

## MERIT PAY IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

By Sergio G. Flores

**In this view, the data show that many, mostly suburban, U.S. schools work well, arguably among the best in the world. Instead of blaming the overall structure of U.S. schools, we should focus attention on inner cities, which need not only better schools but also improved health care, jobs, and safe neighborhoods.**

**From the *Data Game, Controversies in Social Science Statistics*, 1999<sup>1</sup>**

### WHAT IS MERIT PAY OR PAYMENT FOR PERFORMANCE?

For the way merit pay in education is mentioned all over the media, it would seem that everybody knew for certain what it is and what it does; it is as if merit pay was common knowledge. After all, [president Obama](#), [Secretary of Education Arne Duncan](#), Governors Schwarzenegger from [California](#) and Romney from [Massachusetts](#), [NY Major Bloomberg](#), and education chancellors [Michelle Rhee](#) from Washington D. C. and [Joel Klein](#) from New York City, among many others advocate for merit pay.

On the surface merit pay is a simple concept: it is extra money awarded for achieving determined results, scores, or goals –an incentive that can improve results, make people feel appreciated and recognized, and a tool for administrators to keep and get more from their workforce. However, contrary to what supporters of merit pay want to believe, record shows it has not been successful ever. In public education the story of merit pay has been mostly a collection of wishful thinking and hopes that did not materialized.

In reality, experts in the topic discourage the use of merit pay. Researchers from the London School of Economic and Political Science, studying 51 cases of payment for performance in the business area concluded that “it may reduce the worker’s natural inclination of finishing a task, and derive pleasure from doing so.” Dr. Bern Irlenbush from the LSE’s Department of Management adds:

'We find that financial incentives may indeed reduce intrinsic motivation and diminish ethical or other reasons for complying with workplace social norms such as fairness. As a consequence, the provision of incentives can result in a negative impact on overall performance.'<sup>2</sup>

But, what does merit pay look like? Does PFP means that a few teachers –math and English teachers mostly, will be paid more because their students obtained higher scores than the rest of the competitors? Or that every teacher will get an opportunity to get a bonus if they reach or surpass a predetermined score in a single test? Or it means that teachers will get paid more because they work longer days or school years? Or it means that some teachers would get paid extra for working in “hard-to-staff” schools? Or it would be used for supplementary payment

for teaching in areas where there are teacher shortages --like certain kinds of special education or subjects such as math and science? Or it would pay more for mentoring other teachers?

PPF has two characteristics that are important to consider at this point. One, merit pay is designed to stimulate certain observable and measurable behaviors, such as working more time or producing more in less time, or finishing a project earlier than originally planned. It is an intrinsic factor of merit pay schemes to eliminate unobservable motivations such as use of professional judgment, exercise discretion, or work with autonomy. It is this characteristic that makes administrators consider the use of merit pay as a tool to improve results. They can establish tangible goals, set a time table, and assess the outcomes. It simplifies their job by reducing the task to a list of specifics.

And two, merit pay also excludes, by de fault, a culture of democracy or cooperation. Since PPF rewards mostly individual achievements --or groups, it entices individualism, competition, and creates rivalry while diminishing cooperation among peers or teams. In essence, merit pay does not foster or promote democratic practices, instead it hinders it<sup>3</sup>.

It is in this respect that the use of merit pay seems most incongruent with the democratic goals in public schools. With its tendency to discourage solidarity in the work place, PPF would reduce cooperation to an observable behavior in a list of goals. One of the social purposes of public schooling in the United States is fostering, promoting, and enhancing the culture of democracy as Thomas Jefferson, Horace Mann, and John Dewey envisioned.

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. These more numerous and more varied points of contact denote a greater diversity of stimuli to which an individual has to respond; they consequently put a premium on variation in his action. They secure a liberation of powers which remain suppressed as long as the incitations to action are partial, as they must be in a group which in its exclusiveness shuts out many interests.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, a public school must be a model of a democratic community<sup>5</sup>, where individual interests and the group interest coexist and interact constantly in a dynamic relationship. Thus, merit pay, with its tendency to foster individualism does not fit into a system that is supposed to nurture democratic values such as cooperation and inclusiveness.

One important contextual factor that allows concepts such as merit pay to emerge has to do with manipulation and control of people<sup>6</sup> through subtle and no so subtle manners. Just as with the whole NCLB mandates, policy makers decide and implement demands on public educators without meaningful debate or consideration from their ideas. A national policy was designed, money was allocated, and the implementation of merit pay came to public education. In Texas, where lawmakers passed in 2006 the largest incentive pay program in the nation, the issue of merit pay is used more as a political weapon of control, than to solve the problems in education.<sup>7</sup>

Never mind that, particularly about merit pay, there has been no discussion about what constitutes excellent teaching and meaningful learning, or that it has not been established if it does improve the quality of teaching or enhance learning. For all we know, merit pay can be a detrimental factor in education. As far as we are concerned, “student achievement is whatever is deemed worth testing and excellent teaching is whatever accomplishes or seems to accomplish success in this testing.” Rather than discussing merit pay’ effects prior to its implementation, several school districts have implemented it in one form or another.

To this day, neither president Obama nor anyone in his administration has explained in a comprehensive and operational manner what merit pay means, does, or pretends to accomplish. All we know is this new administration has decided to continue what the previous one did in this matter—relentlessly pursue PFP by exerting political and economic power. As a result, several districts all over America are using federal, local, and private money to run each their own version of PFP. Without any definite goals, or way to evaluate these local programs, it would be practically impossible to assess results. In other words: with no specific goals for these experiments on PFP, there is no way to have a reliable accountability system. From what we know so far, merit pay for teachers does not look like a well thought off plan.

This year alone, the federal government is investing around 500 million in merit pay grants, and it has allocated 200 million more in stimulus money<sup>8</sup>. In reality, merit pay takes whatever forms its creators want, which makes having a rational debate about it challenging at best. Since it is not possible to extract a definition from the administration rhetoric, here is one that may serve as an introduction to the topic. A broad definition of merit pay is

an alternative or supplement to the single salary schedule that rewards individual teachers, groups of teachers, or schools on any number of factors, including student performance, classroom observations, and teacher portfolios. Merit-based pay is a reward system that hinges on student outcomes attributed to a particular teacher or group of teachers rather than on “inputs” such as skills or knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

This definition seems straightforward and serves the purpose of establishing a point to start in order to understand what merit pay or pay-for-performance in education is and does.

## BRIEF RECORD

In America there are eleven states have state-wide performance-for-pay programs, and twenty-six more with some form of federal funded merit pay<sup>10</sup>. Authorities and districts<sup>11</sup> express three main reasons for using merit pay: to reward and recognize the work of outstanding and successful teachers, to link compensation with instructional outcomes, and to enable districts to attract and retain qualified and effective teachers. These intentions stemmed from legitimate concerns, and they are welcomed and commended, however as record shows, merit pay has already been tried ineffectively at different times in the United States and England.

Pay-for-Performance had been tried resolutely in England and in the US. In England in the 1900's ended up with a resounding failure<sup>12</sup>, in the US in the 1920's; in 1974 in Kalamazoo, MI an attempt at a comprehensive system "choked on paperwork,<sup>13</sup>" in the late 70's president Nixon's "performance contracting was abandoned."<sup>14</sup> In Fairfax, Virginia from 1986 to 92 the merit pay experiment ended up with teachers disliking what it was then an expensive experiment.<sup>15</sup> Charges of favoritism, cheating, along with unreliable funding and union opposition sank such experiments. Twenty years ago, an elaborated failed experiment that backfired in Florida in 1985,<sup>16</sup> and most recently in Houston<sup>17</sup>.

As well intended as its proponents may have been, merit pay has proven to be extremely difficult to implement with fairness. Recently, in Houston, despite opposition from the union, the local newspaper website published a list of the teachers who got bonuses. In addition, ninety-nine employees were asked to return about \$74,000 in bonus checks issued by mistake<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, while around 15,000 teachers receive an average of \$2,800, and 2,100 got zero, the ASPIRE system awarded the HISD superintendent, Abelardo Saavedra the amount of \$77,500, which is more than the HISD [highest teachers' annual salary](#), on top of his annual salary of \$327,010<sup>19</sup>. This year in Minnesota, 22 school districts whose [Q Comp](#) practices were examined by the Star Tribune, gave merit pay to more than 99 percent of teachers in the program<sup>20</sup>. Strangely, only 27 of the roughly 4,200 teachers eligible did not get a pay raise. What is not strange is that in its third year, this program has not proven to be successful<sup>21</sup>. In Florida, one county ran short of bonus funds while another had an embarrassing discrepancy between the number of awards given in predominantly white schools and the number that went to schools with mainly black students<sup>22</sup>. In Utah, because of budget problems, the board of education considered delaying the bonuses for teachers participating in performance pay.<sup>23</sup>

The experiment of merit pay in Denver is the largest ever attempted and most talked about at this time<sup>24</sup>. So far, the effectiveness of the system is questionable. A study published in 2008 indicated that although teachers who opted for the merit pay system have been more successful in raising scores than those who did not, this difference cannot be attributed to this factor. At this time, the authors are cautious, indicating that it's too soon to say if [ProComp](#), a merit pay system, will raise achievement in Denver. A plus for the program is that it has raised the number of teachers applying to work in Denver's most troubled schools. On the down side,

the Denver teachers' union threatened a strike over the renegotiation of Pro-Comp<sup>25</sup>. Following these developments will undoubtedly give important information about the implementation of merit pay.

In dealing with this controversial issue it is necessary to review what proponents and opponents have written about it. Here are some of the most common arguments for and against merit pay.

