

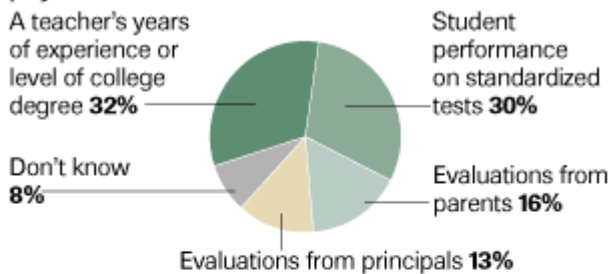
Parents back merit pay

Those with children in school rank test scores almost as high as teachers' experience.

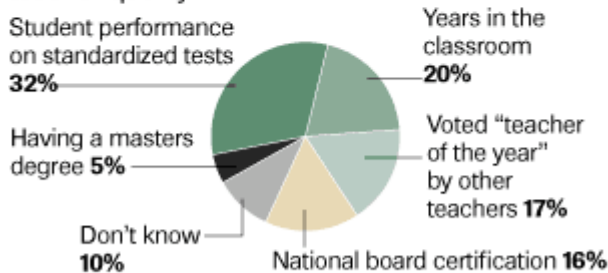
By Ron Matus, Times Staff Writer

Published March 3, 2008

Which of these do you think should be the one most important factor in determining a teacher's pay?



Which of these is the one best measure of teacher quality?



Reflects response of those with school-age children

Note: 702 interviews conducted Feb. 6-10 among Florida registered voters by Communications Center Inc. of Lakeland. Max. sampling error +/- 4 points

Source: Times Research

RON BRACKETT | Times

Many teachers hate the idea of tying their pay to student scores on standardized tests. But a *St. Petersburg Times* education survey finds many parents do not share their disdain.

When asked what they thought should be the most important factor in determining teacher pay, 30 percent of respondents with children in Florida schools picked standardized test scores, while 32 percent chose years of experience and level of college degree. Two other choices got much lower responses.

"That teacher has to somehow be rewarded or not rewarded for their actions," said Betty Lininter, 61, a retired nurse who cares for a niece attending Lecanto Middle School in Citrus County. "It shouldn't automatically be, 'You're here five years, you get this.' If your kids aren't passing, there's something wrong."

The results come just as the issue of performance pay - one of the most talked about education initiatives in the country - is again heating up in Florida.

Key lawmakers are frustrated that only seven of the state's 67 county school districts signed up for the state's performance-pay bonus plan, called the Merit Award Program. Apparently so is Gov. Charlie Crist, who unveiled a proposal last week that seeks to prod districts into participating by sweetening the financial pot.

Meanwhile, questions about MAP continue to mount. The Times reported Feb. 24 that the vast majority of bonuses awarded to Hillsborough teachers went to more affluent schools. The story raised questions about both the formula for MAP - which is based on test scores and principal evaluations - and the distribution of top teachers.

Lee-Roy Marks, whose daughter attends Pleasant Grove Elementary in Inverness, said paying teachers based on their experience makes sense. Veteran teachers "know what works and what doesn't," he said.

He and other parents also said awarding bonuses on scores from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test - which is the case for many teachers participating in MAP - gives even more weight to a test they think is already overemphasized.

"It's not the kid anymore," Marks said. "It's the test."

In Florida and beyond, teacher pay hinges almost entirely on years on the job and level of academic degree. Backers of performance pay think if pay is instead tied to student performance, teachers will work harder and smarter, with better teachers earning bigger paychecks and more students getting up to snuff academically.

Opponents worry that performance pay will introduce a corrosive competition into what is often a team effort. And even some supporters concede that rating teachers by student test scores can be dicey.

The Times survey found the vast majority of Florida parents gave their children's teachers high marks 46 percent rated them as excellent and 34 percent said good. They also agreed by large margins that the average Florida teacher salary of about \$46,000 over 10 months was not enough. (Sixty-five percent said it was too low, while 31 percent said it was appropriate.)

On performance pay, the survey found parents with children in school were more supportive of tying test scores to pay than the public at large.

Both parents and respondents overall ranked student test scores as their No. 1 choice when asked which of five options they thought was the best measure of teacher quality. But when asked what should be the biggest factor in determining teacher pay, 18 percent of the public chose test scores, compared with 30 percent of parents.

Supporters found the numbers encouraging, but not surprising.

"Most parents work for a living in an environment where their pay is directly related to performance," said Rep. Joe Pickens, R-Palatka, chairman of the House Education Council.

