason to expect that education will improve immediately and significantly. Conversely, poor teachers will be financially penalized.

This will motivate poor teachers to improve so they will acquire positive salary adjustments over time. Should no improvement take place, these teachers will be financially encouraged to leave the profession, tenure notwithstanding.

The envy and divisive feelings associated with previously tried merit pay plans will be absent with the use of this instrument. The salary adjustments made will stem from objective testing results. Evaluated teachers will be judged (and financially rewarded) independent of the subjective feelings of evaluators.

Effective teachers will be clearly identified through accelerated financial awards. This will be advantageous since these teachers skills and traits will be studied by colleagues. Through such emulation, superior teachers may serve as very effective mentors within their schools. Various procedures will be created for transfer of effective teaching skills from these mentors.

There is presently a significant national movement for restructuring public education to more effectively teach students. In Colorado, abolishing mandatory district-wide salary schedules was proposed in the 1992 legislative session and will continue to be advocated. Trends and proposals like these make the introduction of true pay-for-performance more feasible. For the students sake, it cant come soon enough.

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