## **PROS**

People who propose merit pay advance ideological arguments stemmed from the free-market theories that supposedly apply in the business world<sup>26</sup>--namely that competition among schools would improve them as Milton Friedman suggested<sup>27</sup>. Since Americans value hard work and results, and because in theory rewarding good results has been part of the capitalist system, merit pay seemed appropriate in education. In the business world, offering bonuses and salary increases to outstanding workers are common practices<sup>28</sup>. Some arguments in favor of merit pay are:

One, merit pay will motivate teachers to work more and harder<sup>29</sup>. Extra pay will induce teachers to become more proficient, consequently and better results will follow. The premises here are that teachers are not doing as good a job as they supposed to, and that the bonus will motivate the average teachers to do that extra effort necessary to achieve professional goals and increase students' achievement.

Two, merit pay will attract top people to the teaching profession. A common criticism from public education detractors has been that teachers are on average less qualified than professionals of other areas, such as engineering or medicine. Since everyone want to make more money for their work, there is no reason to think teachers are different<sup>30</sup>. Thus, offering economic incentives would attract the smartest people to teaching. The principle for this argument relies on the condition that people wants to profit from their talent as much as possible.

Three, merit pay will compensate good teachers for their unfair salaries. To remedy this injustice, it is necessary to reward the good teachers with financial recognition<sup>31</sup>. Recognizing that teachers are underpaid, merit pay seems the logical option for a fast remedy. Here, the basis of this argument for merit pay states that low salaries are punishing high performing teachers.

Four, merit pay will elevate the standing of the teaching profession. As it is, people who go into teaching do it more with a sense of sacrifice for the common good, than for pursuing a personal goal. Merit pay will give our young people a reason to consider teaching as a modern, dignified profession<sup>32</sup>. The idea behind this argument is that the area of education does not carry the reputation other professions do, and using merit pay would elevate teachers' ranking.

Five, merit pay can attract enough candidates to supply the current and future demands. Since initial teaching salaries are not attractive, many young people have dismissed teaching. Offering merit pay may increase the number of college students considering this profession. Here, the argument assumes that the initial salary plus the potential earnings from merit pay become attractive enough for new teachers.

Six, merit pay is as good idea as any other in times of crisis<sup>33</sup>. With teacher morale low, and students' performance below average, it is necessary to try something different to improve education. Merit pay seems like a feasible idea. Here the basic premises are one, that public education is in crisis, and two, that it is imperative to improve as soon as possible. Thus, the implementation of PFP may be the factor that could turn things around.

At first glance, these six arguments for merit pay seem well constructed; after a careful analysis, a reasonable person can conclude that, these ideas resemble more a wish list without real cause-effect conditions. There is no evidence that merit pay can directly produce any of the goals. The three most notorious problems of PFP in education are: one, considering that a teacher, singlehandedly, can affect all the other factors in the educative process; two, that it is not congruent with the problems it attempts to solve; and three, that its scope is limited.

The current rhetoric justifies merit pay because it makes it congruent with the idea that the teacher is the most important factor in the educational process. The problem with this assertion is that makes people confuse "most" with "only." This has to be stated clearly: teachers do not influence every single factor of the educational process; it is only a factor, an important one, but only a factor. Even if merit pay were successful in motivating teachers to do more and better, that condition would not solve all the other problems that affect students and teachers alike.

The problems in public education, as stated by authorities are low scores in basics, unacceptable number of high school dropouts, falling behind other countries, mismatching between what schools produce and what the new economy demands, and ultimately the danger of losing our standard of living, it is clear that the problem is not going to be solved just by offering bonuses to teachers. A real solution to the problems in education should consider effective interventions to counter a mixture of social, economic, logistic, and political problems that affect the performance of teachers and students. Poverty, insecurity, violence, drug abuse, lack of political will to provide health insurance to millions of families, outsourcing of jobs, and the housing problems, are just some of the factors that affect the great majority of families who use public education.

The effects of PFP, even at its best, are of so limited scope that they could not solve the problems for which it is implemented. By design, merit pay is extra money allocated to reward some of the teachers. Thus, this competitive design reduces the positive effects to only those who win the bonuses. Unless, there is a constant supply of an extraordinary large amount of

money, this competitive system will not produce the long term necessary changes to improve public education.

## **CONS**

People who object the use of PFP in education argue that it is based on faulty assumptions<sup>34</sup>, does not accomplish its intended goals, and that it affects negatively people and their working environment. Merit pay has many intrinsic problems that are important to acknowledge. By doing so, politicians and districts may acquire the basic knowledge necessary to decide on whether to try it<sup>35</sup>. In the business world, bonuses go to the best and the brightest, but what does that mean?<sup>36</sup> Just recently, the Washington Post published an article noting that federal employee unions are asking president Obama to kill the pay for performance system for considering it unjust and unnecessary<sup>37</sup>.

Among the arguments against PFP are: One, rewards are just like punishments: they give short term results. Just like intimidation and threats, a reward act in the same way as coercion, and destroys motivation. If policy makers are thinking about creating a better system for the long run, pay-for-performance does not fit into a rational plan. Indeed, it would be counterproductive to use merit pay to attract to retain large numbers of good teachers.<sup>38</sup>

Two, after a while those desired rewards may be perceived as manipulative, and the control seems punitive. It is a norm that people with more power usually set the goals, establish the criteria, and generally try to change the behavior of those down below.<sup>39</sup> This seems suitable in a business world where wealth and power, which are the main goals in a business, increase as one moves up. However, teaching is a profession requires cooperation, team work, and the use of professional judgment. With merit pay, these traits would be eventually diluted. If merit pay feels manipulative and patronizing, that's because it is.

Three, people who don't get the rewards feel punished and ultimately demoralized. Even when pay-for-performance programs are not explicitly competitive, it undermines collegial relationships.<sup>40</sup> If one teacher ends up getting a bonus and another doesn't, their interactions are likely to be adversely affected, particularly if the unrewarded one thinks of herself as a good teacher. Even if the rewards were offered to an entire groups such a school or district, this kind of damage would occur. In the case of missing the bonus, the immediate reaction would be finding whom to blame. As it emerges clearly, merit pay rewards victory, not excellence.

Four, rewards destroy cooperation among teammates for individuals would conceal problems, and will not ask for help when needed.<sup>41</sup> If the goal is excellence, fostering an exchange of ideas and a supportive environment is necessary for a successful teamwork. Moreover, merit pay is set up as a competition where the point is to best one's colleagues. If the goals are improving the quality of public education, the damaging effect of setting educators against one another in a race for artificially scarce rewards will not help.

Five, rewarding ignores the causes of the problems. Instead of offering rewards to increase productivity, it is important to find out the causes<sup>42</sup>. An underlying premise of merit pay is that teachers are purposely not doing their best and so there is a need to bribe them for them to do it. Rather than addressing the complicated, systemic factors that cause the deficiencies, merit pay distracts from them in an insulting way. As Alfie Kohn points out, “countless consultants live handsomely from devising yet more ways to compute bonuses, for instance. Others persuade employers that team incentives are the way to go, or that they need to reward quality, not quantity. But all these fixes miss the point. Trying to correct the trouble by revising a pay-for-performance program makes as much sense as treating alcoholism by switching from vodka to gin.”<sup>43</sup> Public schools are systems with numerous individuals with different motives and reasons, and merit pay does not address the problems of the system. This is as insulting as it is inaccurate.

Six, working for rewards modify the behavior of workers negatively. For one, they don’t want to take risks, explore new possibilities, or look deeper into the problems. Because merit pay doesn’t recognize other kinds of motivations, like personal enjoyment or recognition, people tend to lose interest in what they do. The extrinsic motivation, a bonus, systematically undermines the intrinsic motivation, personal satisfaction or passion for teaching.

Seven, rewards undermine personal motivation. The feeling of being controlled by the reward causes loose of interest, or makes the work unpleasant. In general, teachers nurturing people who are not money-driven; they express more satisfaction from helping students, than for earning a few more dollars. With the current accountability systems, teachers feel embittered more for the feeling of being controlled than for salary issues. Thus, merit pay, being one more controlling element, intensifies teachers’ disenchantment.

Eight, it is impossible to establish a fair system to reward good teaching. Contrary to what advocates for a free-market system approach to public schools believe, teaching cannot be simplified in numbers. It is practically impossible to quantify all the components of good teaching and learning.<sup>44</sup> And even if it were possible to evaluate the quality of teaching, it is impossible to develop a valid and reliable measure for success, as DC Chancellor Michelle Rhee found out with her recent experiment.<sup>45</sup> Raising test scores, to mention one criterion, is unreliable for awarding bonuses. Scores don’t reflect teacher quality as much as children’s background. Moreover, the problems with the details of merit pay often trigger new ones. Newer models for merit-pay plans includes long list of criteria and statistical controls that make it extremely difficult to understand.

Nine, pay-for-performance attaching scores to bonuses may induce undesired and counterproductive behaviors<sup>46</sup>. As mentioned before, merit pay works as reward as well as a punishment, and school wide merit pay is no less destructive than the individual edition. Now, if specific rewards get directly attached to scores, getting that bonus may become more

important than improving teaching and learning, which was the main goal in the first place<sup>47</sup>. It is proven that high stakes induce different forms of cheating, gaming, teaching to the test, and other creative ways in order to show progress without in fact improving student learning<sup>48</sup>. The incentive is too powerful that a teacher that does not want to do it for personal gain can consider doing something for his colleagues' benefit. Moreover, since principals and administrators decide who gets the bonuses, this condition may create cronyism and teachers may feel unfairly treated--not to mention the great possibility of complains and law suits.