Mark Pudlow, spokesman for the state teachers' union, wasn't surprised either.

"Maybe parents want to have their children taught by someone who is both experienced and can get results by the only gauge that you gave them an option on, which is standardized tests," he said. "That doesn't strike me as odd."

A battery of surveys shows teachers have mixed feelings about performance pay, with some showing negative feelings toward systems that factor in test scores. Last year, for example, a teacher survey in Washington state found only 17 percent approved of such a system.

In Hillsborough, a survey of teachers released last fall found 49 percent agreed or strongly agreed that performance pay for individual teachers was a positive change, compared with 28 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

But the same survey, by the National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University, also found that nearly two-thirds of Hillsborough teachers believed performance pay would "destroy the collaborative culture of teaching," while 85 percent said state and local officials should be more concerned about raising base pay. The MAP bonuses in Hillsborough were \$2,100.

In a twist, the Times survey also asked how involved parents should be in evaluating teachers. Few, if any, performance pay systems factor parent evaluations into the mix.

But 91 percent of the public at large, and 95 percent of parents, thought parents should have a say.

The Times survey was administered to 702 registered voters Feb. 6 through Feb. 10 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

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COMMENTS ON THIS ARTICLE

by richard

03/12/08 09:53 AM

i just watched a unicef video on youtube about how we are 18th of 24 nations education systems surveyed and we pay the most into education, its not about the money!

by Enan

03/11/08 02:35 PM

I really like the idea of merit pay. I'm a student who has gone through the public school system and is now in college, and from what I see and experienced "most" teachers rarely care about their students future. I think this will motivate teachers.

by Kristian

03/11/08 06:15 AM

Performance pay makes it solely the teachers responsibility that the children learn, and removes responsibility from parent involvement. "If my kid is dumb it is your fault, so you take the payout!" You cannot blame teachers for inadequate parenting.

by Karen

03/10/08 04:23 PM

With even the best teachers, many students are not able to pass the state test due to a moderate learning disability. Is it fair to not award teachers because they have students with disabilities in their classes that bring down the class scores?

by Dawn

03/10/08 11:54 AM

Not all subjects taught in school have standardized tests to evaluate student performance, and in my experience as a teacher, my colleagues and I were often cut down on their evaluations so the district did not have to pay us what we deserved.

by scott

03/10/08 11:05 AM

I've been teaching for 9 years. Some years my children do very well, sometimes they don't. It depends on the IQ, work ethic, and attitude of the children and parents, not as much on me. It's not fair to pay a teacher with quality students more money.

by Helen

03/10/08 08:05 AM

Did anyone say back-stabbing or cheating on the test? Did anyone address team teaching? Did anyone address students thinking of black teachers as inferiors? yes, especially black students. What about parents/students who don't take any responsibility

by Coral

03/04/08 09:45 PM

I can't believe a nurse would agree with merit pay. Shall we not increase the salary of nurses and justify it by giving merit pay bonuses based on how many of their patients live or how quickly they recover? Better hope you're not a hospice nurse...

by Lisa

03/04/08 07:05 PM

I have worked in catholic and public school. Catholic schools weed out the low test scorers. When \$ is in the equation, these children do suffer. They will be manipulated out of the "excellent" schools. These are people like Thomas Edison.

by tim

03/04/08 06:18 AM

oh, matt, i like that idea. parents have a hand in this thing too, don't they?

by jeanena

03/03/08 10:44 PM

i was browsing 4 articles 4 my grad class and came across this how sad! you people have no idea what hell teachers face everyday. i teach up here in philly. should my pay be based on how much i can up the reading level of an 8th grdr from kind to 8th?

by Vickie

03/03/08 09:32 PM

"The Times survey was administered to 702 registered voters"..note it does NOT say PARENTS of PINELLAS COUNTY STUDENTS.No where on voter registrations does it DONOTE that info,either.In other words,as stated BEFORE,this survey is BOGUS!!

by Dick

03/03/08 08:57 PM

Merit Pay is extremely discriminatory and unfair! Worse yet, the home grown FCAT is not a validated test, unlike the SAT's which are extensively validated. Merit Pay doesn't address the real problems of education, it is only feel good legislation!

by Rhonda

03/03/08 08:50 PM

If you think I'm joking about the illiteracy of some of the administrators, do a little investigating. There are some great ones, but it rankles me to have to answer to someone who couldn't teach tiddly-winks and gets a fat paycheck.