Ten, PFP for teachers has not worked ever<sup>49</sup>. In England, in early 1800's a form of merit pay was used and abandoned for ineffective and counterproductive. Both, administrators and teachers became so obsessed with the basics --arithmetic, reading, and writing that other subjects were ignored and some of them resorted to cheating<sup>50</sup>. In the 1950's and 1980's, in the United States, were tried and later suspended in different states. Moreover, even in the business environments, merit pay has received mixed reviews from executives; in 1996 a survey of Merit pay programs show that they didn't work nearly as well as expected, the report explains

A survey of senior compensation professionals in 72 organizations was conducted to examine the effectiveness of merit pay in achieving organizational objectives. The results indicate that merit pay is seen as being "marginally successful" in influencing employee attitudes (e.g., pay satisfaction) and behaviors (e.g., performance) which represents a decrease in effectiveness compared to a survey conducted 10 years ago where merit pay was seen as "moderately successful."<sup>51</sup>

Eleven, merit does not benefit students significantly, and sometimes not at all<sup>52</sup>. Since merit pay is designed to benefit a small percentage of teachers, consequently, the number of students receiving the benefits of this incentive is proportionally small. "A University of Florida study showed that students taught by teachers participating in merit pay programs only scored one or two percentage points higher on standardized tests than did other students." With its poor results, merit pay should be discarded altogether.

Twelve, merit pay is attached to scores that can be subjected to statistical errors, measurement errors, and random errors. Until we come up with a system that minimizes the probability of these occurrences, the impartiality and accuracy of the results can be challenged. Moreover, the results have a more serious consequence for teachers because these are also used to make high-stakes personnel decisions.

Thirteen, merit pay does not consider that factors such as student ability, student motivation, family support (or lack thereof), the weather, distractions on testing day, etc. may affect the scores<sup>53</sup>. Having one annual score to determine if one teacher deserves or not a bonus does not seem a well thought of criterion. Tying teachers' salaries to the academic performance of

their students, many of whom struggle with severe social problems such as poverty, lack of health care, hunger, and domestic abuse does not seem like the right medicine for society's ills.

Fourteen, merit pay based on one annual score is fundamentally unfair. For one, a score does not measure progress; at best provides information according to a standard which may or may not be fair itself. In addition, a score cannot be used to evaluate the teaching itself, for it is a product of a series of variables, such the cultural, social, economic, emotional, and intellectual of students. A better way to evaluate the success of a teacher would be to have two tests, one at the beginning and another at the end of the year. The difference in scores could be a more acceptable measure to determine the degree of success. As it is now, with one test taken before students cover all year material seems quite inadequate.

### **WHO ADVOCATES FOR MERIT PAY?**

Merit pay supporters come from the entire political spectrum. It is no surprise to see both republicans and democrats, not to mention libertarians favor the idea of merit pay. It is safe to assume that everyone who is for merit pay is also for any other measure that leads to the privatization of the public school system, as Milton Friedman asked in 1995<sup>54</sup>. In general, people with business background and non-educators support the idea of merit pay. Regardless of its previous failures and the lack of relevant information indicating that merit pay may produce positive results, conservative groups and policy makers support its implementation<sup>55</sup>. Also, consultants who make a living devising ways to compute bonuses, and inexperienced administrators support it. Moreover, those who are more invested in privatizing policies are the ones profiting in one way or another from them. In these regard, Jonathan Kozol, writes:

Some years ago, a friend who works on Wall Street handed me a stock-market prospectus in which a group of analysts at an investment-banking firm known as Montgomery Securities described the financial benefits to be derived from privatizing our public schools. "The education industry", according to these analysts, "represents, in our opinion, the final frontier of a number of sectors once under public control" that "have either voluntarily opened" or, they note in pointed terms, have "been forced" to open up to private enterprise. Indeed, they write, "the education industry represents the largest market opportunity" since health-care services were privatized during the 1970s. Referring to private education companies as "EMOs" ("Education Management Organizations"), they note that college education also offers some "attractive investment returns" for corporations, but then come back to what they see as the much greater profits to be gained by moving into public elementary and secondary schools. "The larger developing opportunity is in the K-12 EMO market, led by private elementary school providers", which, they emphasize, "are well positioned to exploit potential political reforms such as school vouchers". From the point of view of private profit, one of these analysts enthusiastically observes, "the K-12 market is the Big Enchilada".<sup>56</sup>

Merit pay backers have a substantive bulk of written work to cite. Think Tanks such as the [Heritage Foundation](#), [the Hoover Institution](#), [The Cato Institute](#), the [Milken Foundation](#), and many others, and reporters like [Jay Mathews](#), have continuously provided material to support their causes<sup>57</sup>. A glance at Amazon.com shows 30 books and studies on merit pay in education. The report [What Do Expert Say about Merit Pay?](#), prepared for the Florida Department of Education Commissioner in 2007 serves as evidence of this point. Moreover, there are scores of other books that touch the topic. For instance, Books like *Tough Choices* and *Frozen Assets* argue that by cutting teachers' benefits policy makers can boost teachers' salaries.

### **WHO OPPOSES IT?**

In the United States is practically impossible to find a public official, politician, or billionaire disagreeing with the idea of merit pay in education. Those opposing merit pay in education comes almost exclusively from the public school system and from liberal backgrounds – teachers' associations, university professors, and independent intellectuals. Understandably, the opinions of these critics appear infrequently, and receive little endorsement in the mainstream media. Thus, just like with the privatization of public schools, current policy-makers have been considering merit while dismissing or ignoring both critics and the research that contradicts or invalidates their arguments.

For instance, practically ignored goes the [Sandia Report](#)<sup>58</sup>. In 1990, Admiral James Watkins, the secretary of energy, commissioned the Sandia Laboratories in New Mexico to document the decline in education so dramatically announced with the 1983 report [A Nation at Risk](#). With some actual data, scientists found out that on nearly every measure employed in the survey, a steady or slightly improving trend was identified in public education. Reports by the conservative Public Agenda in 2000 and 2002 found out that while teachers considered themselves underpaid, the condition of higher salaries would be of limited effectiveness, and that "unreasonable standards and accountability," was the main reason that drives colleagues out of the profession<sup>59</sup>. The opinion and work of distinguished pro-public education personalities like [Gerald Bracey](#), [Alfie Khon](#), [Susan Ohanian](#), or [Jonathan Kozol](#), or [Noam Chomsky](#) have remained largely unnoticed by the mainstream media, and astonishingly by teachers', administrators', parent-teachers' and board members' associations.

On paper, teacher unions such as NEA<sup>60</sup> and AFT oppose merit pay, as they did with NCLB. Yet, even with their respected political power, NEA and AFT<sup>61</sup> have not been able to counter the pro merit pay campaign and persuade politicians and policy makers of the blunder this any other privatizing measure represent for the future of public education and democracy in America. As a norm, both national associations have cautiously criticized the idea of merit pay and provide support for their locals, but they have not make a strong stand in rejecting it. Neither organization has organized forums, informative debates, or effective campaigns at local, state or national levels. As a result, instead of dealing with other important issues to improve

education and society in general, districts and associations are spending time and money on this futile experiment.

Moreover, since merit pay is mostly a local decision, both national associations have seen several of their locals fold on this issue due to pressure more than persuasion -- merit pay is already in place in several states like Florida, Denver, and Philadelphia. Their local associations' position may be better understood when considering that the power of the corporations behind privatization is formidable, and that NEA and AFT do not match their institutional, political, economic or logistic power<sup>62</sup>. This political pressure, combined with unsatisfactory entry salaries and the system that makes teacher wait years to achieve an acceptable income, makes it hard for teachers to reject "trying" a system that promises more money in a short run. Milwaukee with vouchers, and Philadelphia with charter schools are two premier examples of this point.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, teachers associations have wisely decided to participate in a dialogue with hope of winning something, rather than to engage in a winless brawl.

#### **WHY MERIT PAY IS EVEN CONSIDERED?**

Proponents argue that merit pay is an ideal measure for improving scores, reward successful teachers, and making the teaching profession appealing to a greater number of candidates. All of these are indeed laudable goals. Yet, in the present social and economic context --with a shortage of teachers, the national economy in crisis, and inadequate salaries, it seems untimely and incongruent the suggestion of "extra money" for teachers. However, looking at the political and ideological context, one can understand that merit pay emerges as just another proposal from the conservative groups that want the public education system ruled by the same free-market frame that regulates every other business<sup>64</sup>.

Previous larger changes such as the introduction of competition for customers (in this case students or families), parent choice (as in I prefer to take my business elsewhere), accountability (as in going out of business), prefaced the lesser scheme of merit pay. It just makes financial sense to pledge a limited number of attractive bonus to motivate all, rather than raising the salary of teachers across the board. Furthermore, from the ideological point of view, merit pay fits into a line of reasoning that seems logical: since extra money boost performance, and standardized test scores are effective as a measure of teacher success, merit pay will lead to improvement in students' scores and quality of teaching. It sounds reasonable, isn't it; regretfully for teachers and students, this is not true: it has never happened in education, and no research validates these claims<sup>65</sup>.

A most important factor for the consideration of PFP is their influential supporters. Merit pay is backed by important political players: The Business Roundtable and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. As a matter of fact, these two organizations have combined efforts to support, promote, and impose policies, among which are some of the unproven educational policies that currently guide public education<sup>66</sup>. A major success for them came with the federal administration enacting the NCLB law, which instituted substantial changes in our public education system. With the unprecedented use of public money for the promotion and support of charter schools, and paying for services from private consulting companies, the vault of public education was finally opened --their committed effort was finally rewarded it.

Merit pay is only one more of the unproven experiments that will most certainly fail to produce the long term projected outcomes, and most likely will divide teachers, as it happened in [Tennessee](#) and [Denver](#). If merit pay were a legitimate issue to be discussed rationally, one could say that educational policymakers who advocate for merit pay suffer from both myopia and amnesia. For instance, a government commission's evaluation of England's mid-19th-century "payment by results" plan concluded that: schools became "impoverished learning environments in which nearly total emphasis on performance on the examination left little opportunity for learning." In 1985 two researchers from *The Public Interest*, a right-wing policy journal, concluded that no evidence supported the idea that merit pay<sup>67</sup>. Most recently, the Manhattan Institute published a report about the New York School Wide Performance Bonus Program in which the authors "found that the SPBP had little to no impact on student proficiency or school environment in its first year<sup>68</sup>." Merit pay has never been endorsed by any independent research, even when positive statistical results like this research from CS Stanislaus shows<sup>69</sup>. To make it even more difficult to understand the insistence is the fact that merit pay has never been instituted successfully in any private schools, colleges, universities, or similar institutions.

If every attempt for merit pay in public education has failed, and if it has never been successfully used in analogous situations, such as in private schools, why do conservatives persevere on this idea? A reasonable individual may deduce that merit pay would be used for a different purpose: privatizing public education<sup>70</sup>. Since teachers' associations would a major obstacle, merit pay would be a crucial piece to split teachers for good and eventually weaken and dismantle their organizations. In 2004, researchers from the Commonweal Institute wrote:

As radical as the idea of privatizing public schools may seem, the right-wing movement has an even broader agenda in this school privatization drive, namely "defunding the Left" by defunding teacher unions. By privatizing public schools, and destroying teacher

unions, the Right hopes to eliminate teacher unions as a source of support to the Right's political opposition. This goal is part of a broader effort to destroy other supporters of the Right's political opposition, including trial lawyers and organized labor.<sup>71</sup>

Proponents argue that merit is a measure that will attract more teachers, improve the quality of teaching and scores by rewarding excellence, and raise teachers' salaries to a level comparable to other professions. Let's see how probable these outcomes are.

### **ATTRACTING AND RETAINING A WORKFORCE**

Currently, America faces the challenge of offering quality public education to its population. The imminent problem is that the public education system will need to replace 2.8 million teachers in the next eight years. This is a problem of epic proportions if we consider that in America, when compared with accountants, reporters, registered nurses, computer programmers, personnel officers, and other comparably educated and experienced professionals, teachers are paid considerable less. This circumstance dissuades college graduates from entering this profession. To make this task even harder, educated women, which in the past have composed most of the workforce of the public education system, have had more career options opened to them. With entry salaries to attract and retain college educated candidates, recruiting and keeping the teaching workforce seems complicated.

Practitioners need years of experience to become skillful teachers. It takes at least two years to master classroom management, and usually six to seven years to become a proficient teacher. With the current situation, a large number of candidates leave before five years. It is a fact that as many as 50% of teachers who work in poor urban schools leave in their first five years.

Teaching is a profession that does not attract enough people in the first place. Proponents of merit pay argue that this system may serve as a powerful incentive to allure more candidates. This idea seems feasible, but does not look appropriate to solve the problem. Offering one time bonuses to only a small number of teachers would not keep the rest of the teachers interested or motivated in staying in this profession for the long run. This is a gambling approach that may attract those who like the excitement of competition, and will stay for as long as they are enticed by it. Someone interested in becoming a true professional teacher may not consider one-time small prizes as a substantial reason for improving or staying. A more sensible suggestion to get more teachers and increase their quality is to consider increasing salaries as close as possible to other comparable professions. That would immediately attract a larger number of prospects to the profession, and from there, it would be easier to select the best of them.

In order to embark in this colossal task of creating the best teaching force America can produce, it is necessary establish long term goals, and to predict as much as possible the long term effects of the measures our policies may produce. To attract and keep capable, qualified, and committed teachers, we need policies to create reasonable economic incentives. We may

consider premium pay, higher pay, and bonuses for performance, but the basic solution to the problem of forming a public education force remains to raise teachers pay across the board. To offer a combination of a meager salary with the option of one-time bonuses does not seem a serious suggestion for a long term project.

### **IMPROVE PUBLIC EDUCATION THROUGH REWARDING EXCELLENT TEACHERS**

The official rhetoric of the education in America explains that the alleged failure of public<sup>72</sup> education is due largely to bad, ineffective, lazy, or burned out teachers. Following this premise, one must assume that there are a small number of laudable teachers who day in and day out work tirelessly to benefit their students. The reformers acknowledging these few outstanding teachers thought about recognizing and rewarding them in a way that could also motivate all the mediocre and send home the unproductive ones. Hence, merit pay is a laudable and pragmatic approach; it is supposed to be a motivation, a reward for those deserving it, and an instrument to dismiss those unworthy.

The problem here is that the goals are not backed up by the means. Since the mission at hand is to create and maintain a motivated and effective workforce for the long run, placing such confidence in an untested measure, whether merit pay or any other seems unconscionable<sup>73</sup>. A more moderate and believable use of merit pay would be to use it as a compensation for extra work of special duties performed—an extra money for additional work.

At the present time, arguing that merit pay results in good teachers feeling rewarded and bad teachers leaving the profession is perceived as wishful thinking at best, or a determined attempt to destroy teachers' morale and solidarity at worse<sup>74</sup>. In both cases, it is another diversion from solving more important problems such as health care and poverty and its effects. If salaries for teachers were comparable to other professions, there would be no need for bonuses. In short, merit pay neither promotes teaching excellence, nor does eliminate subpar teachers. One-time extra money is an opportunity that every worker welcomes, but it does not give a reason for becoming better or proficient.

### **EQUIPARED TEACHERS SALARIES WITH OTHER COMPARABLE PROFESSIONS' SALARIES**

From 1979 to 2006, other professions salaries have increased while teachers' salaries have been eroded. In 2006 teachers' salaries were already 15 % lower<sup>75</sup>. For female teachers, the comparison fairs worse than for males. In 1960 female teachers made an average of 14.7 % more than other comparable professional women, and by 2000, their salary fell to an average of 13.2 % less; a decrease of almost 28 %. When comparing salaries and benefits, the disadvantage is reduced only by 3%, leaving the difference at 12%. The increases in the 1990's

have been more beneficial for mid- and senior level teachers, than for entry level ones, whose wages have stayed relatively equally low. In no state, teachers earn the same or more than other college graduates; in 15 states, teachers' salaries are 25 % lower than comparable professionals; and only in five states, their weekly wages are only 10 % below<sup>76</sup>.

### **WHY DO WE KEEP SEEING MERIT PAY AFTER ITS RECORD OF FAILURE?**

In order to answer this question we have to observe the context in which merit pay resurged. The first condition is also the unchallenged premise that public schools are a bastion of socialism and that teachers are failing their students<sup>77</sup>. This condition was effectively presented as a systemic problem, not as a condition that could be address with simpler interventions. From this perspective, solely by each teacher working harder and better, students will improve and the problems produced by the education system would be solved. Thus, for that transformation to happen, this current school system that runs on the principle of caring for educating everybody's children has to be dismantled and substituted by another in which free market principles and competition determine the conditions.<sup>78</sup>

The second and most powerful condition is the more than 56 billion of dollars that the federal and local governments spend in their public schools annually. According to the free market theory, this money would be more effectively used by contractors competing for the consumers. Thus, corporations, entrepreneurs, privatizing advocates, and politicians favor the idea of gradually stopping the funding of public education and supporting a whole new system where what remains of public schools, charters schools, and private schools compete for consumers.

Consequently political leaders, policy makers, and administrators have set up the conditions for the change with merit pay being one of these conditions. But how come we have so many merit pay experiments all over the country? Since the idea of an education crisis was firmly set up, a state of urgency regarding teachers' performance was created --teachers were signaled as the most important factor in the education process. Later, this idea was used to introduce the idea that some teachers are good and deserve recognition, while several are inefficient but the unions protect them from being fired. The positive spin resounded on both parents and teachers who did not see anything wrong with the premise. At the same time, coupling this idea of recognition with improving scores, made the selling of merit pay much easier.

An interesting selling point resided in the vagueness of the concept of merit pay. Since it may mean something different for different people, a variety of programs appeared all over the country, and teachers and teacher unions saw themselves overwhelmed by the marketing

campaign behind PFP. This confusion helped their proponents to make inroads and dividing the teachers' union members who in principle opposed to merit pay. Due to this confusion, easy situations like calculating extra payment for extra time at work or for performing extra duties, or providing stipends for teachers with special skills, were thrown in the same group as what can be truly consider PFP like attaching bonuses for achieving a certain score, or for achieving predetermined goals as individuals or for groups.

However, the condition most responsible for having merit pay around is the 517 millions of dollars the federal government provides. For states, districts, and eventually teachers, saying no to more money is indeed impossible during this crisis. What is happening here, cannot be categorized as a buying in by the stakeholders, but as a coercion. There is no discussion or debate about the benefits or shortcomings of merit pay; it is a take it or leave it offer.

At this point, merit pay has become a fixture in many districts, and teachers plan their work in accordance to whatever system they have in place. Whatever changes PFP causes in districts, schools, and teachers themselves, only time will tell. What remains disturbing is the lack of debate about an issue that has so much influence over teachers and students alike.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

Raising teacher compensation is a critical component in any strategy to recruit and Retain a higher quality teacher workforce. If the goal is to affect the broad array of teachers—that is, move the quality of the median teacher. Policies that solely focus on changing the composition of the current compensation levels, such as merit or pay-for-performance schemes, are unlikely to be effective unless they also correct the teacher compensation disadvantage in the labor market.