by Rhonda

03/03/08 08:44 PM

MAP=BAD IDEA! I have been a teacher for 30 years--I used to love it and now I can't wait to get out. The superintendent is ridiculous--People who can't write a decent sentence are principals, no discipline,& we're scapegoats to whom no one listens.

by deep throat

03/03/08 08:05 PM

my son mang's a 5/3 in ohio, spk to him, raise not given because entire bank had low cust surveys; people told him we never put a 5 because there is always room to improve. bank says a 4 gets no raise. get it people?

by deep throat

03/03/08 08:03 PM

just a scam to not put money in the system. it's an idea from the business world designed to NOT hand out money due to lots of "outs" so they don't have to pay. & you all fall for it,

by Matt

03/03/08 05:25 PM

I have a better idea. I would consent to a pay for performance salary if parent would consent to a property tax reform. If your kid does not maintain a B average then you must pay more in property taxes because it cost the system more to educate.

by Frustrated

03/03/08 05:11 PM

So it is MY fault that a student has high absenteeism and tardies, never does his homework, and falls asleep in class? It is MY fault that the parents never come for a conference or respond in the agenda or return my calls? Parent report card anyone?

by tim

03/03/08 03:05 PM

nice one vickie! i agree and like the analogy. so kim, are you a teacher? maybe since it seems so easy to do, you should come teach the classes.

by Kim

03/03/08 03:03 PM

I sat down and took the version of the FCAT that was available online. If you have to "teach to the test" to get kids to pass, we have a problem. The english test seemed fairly general knowledge to me.

by Vickie

03/03/08 02:34 PM

GEEE..look at what all THESE parents have to say!As I said in the FIRST post:WHAT parents were POLLED??Not anyone at MY school!Merit pay is NOT fair to teachers or schools.To tie it to that monstocity of a test,Fcat, makes it even more BOGUS!!

by Ken

03/03/08 01:49 PM

If nurses like Ms. Lininter were rewarded solely based on their patients survival rates, then the nurses working on the elective cosmetic surgery wing would receive more merit pay than the nurses working in the emergency trauma wing. Is this fair?

by tim

03/03/08 01:20 PM

don't people realize that teaching is different than working in a business. merit pay makes no sense in the education field. if you are going to use merit, use teacher evaluations done by the principal or administration. teachers need to collaborate.

by john

03/03/08 01:19 PM

sorry but it will be the good ol boy raise. its all who you know.

by Brian

03/03/08 12:34 PM

Teacher pay should most definitely be based on merit.Test scores should be only one measure of that merit.Parent feedback,student feedback and student progress in the following year should also factor in.

by Mindful

03/03/08 12:21 PM

The bonus money will never reach some of those who work the most: those who teach within the juvenile justice system, where these tests are moot, due to the flow of young felons as they file through the programs. Sad, but true.

by Gilbert

03/03/08 11:54 AM

Give the teachers the tools they need: Corporal Punishment, more say on who pass/fail, support their decisions, reduce classroom sizes, fair and impartial inquiries on misconduct allegations. As a parent (I am not a teacher) we must do these first!

by Gilbert

03/03/08 11:45 AM

I know I am in the minority on this one so I will say this. Teacher pay should NOT be tied to kids test scores. For Christ sakes the teachers endure an awful lot navigating the dangers of full classrooms with undisciplined at HOME, smart alack kids.

by Pasco Mom

03/03/08 11:32 AM

I wasn't surveyed. Teaching to test is a terrible distraction from learning. Almost non-existent in the classroom now, is the passionate teacher who engages students to learn for the sake of understanding and instills the love of learning. NCLB=BS

by DP

03/03/08 10:33 AM

"Most parents...where their pay is directly related to performance" You can't fire poor students like bad, performance hindering employees; or what about schools where, for many students, english is a second language?

by Anne

03/03/08 09:36 AM

Those who work in the business world and earn merit pay, earn it because of their own performance, such as sales commission. Teachers can teach the curriculum, but have no control over how the student will do on the test-it's the kids' performance.

by Gibb

03/03/08 09:33 AM

They should create another test for the kids to take before they enter school and if the kids don't perform well enough on it they should be taken away from their parents!

by Ray

03/03/08 09:23 AM

This is nothing more than a Republican Union Busting scheme - divide and conquer giving the perceived top teachers according to the FCAT a bonus and not giving a raise. The Union and Membership should reject unless there is a plan to reward all.

by Melissa

03/03/08 09:23 AM

Today's parents are cop outs as parents, we should give parents stickers for trying to be good parents. Most of today's parents couldn't even do their children's homework!