When looking at the problem of attracting and retaining teachers, “pay-for-performance is like treating alcoholism by switching from vodka to gin.” Money is offered in such a way that it distracts from the problem, instead of solving it<sup>79</sup>. Linking achievement to pay is more damaging than helpful. A more sensible approach to solve the problem with teachers is to pay well and fairly so they forget about money. Once the problem with money is solved, everyone will concentrate in what really is important.

The process to take care of what really matters should be free of manipulations. Teachers must participate in the decision making process with the idea of bringing quality to the workplace. For this to happen, teachers need to have choices, participate in a collaborative manner, and have a saying in the content of their work. This collaboration must be done in teams that define tasks, establish the standards, and determine the necessary means to succeed.

Could teachers defend a public school system based in solidarity when American culture thrives in individualism? Judging for the current state of affairs, protecting public education against privatization seems extremely difficult if not impossible. Alfie Kohn explains that “American culture is distinguished by a strong work ethic, individualism, and a tendency to collapse all human interaction and most matters of public policy into economic laws.” And then he adds, “Vouchers and school choice plans effectively say to parents, Never mind about what's best for kids; just shop for the school that's best for *your* kids. It's not a community; it's a market -- so why would we expect things to be any different inside the school? How much commitment to inclusive education can we expect in an exclusive society?”<sup>80</sup> Defending public education would require all the stakeholders, such as board members, administrators, and parents to form a well informed, organized, and committed a coalition. Among all of these, only teachers associations could start the process.

For those who ask if teachers should be rewarded, the answer should be: No, they shouldn't. Teachers should be paid fairly. The simplest and fairest approach to how to keep an effective teaching workforce is to pay them well, treat them with the respect professionals deserve, and provide them with the support and incentives to achieve excellence so teachers feel professional satisfaction and are able to perform at their highest level possible. Troen and Boles explained in the Boston Globe that,

... a good case can be made for merit pay, if that means higher salaries for higher professional achievement. But that can only be accomplished by instituting education reforms that include a career ladder in which teachers can, by acquiring the skills, knowledge, responsibilities, and certification, climb from one career level to the next for example, by advancing from associate teacher to teacher, then professional teacher, and finally chief instructor. And by further professionalizing the practice of teaching so that teachers work in teams instead of in isolation, increasing collaboration and accountability. And by including professional development in the career path of all teachers, just as in other fields such as medicine and law. These steps must all be taken together in order for any of them to succeed.<sup>81</sup>

A more reasonable and fair approach to compensate teachers should consider paying more according to added responsibilities. In schools and districts, teachers take on the roles of leaders, mentors, curriculum designers, or researchers, to mention some possibilities. There must be a system to pay teachers for these extra duties. Another idea is stipends. These have been an accepted way districts use to attract teachers with special skills, psychologists, or counselors. An army of enthusiastic well prepared teachers will, in turn, deliver an increased number of lifelong learners and hard-working citizens. The Economic Policy Institute, in a study published in March 2009 concludes that merit pay does have too many downsides to be considered an effective measure for education. In regards of accountability the study suggests that teachers should be held accountable using a better more comprehensive design. The report reads:

Rothstein does not conclude schools and teachers cannot or should not be held accountable; rather, he urges that any accountability system must be built on the

extensive experience and research inside and outside of education and on an informed assessment of the gains and losses inherent in any system. As he writes in his conclusion: "In education, most policy makers who now promote performance incentives and accountability, and scholars who analyze them, seem mostly oblivious to the extensive literature in economics and management theory documenting the inevitable corruption of quantitative indicators and the perverse consequences of performance incentives that rely on such indicators. Of course, ignorant of this literature, many proponents of performance incentives are unable to engage in careful deliberation about whether, in particular cases; the benefits are worth the price."<sup>82</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Controversies in Social Science Statistics. Mark H. Maier with Todd Easton. Third Edition. M. E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, London England. 1999 p.99

<sup>2</sup> When Performance-Related Pay Backfires. London School of Economics and Political Science.  
<http://www2.lse.ac.uk/ERD/pressAndInformationOffice/newsAndEvents/archives/2009/06/performancepay.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> There is a pressing need to redesign our schools to meet the demands of a global 21st century society in which knowledge and technology are changing at a breath-taking pace, and new forms of education are essential for individual and societal survival. Yet, our current policy strategies are constraining rather than enabling the educational innovation our school system needs. Indeed, the path we are pursuing promises to leave our schools, as well as our children, behind. **Democracy at Risk: The Need for a New Federal Policy in Education**  
 Author: THE FORUM CONVENERs. April 23, 2008 <http://www.forumforeducation.org/node/378>

<sup>4</sup> *Democracy in Education*, Chapter 7. John Dewey.

<http://www.worldwideschool.org/library/books/socl/education/DemocracyandEducation/chap7.html>

<sup>5</sup> Signs abound that the path we have taken in educational reform has led us astray. Inequities in educational opportunity have increased, public commitment to democracy has waned, the scope of education has narrowed, and our rankings internationally in educational achievement and attainment have fallen. These indicators suggest that we are not making the strategic investments in our schools that both democratic life and the new learning economy require. *Democracy at Risk*. <http://www.forumforeducation.org/node/378>

<sup>6</sup> Merit Pay for Teachers? <http://www.momsrising.org/node/761>

<sup>7</sup> State lawmakers should consider: Eliminating the state minimum salary schedule • which rewards longevity over effectiveness in the classroom. Refusing to tie local school districts hands by giving all • teachers in the state an across-the-board pay raise. Continuing to support and fund teacher incentive pay • programs. Removing any roadblocks to reform at the state level • that hinder local school districts from having the flexibility to design a compensation system that meets their needs. <http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2008-09-RR09-IncentivePay-bt.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Even as education officials have eliminated 12 programs they say are not proven to benefit students -- a savings of \$550 million -- the department is seeking \$517 million for performance pay grants, up from \$97 million in last year's budget. In addition, the stimulus law included an additional \$200 million for such programs. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/07/AR2009050703786.html>

<sup>9</sup> Teacher Performance Pay: A Review

[http://web.missouri.edu/~podgurskym/papers\\_presentations/reports/Podgursky%20and%20Springer.pdf](http://web.missouri.edu/~podgurskym/papers_presentations/reports/Podgursky%20and%20Springer.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The Washington Times, April 10, 2009.

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<sup>11</sup> ProComp is a nine year bargained agreement between the Denver Classroom Teachers Association and Denver Public Schools that is designed to link teacher compensation more directly with the mission and goals of DPS and DCTA. The system accomplishes the following goals:

- Rewards and recognizes teachers for meeting and exceeding expectations
- Links compensation more closely with instructional outcomes for students
- Enables the district to attract and retain the most qualified and effective teachers by offering uncapped annual earnings in a fair system

<sup>12</sup> The idea of merit pay, sometimes called pay for performance, was born in England around 1710. Teachers' salaries were based on their students' test scores on examinations in reading, writing, and arithmetic. The result was that teachers and administrators became obsessed with financial rewards and punishments, and curriculums were narrowed to include only the testable basics. From *How Merit Pay Squelches Teaching*.

[http://www.boston.com/news/education/k\\_12/articles/2005/09/28/how\\_merit\\_pay\\_squelches\\_teaching/](http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2005/09/28/how_merit_pay_squelches_teaching/)

<sup>13</sup> One instance of open conflict erupted when the school board in Kalamazoo, MI, decided to reward teachers differently in 1974. The American School Board Journal trumpeted the Kalamazoo plan as the end to lockstep pay and unaccountable staff. "Take it from Kalamazoo," the Journal said: "A comprehensive, performance-based system of evaluation and accountability can work." This judgment was premature. The merit scheme, in which "nearly everyone evaluated everyone else," choked on paperwork and provoked frustration, not superior performance. *Rethinking Schools. Lessons from History*.

[http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/14\\_03/hist143.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/14_03/hist143.shtml)

<sup>14</sup> In 1969, President Richard Nixon championed a plan he called "performance contracting," in which it soon became apparent that financial incentives not only failed to produce expected gains but also generated damaging educational practices such as falsifying school records and teaching to the test to boost scores artificially. The inability of contractors to develop innovative teaching strategies and the dismal results of the program eventually doomed performance contracting, and it was declared a failure. *The Boston Globe*, September 25, 2005

<sup>15</sup> *The Toronto Star*, May 13, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Last week, a coalition of groups representing teachers and administrators called for an immediate halt to the Master Teacher Program until a legislative inquiry can be conducted into the evaluation procedure that serves as one of two methods used to determine master-teacher status. *Ed Week*. May 22, 1985.

<http://www.edweek.org/login.html?source=http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1985/05/22/06030014.h04.html&destination=http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1985/05/22/06030014.h04.html&levelId=2100>

<sup>17</sup> Though incentives for teachers have been around for decades, there's a lack of solid research around whether merit pay boosts student performance, said Matthew Springer, director of the National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University, which has federal funding to study whether incentives work.

"It's a movement that's gaining traction," said Springer, "but we really don't know if it's an effective reform or not." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* March 30, 2009

<sup>18</sup> "Horribly divisive" is how Gayle Fallon, president of the Houston Federation of Teachers, describes the recent distribution of \$15 million (U.S.) in bonuses to teachers in the largest school district in Texas.

Most teachers received payments averaging close to \$2,000. But an angry minority received none; and everyone learned what everyone else got when the Houston Chronicle's website published a list of teachers and amounts. Raising hackles further, 100 teachers were asked to return part of their bonuses because a computer glitch had inflated them. This was Houston's first year of doling out such bonuses, and its troubles may have prompted the Texas House of Representatives to vote against a state-wide merit-pay program. *The Toronto Star*, May 13, 2007

<sup>19</sup> More than 2,100 school employees received zilch. Saavedra emphasized in a prepared statement that teachers who didn't receive awards aren't necessarily bad at their jobs. But under the bonus system, called ASPIRE, rewards go only to those teachers whose students made the most growth in the district.

"There are teachers who did not receive an ASPIRE award this year," Saavedra said. "This does not necessarily mean that their students or their campus didn't grow academically or that they are poor teachers. It simply means that their performance was not in the top 50 percent for last year across the district."

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/6234379.html>

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<sup>20</sup> Merit pay, but nearly all get it; Pawlenty's program was meant to reward teachers who improve student performance. But nearly everyone gets the pay raise. [EMILY JOHNS, Star Tribune](#). Minneapolis, Minn.: [Feb 1, 2009](#). pg. A.1

<sup>21</sup> Pawlenty's education goals this year is to expand Q Comp to all public and charter schools. Q Comp is currently voluntary. It combines merit pay for teachers, professional development, and increased state funding for participating schools. A new audit Tuesday says there's no way to know whether Q Comp has improved student achievement and that conclusion has some lawmakers wondering whether expansion is such a good idea. [http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2009/02/03/q\\_comp\\_leg\\_audit/](http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2009/02/03/q_comp_leg_audit/)

<sup>22</sup> At Palm Lake Elementary, two out of three teachers earned a bonus through Orange County Public Schools' merit-pay plan. At Richmond Heights Elementary, the number was zero. Palm Lake is a predominantly white school in the affluent Dr. Phillips area. Richmond Heights is a predominantly black school in a poverty-stricken pocket of Orlando. The two schools illustrate a marked disparity in the distribution of merit bonuses to 3,911 Orange County teachers and administrators uncovered in an Orlando Sentinel analysis of the program. The Sentinel's review showed that teachers at predominantly white and affluent schools were twice as likely to get a bonus as teachers from schools that are predominantly black and poor. <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2007/9/13/193552/262>

<sup>23</sup> Teachers in participating districts and charter schools would have received an average of \$500 each under the merit-pay program. Teachers, of course, are not so happy about the news, since it comes after they've spent a year working for the bonuses. Utah Education Association spokesman Mike Kelley told the *Deseret News* that teachers have been participating "in what they thought would be a compensation plan and working toward what they thought would be a bonus." Utah May Hold Back Merit Pay Funds. [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2008/12/utah\\_may\\_hold\\_back\\_merit\\_pay\\_f.html?qs=merit+pay](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2008/12/utah_may_hold_back_merit_pay_f.html?qs=merit+pay)

<sup>24</sup> In 2005, the voters of Denver were asked to approve a \$25 million funding boost in teacher pay. They said yes, but they wanted something in return, according to Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper. "Teachers are underpaid, I don't think anyone argues that. But given the sentiment of the public, if they want to have taxpayers vote more taxes, they're going to have to give some dramatic change in the way they go about teaching," Hickenlooper said. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=17527987>

<sup>25</sup> In Denver, on the other hand, it was infighting among teachers that dominated media coverage of last August's contract negotiations. After the Denver teachers' union threatened a strike over the renegotiation of Pro-Comp, a group of young teachers formed Denver Teachers for Change. Three-hundred-and-fifty Denver teachers signed DTC's petition seeking to avert a strike and reform Pro-Comp to provide teachers with larger starting salaries and pay increases during their first 12 years of service. In other words, no merit pay proposal is static; these are experiments that will require continuous testing and tweaking, and about which people are sure to disagree for years to come. Is Merit Pay a Distraction in the Fight for Meaningful Education Reform? The American Prospect. [http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=is\\_merit\\_pay\\_a\\_distraction\\_in\\_the\\_fight\\_for\\_meaningful\\_education\\_reform](http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=is_merit_pay_a_distraction_in_the_fight_for_meaningful_education_reform)

<sup>26</sup> Procedures to Administering Merit Pay. [http://www.purdue.edu/hr/Compensation/smp\\_procedures.html](http://www.purdue.edu/hr/Compensation/smp_procedures.html)

<sup>27</sup> Milton Friedman, the Nobel Prize-winning economist known for his free-market views, proposed 50 years ago that to improve schools, parents could be given vouchers -- tickets they could spend to shop for a better education for their kids. He theorized that the resulting competition among schools would spark improvements in the system. Free-market advocates loved the idea. Teachers' unions hated it, arguing that it could drain resources from some public schools and direct resources to religious institutions. <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=0&did=915604641&SrchMode=2&sid=3&Fmt=3&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1247158947&clientId=5264>

<sup>28</sup> The idea of differentiated pay is common in most occupations. High-performing business people, chefs, journalists and athletes prosper from salary hikes or bonuses. Why not teachers? The Gazette (Montreal) February 19, 2009 Thursday .

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<sup>29</sup> Bonuses can serve as carrots for working harder. Helping out on extracurricular activities is not remunerated. (One high-school teacher told me yesterday: "Trust me, teachers who work over and above their line of duty are taken as 'suckers' by some teachers. Too many teachers have the philosophy, 'Why work more when for the same pay you can work less?' ") The Gazette

<sup>30</sup> "The whole society is based on merit," Hershberg said. "Why is public education the only place where we don't give a damn if you're any good?" The Philadelphia Enquirer, March 30, 2009

<sup>31</sup> Teachers are underpaid. Bonuses would help attract and retain better teachers. The Gazette

<sup>32</sup> 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. The Philadelphia Enquirer. March 30, 2009

<sup>33</sup> The commission was organized by the National Center on Education and the Economy, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group based in Washington, and partly financed by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. The center organized a similar commission that issued a similar report 16 years ago. Marc S. Tucker, the group's president, said globalization had created new urgency. "There is this growing mismatch between the demands of the economy and what our schools are supplying," Mr. Tucker said. In its report, the commission warned of dire consequences should the country not adopt a strikingly bold approach. "If we continue on our current course, and the number of nations outpacing us in the education race continues to grow at its current rate," it said, "the American standard of living will steadily fall relative to those nations, rich and poor, that are doing a better job."

<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=0&did=1180683671&SrchMode=2&sid=5&Fmt=3&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1247162058&clientId=5264>

<sup>34</sup> Some school policymakers are promoting a new idea for improving the schools: merit pay plans that would tie teachers' pay to the scores their students earn on standardized math and reading tests. Advocates of this approach base their support on two assumptions: first, that merit pay is long-established and widespread in the private sector, and second, that students' test scores are a reliable way to gauge how well teachers are doing their jobs. Both assumptions, according to a new research report issued today by the Economic Policy Institute, are faulty. [http://www.epi.org/page/-/pdf/20090514\\_merit\\_pay\\_pr.pdf](http://www.epi.org/page/-/pdf/20090514_merit_pay_pr.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> The Merits of Merit Pay: Ten Tips on Pay-for-Performance Reform. How to link teacher compensation to teacher accomplishment -- and a look at a school that makes it work. by [Laura McClure](#). <http://www.edutopia.org/merit-pay-reform>

<sup>36</sup> Despite crippling losses, multibillion-dollar bailouts and the passing of some of the most prominent names in the business, employees at financial companies in New York, the now-diminished world capital of capital, collected an estimated \$18.4 billion in bonuses for the year.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/29/business/29bonus.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/29/business/29bonus.html?_r=1)

<sup>37</sup> The assaults often have been agency-specific -- the Pentagon's National Security Personnel System, for example, was the subject of a congressional hearing last week. But now, eight chairmen and subcommittee chairmen in the House have upped the ante and urged the Obama administration to suspend any further implementation -- government-wide -- of pay-for-performance. The chairmen, all Democrats, questioned the justification for such programs in a Friday letter to [Peter Orszag](#), director of the Office of Management and Budget. Washington Post, April 7, 2009

<sup>38</sup> "We've been down this road before," says Linda Darling-Hammond, Stanford University's Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education, noting that merit-pay plans were also introduced in the 1920s, the 1950s, and the 1980s. "We know that there are strategies and options that have some good potential, but there are also really predictable pitfalls to be aware of and design around," she cautions. The risk of failing to learn from past lessons is significant, Darling-Hammond adds, because poorly thought-out programs can cause teachers to become

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demoralized and even leave their districts, just what the programs are meant to prevent. Edutopia. Merit Pay –For Love and Money. <http://www.edutopia.org/whats-next-2007-merit-pay>

<sup>39</sup> The moral arguments against controlling and manipulating people apply to both teacher and student. By establishing strict accountability through frequent high stakes testing and offering incentives such as individual or group bonuses attached to student achievement, administrators are trying to define teacher excellence as they define student achievement: without critical discussion of what constitutes excellent teaching and meaningful learning. They would say student achievement is whatever is deemed worth testing and excellent teaching is whatever accomplishes or seems to accomplish success in this testing. Scholastic. Wynona University Professor Wade Wilson. Counterpoint. <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=234>

<sup>40</sup> At the end of the day, when funding for FMIs was finally eliminated, there seemed to be no faculty member (or campus administrator involved in implementing our programs) prepared to say that **merit pay** had helped improve faculty “performance” or made the university a better place in any way. What we heard instead was: faculty demoralized by fractured relationships within departments and strained relations between faculty and administrators; faculty frustrated at the enormous time commitments involved in careful administration of **merit pay** on top of an already mushrooming workload; faculty dismayed that they didn’t feel like they had been rewarded even if they got money; and faculty finally convinced that the entire exercise had never really been about “merit” at all. What It Seems Like a Good Idea That’s Really a Bad Idea. <http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:4YCJh1Now9QJ:www.califac.org/allpdf/insiders/MERIT%2520PAY.pdf+%22merit+pay%22+demoraiize&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>

<sup>41</sup> Promoting competition among colleagues would reduce rather than increase the productivity of schools because teachers would conceal their best ideas and pursue their own interests rather than the general good. Moreover, performance bonuses might perversely reward teachers for success with able students while discouraging efforts with those who progress more slowly. Finally, teachers resented policymakers’ efforts to entice them with the prospects of one-time bonuses for a select few when many teachers held second jobs just to meet basic living expenses. By seeking to provide recognition for exemplary teachers, potentially at the expense of many others, the reforms threatened egalitarian norms that the profession supports. Lessons From History. Rethinking Schools. [http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/14\\_03/hist143.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/14_03/hist143.shtml)

<sup>42</sup> Mike Baker, a correspondent for BBC News, discovered that an educational “recruitment crisis” exists almost exclusively in those nations “where accountability measures have undermined teachers’ autonomy.” The Folly of Merit Pay, Alfie Kohn. <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/edweek/meritpay.htm>

<sup>43</sup> Alfie Kohn. For Better Results, Forget the Bonus. <http://www.alfiekohn.org/managing/fbrftb.htm>

<sup>44</sup> Why have so few schemes to pay teachers for their performance stuck? Murnane and Cohen argue that merit pay seldom works if its intent is to get teachers to excel, for little agreement exists among administrators and teachers about just what effective teaching is and how to measure it. In part, the complexity of the teaching act foils merit pay. Internal strife erupts over administrators’ judgments when some teachers win “outstanding” marks and others only “average” grades. Lessons From History. Rethinking Schools. [http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/14\\_03/hist143.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/14_03/hist143.shtml)

<sup>45</sup> In cooperation with the Washington Teachers’ Union and the New Leaders for New Schools organization, Rhee has tried one school incentive, the TEAM awards. Everyone working at D.C. schools last school year that reached 100 percent reading and math proficiency or raised student scores 20 percent got money. Teachers at those schools received \$8,000 each. But the rules denied money to some very successful schools. That created resentment, which proves the danger of this approach. Jay Mathews. Merit Pay Can Ruin Teachers Teamwork. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/10/05/AR2008100502040.html>

<sup>46</sup> Rothstein paints a vivid picture of the perverse consequences created when numbers-based accountability measures encounter the human talent for gaming the system. He draws upon familiar examples such as body counts employed by the military during the Vietnam War, ticket quotas and crime clearance rates used by law enforcement agencies, TV sweeps week, best-seller lists, and college rankings, as well as examining the impact of health care report cards on health care delivery. [http://www.epi.org/page/-/pdf/20090514\\_merit\\_pay\\_pr.pdf](http://www.epi.org/page/-/pdf/20090514_merit_pay_pr.pdf)

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<sup>47</sup> Although proponents argue that these strategically focused rewards can broaden and deepen teachers' content knowledge of core teaching areas and facilitate attainment of classroom management and curriculum development skills (Odden & Kelley, 1996), evidence to date suggests that the knowledge and skills being rewarded in these "input-based" pay systems may have a negligible impact on student outcomes (Ballou & Podgursky, 2001; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2004).

[http://web.missouri.edu/~podgurskym/papers\\_presentations/reports/Podgursky%20and%20Springer.pdf](http://web.missouri.edu/~podgurskym/papers_presentations/reports/Podgursky%20and%20Springer.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> But in 1999 the Texas Education Agency began investigating Houston and other districts because of suspicious results on the statewide test, then called TAAS. Last year, the Houston school board said it had found evidence of cheating at four schools and testing irregularities at seven more. A half-dozen teachers were fired, and several principals were demoted or reprimanded. The New York Times January 13, 2006

<sup>49</sup> Here are the educational historians David Tyack and Larry Cuban: "The history of performance-based salary plans has been a merry-go-round. In the main, districts that initially embraced merit pay dropped it after a brief trial." But even "repeated experiences" of failure haven't prevented officials "from proposing merit pay again and again." Alfie Kohn, The Follies of Merit Pay. <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/edweek/meritpay.htm>

<sup>50</sup> The idea of merit pay, sometimes called pay for performance, was born in England around 1710. Teachers' salaries were based on their students' test scores on examinations in reading, writing, and arithmetic. The result was that teachers and administrators became obsessed with financial rewards and punishments, and curriculums were narrowed to include only the testable basics. So drawing, science, and music disappeared. Teaching became more mechanical as teachers found that drill and rote repetition produced the "best" results. Both teachers and administrators were tempted to falsify results, and many did. The plan was ultimately dropped, signaling the fate of every merit plan initiative ever since. The Boston Globe September 28, 2005.

<sup>51</sup> A survey of Merit Pay Effectiveness. End of the Line for Merit Pay, or Hope for Improvement?

<http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst;jsessionid=J3KTRwjRBcrPm7zfXvqLv4y1RhqjhQfng12Jkr1prJTG1MvnhTbJ!1369644437!-1137335696?docId=5000417081>

<sup>52</sup> A few weeks ago, the conservative [Manhattan Institute released a study](#) showing that merit pay had no impact on test scores in 200 schools in New York City that are trying it. In fact, scores went down in larger schools that offered bonuses. This little experiment in schoolwide bonuses is costing taxpayers \$20 million a year. Diane Ravitch. What's Wrong With Merit Pay. [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/2009/04/whats\\_wrong\\_with\\_merit\\_pay.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/2009/04/whats_wrong_with_merit_pay.html)

<sup>53</sup> One of the chief shortcomings of test-based accountability in education, Rothstein notes, is that it doesn't take into account the wide variations in student characteristics. He writes, "A school with large numbers of low-income children, high residential mobility, great family stress, little literacy support at home, and serious health problems may be a better school even if its test scores are lower than another whose pupils do not have such challenges; similarly for teachers." MERIT PAY HAS PITFALLS FOR SCHOOLS. [http://www.epi.org/page/-/pdf/20090514\\_merit\\_pay\\_pr.pdf](http://www.epi.org/page/-/pdf/20090514_merit_pay_pr.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> Our elementary and secondary educational system needs to be radically restructured. Such a reconstruction can be achieved only by privatizing a major segment of the educational system--i.e., by enabling a private, for-profit industry to develop that will provide a wide variety of learning opportunities and offer effective competition to public schools. The most feasible way to bring about such a transfer from government to private enterprise is to enact in each state a voucher system that enables parents to choose freely the schools their children attend. The voucher must be universal, available to all parents, and large enough to cover the costs of a high-quality education. No conditions should be attached to vouchers that interfere with the freedom of private enterprises to experiment, to explore, and to innovate. Individual, Liberty, Free Markets, and Peace, CATO institute.

<sup>55</sup> Here are the educational historians David Tyack and Larry Cuban: "The history of performance-based salary plans has been a merry-go-round. In the main, districts that initially embraced merit pay dropped it after a brief

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trial." But even "repeated experiences" of failure haven't prevented officials "from proposing merit pay again and again." The Follies of Merit Pay, Alfie Kohn. <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/edweek/meritpay.htm>

<sup>56</sup> From **The Big Enchilada** by Jonathan Kozol. Harper's Magazine Notebook (August 2007)

<sup>57</sup> At the center of the conservative network receiving public funds to pursue what is arguably an antipublic agenda is the Education Leaders Council, which was created in 1995 as a more conservative alternative to the Council of Chief State School Officers (which itself is not all that progressive). One of its founders was Eugene W. Hickok, formerly Pennsylvania's Secretary of Education and now the second-ranking official in the U.S. Department of Education. Hickok brushes off the charge that DOE is promoting and funding privatization. If there's any favoritism reflected in these grants, he says, it's only in that "we support those organizations that support No Child Left Behind." <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/testtoday.htm>

<sup>58</sup> Systems scientists there produced a study consisting almost entirely of charts, tables, and graphs, plus brief analyses of what the numbers signified, which amounted to a major "Oops!" As their puzzled preface put it, "To our surprise, on nearly every measure, we found steady or slightly improving trends." One section, for example, analyzed SAT scores between the late 1970s and 1990, a period when those scores slipped markedly. ("A Nation at Risk" spotlighted the decline of scores from 1963 to 1980 as dead-bang evidence of failing schools.) The Sandia report, however, broke the scores down by various subgroups, and something astonishing emerged. Nearly every subgroup -- ethnic minorities, rich kids, poor kids, middle class kids, top students, average students, low-ranked students -- held steady or improved during those years. Yet overall scores dropped. How could that be? <http://www.edutopia.org/landmark-education-report-nation-risk>

<sup>59</sup> From the Folly of Merit Pay by Alfie Khon, appeared in Newsweek.

<http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/edweek/meritpay.htm>

<sup>60</sup> NEA has resolutions opposing merit pay based on test scores, but it also open to other possibilities.

<http://www.nea.org/home/15069.htm>

<sup>61</sup> Recently elected American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten on Monday conveyed an openness to discussing new approaches to such issues as merit pay and teacher tenure. "With the exception of vouchers, which siphon scarce resources from public schools, no issue should be off the table, provided it is good for children and fair to teachers," Weingarten said. [New York Times, The](#) (11/17) [Los Angeles Times](#) (11/18)

<sup>62</sup> The Roundtable and the Chamber have lost none of their love for the law despite evidence of its damaging consequences. On the contrary, the Chamber's web site confirms its support: "The U.S. Chamber believes the No Child Left Behind Act is one of the critical tools needed to transform U.S. education so that all students graduate academically prepared for college, citizenship, and the 21st century workplace. Ask your legislators to support NCLB reauthorization efforts that go beyond the current Act." Who is in Touch With NCLB? The Aspenites or FairTest and the Rest . <http://www.fairtest.org/who-is-in-touch-with-nclb>

<sup>63</sup> In addition to paying legal fees in defense of voucher programs and funding research studies and conservative think tanks, the Bradley Foundation in August 2000 created an organization called the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO). The BAEO's "public information campaign" targets African American families with its pro-voucher message through direct mailings, radio, internet, and newspaper ads as well as door to door solicitation. The Walton Family Foundation (Walmart) contributed \$900,000 toward project start-up. A federal grant of \$600,000 from the Department of Education was also given to the BAEO. *The Black Commentator* (Author, 2002) succinctly describes the scenario as follows: "A phony 'movement' invented by rich, racist white men in Milwaukee, is being foisted on a Black and Latino public, paid for *with the people's tax money* The privatization process began in Philadelphia in the summer of 2001 when it was but a gleam in the eye of then Governor Tom Ridge. Ridge awarded Edison Schools Inc. a \$2.7 million, no-bid contract to study the district over a two month period and make recommendations for improving school financing and student achievement. It did not go unnoticed that a potential conflict of interest was inherent in this situation (Woodall, 2001). Right from the start, Edison did not endear itself to Philadelphians when, just days before the opening of school in September, the

company hired away one of the district's primary administrators.

<http://louisville.edu/journal/workplace/issue5p2/boesenberg.html>

<sup>64</sup> The godfathers of this network are two well-heeled, powerful and influential business groups, the Business Roundtable and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Both backed NCLB from its inception and continue to lobby for Congress to expand the law's reach. Over several decades, they have developed a close-knit network to push their standards and testing education agenda, including Education Trust, Achieve, Inc., Education Commission of the States, Broad Foundation, and many newspaper editorial boards. <http://www.fairtest.org/who-is-in-touch-with-nclb>

<sup>65</sup> Three beliefs are necessary for one to support **merit pay**: (1) that individual bonuses are a proven strategy to boost performance; (2) that standardized test scores are an accurate measure of teacher effectiveness; and (3) that placing a greater emphasis on standardized testing will lead to improvements in educational quality and student achievement. Unfortunately for its advocates, **merit pay** systems **fail** on all three counts. Jeffrey Leverich, Merit Pay. March 2007.

[http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:XYq5ADclMq8J:www.edcomp.org/uploadedFiles/Content/Research\\_and\\_Reports/Merit%2520Pay%2520Leverich.doc+Florida+merit+pay+fail+2000&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us](http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:XYq5ADclMq8J:www.edcomp.org/uploadedFiles/Content/Research_and_Reports/Merit%2520Pay%2520Leverich.doc+Florida+merit+pay+fail+2000&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us)

<sup>66</sup> In a major research report, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) documented the role that conservative foundations have played in developing and sustaining America's conservative labyrinth. It offers an aggregate accounting and detailed analysis of the 1992-1994 grantmaking of 12 core conservative foundations, the results of which confirm what has been reported in more anecdotal terms: that conservative foundations have invested sizable resources to create and sustain an infrastructure of policy, advocacy and training institutions committed to the achievement of conservative policy goals. The Strategic Philanthropy of Conservative Foundations. <http://mediatransparency.org/conservativephilanthropy.php>

<sup>67</sup> In *The Public Interest*, a right-wing policy journal, two researchers concluded with apparent disappointment in 1985 that no evidence supported the idea that merit pay "had an appreciable or consistent positive effect on teachers' classroom work." Moreover, they reported that few administrators expected such an effect "even though they had the strongest reason to make such claims."

<sup>68</sup> Our findings suggest that the SPBP has had negligible short-run effects on student achievement in mathematics. The same holds true for intermediate outcomes such as student, parent, and teacher perceptions of the school learning environment. We also find no evidence that the treatment effect differed on the basis of student or school characteristic. Early Evidence from a Randomized Trial. by Matthew G. Springer, Ph.D. and Marcus A. Winters, Ph.D. [http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr\\_56.htm](http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_56.htm)

<sup>69</sup> These results do suggest, however, that schools using a merit pay system enjoy some enhancement of the success rate of their students. This simple test does, therefore, suggest that merit systems may indeed reward and encourage teaching performance as claimed by their many advocates. Given the controversy over the use of merit pay and the relatively weak association between the presence of merit pay systems and positive teaching outcomes revealed in this study, additional empirical evidence should be collected and analyzed. Additional confounding factors could easily have influenced the results returned with the relatively simple models used in this study. Both faculty and administrators need to continue to examine the design and implementation of merit systems. Perhaps additional empirical work will make the continued discussion less adversarial than it was at Sonoma State University in 2001. <http://aabri.com/manuscripts/08077.pdf>. The Impact of Merit Pay on Teaching Outcomes.

<sup>70</sup> Confronting the Challenge of Privatization in Public Education. Pedro A. Noguera, Ph.D. University of California, Berkeley. <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/pnpriv1.html>

<sup>71</sup> Responding to the Attack on Public Education and Teacher Unions. A Commonweal Institute Report David C. Johnson, Fellow Leonard M. Salle, President November 2004

<sup>72</sup> The White House says so, with concern bordering on alarm. So do institutions such as the Gates Foundation, citing performance tests, graduation rates and other benchmarks. But don't measure for dunce caps just yet.

While they're not in first place, U.S. students generally hold their own on international tests. They spend more time in school than the Obama administration would have you believe. And their college graduation rates stack up better than reported. [http://www.mercurynews.com/natbreakingnews/ci\\_12394119?nclick\\_check=1](http://www.mercurynews.com/natbreakingnews/ci_12394119?nclick_check=1)

<sup>73</sup> The Myth Behind Merit Pay. [http://www.longnecker.com/html/the\\_myth\\_behind\\_merit\\_pay.pdf](http://www.longnecker.com/html/the_myth_behind_merit_pay.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> Mounting evidence indicates that individual pay-for-performance plans do not improve organizational results. Worse yet, research shows merit pay and other individual performance-based rewards may generate discernible patterns of pay discrimination linked to gender, race and national origin.

<http://www.financialweek.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081130/REG/811259950/1007/COMPENSATION>

<sup>75</sup> In 2006, American public school teachers earned 15% lower weekly earnings than comparable workers, a 1% growth in a gap EPI found in an earlier study on teacher pay published in 2003. The teacher disadvantage grew by 13.4 percentage points between 1979 and 2006, with most of the erosion (9.0 percentage points) occurring in the last decade <http://www.edwise.org/the-teaching-penalty-and-nyc-teacher-pay>

<sup>76</sup> In a disturbing trend, the greatest gap is appearing for those who make teaching a life time career. After disaggregating trends in relative compensation through the 1990s by age, nearly all of the increase in the weekly earnings gap between teachers and comparably educated and experienced workers occurred among mid- and senior level teachers. Early-career teachers (age 25-34) experience roughly the same wage disadvantage today as in 1990 (about 12%). <http://www.edwise.org/the-teaching-penalty-and-nyc-teacher-pay>

<sup>77</sup> The Friedman Foundation has a new co-chair of the board who is an expert on education. Dr. Patrick Byrne contends the public education system is failing America's youth. "And where it's going wrong is that our government is running the school system, and we're getting socialist-style results," Byrne explains. [The Friedman Foundation](#) does not take a stand on what will fix the problem, but Byrne suggests vouchers, charter schools, and tuition tax credits are part of the answer in that it returns the decision-making process to the parents. He believes public schools need the competition. Is public school a socialist institution? <http://www.onenewsnow.com/Education/Default.aspx?id=210458>

<sup>78</sup> A public education system is based on the principle that you care whether the kid down the street gets an education. And that's got to be stopped. This is very much like what the workers in the mills in Lowell, Massachusetts were worrying about 150 years ago. They were trying to stop what they called the new spirit of the age: "Gain wealth, forgetting all but self." We want to stop that. That's not what we're like. We're human beings. We care about other people. We want to do things together. We care about whether the kid down the street gets an education. We care about whether somebody else has a road, even if I don't use it. We care about whether there is child slave labor in Thailand. We care about whether some elderly person gets food. That's social security. We care whether somebody else gets food. There's a huge effort to try to undermine all of that--to try to privatize aspirations so then you're totally controlled. Privatize aspirations, you're completely controlled. Private power goes its own way, everyone else has to subordinate themselves to it. Assaulting Solidarity—Privatizing Education. Noam Chomsky. Znet. May 2000. <http://www.zmag.org/zspace/commentaries/429>

<sup>79</sup> Trying to correct the trouble by revising a pay-for-performance program makes as much sense as treating alcoholism by switching from vodka to gin. The problem is not with compensation, per se, but with pushing money into people's faces by offering more of it for this or that. The more closely pay is linked to achievement, the more damage is done. NEW YORK TIMES. October 17, 1993. For Best Results, Forget the Bonus By Alfie Kohn . <http://www.alfiekohn.org/managing/fbrftb.htm>

<sup>80</sup> Vouchers and school choice plans effectively say to parents, "Never mind about what's best for kids; just shop for the school that's best for *your* kids." It's not a community; it's a market -- so why would we expect things to be any different inside the school? How much commitment to inclusive education can we expect in an exclusive society? Sadly, when parents (and, shamefully, some educators) go to great lengths to erect walls between the "gifted" and the ordinary, another generation is raised without a commitment to the values of community, and the vicious circle closes in. Alfie Kohn. <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/ofmk.htm>

<sup>81</sup> The Boston Globe, September 28, 2005

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<sup>82</sup> MERIT PAY HAS PITFALLS FOR SCHOOLS [http://www.epi.org/page/-/pdf/20090514\\_merit\\_pay\\_pr.pdf](http://www.epi.org/page/-/pdf/20090514_merit_pay_pr.pdf)