

“ESEA Reauthorization: Boosting Quality in the Teaching Profession”

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Testimony by

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Boosting Quality in the Teaching Profession through Performance Pay Plans

Thank you Mr. Chairman. My name is Valdine McLean and I have taught for 18 years — in both inner-city and rural schools. I currently teach physics, chemistry, and biology to students in grades 10– 12 at Pershing County High School in Lovelock, Nevada. I am a National Board Certified Teacher and have earned a Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching. Currently I am the President of Pershing County Classroom Teachers Association. I am honored to offer my insights on why and how performance pay can boost quality in the teaching profession.

As member of the virtual Teacher Leaders Network I am part of team of 17 other accomplished teachers from across the nation who authored the recent report, *Paying Teachers for Performance: Designing a System That Students Deserve*. My TeacherSolutions colleagues are also award winners— NBCTs, Milken winners, national, state, and district teachers of the year, and Carnegie Fellows. We wrote this report because all too often accomplished teachers are left out of the debates about our profession and the students and communities we serve. Policymakers hear from administrators, business leaders, researchers, policy analysts, and top-level union officials.

Performance pay is the first of many teaching issues that we hope we can tackle through our collective voices at Teacher Leaders Network and with our TeacherSolutions module. We worked in the Spring of 2006 through the use of technology. We had meetings over Illuminate, (an Internet program in which we could listen and talk with national experts and read the research of performance and merit based plans in which some are in existence around the country and others that are comprehensive ideas.)

Through our work in promoting performance pay for teachers, three critical points surfaced:

- 1. Make sure the base pay is right and competitive;**
- 2. Do not place a cap on participation – so all teachers have a chance to grow and lead; and**
- 3. Involve teachers in designing whatever system you create.**

Our report does not offer a prescriptive formula, but a comprehensive framework that proposes to pay teachers more when they:

1. Help students learn more over time, using credible classroom data;
2. Work in small teams to improve student achievement;
3. Gain relevant knowledge like what is needed to serve growing numbers of second language learners;
4. Teach in high priority schools, subjects, and assignments
5. Demonstrate their expertise – e.g., when they earn National Board Certification; and
6. Serve as mentors, coaches, and teacher educators – and lead much needed after-school and parent education programs.

Our own investigation into performance pay issues has led us to conclude that we need to *measure teacher effectiveness in multiple ways*.

Why? Because there are many influences on student learning, identifying effective teachers requires evaluating their teaching practices, assessing their performance, and examining the different ways they get academic results for their students. Only about 1 in 3 teachers can have a valued-added test score ascribed to them. And many of the tests are not very good (especially in terms of measuring 21st century learning) – and large test companies routinely have to invalidate scores because of technical errors. They do not measure much of what I teach — like when I offer daily laboratory experiences for my students, from coaching them how to extract DNA, to investigating the water quality of a 200 mile stretch of the Humboldt River.

We need to focus rewards on teachers spreading their expertise to others, not creating unhealthy competition among colleagues.

- Because understanding that science is not always easily accessible to my diverse students, I frequently develop cooperative projects with colleagues in art, shop, English, and computer science. Together with my colleagues, I've developed into the teacher I need to be.
- We need to reward teachers who earn National Board Certification. The process helped me learn to be the teacher I need to be, and now I mentor colleagues in my district to help them be successful too in achieving their certification.
- As the first teacher in my school to use computers and technology in the classroom, I discovered a powerful tool to help me reach English language learners and special needs students. I then in turn, gave workshops to my colleagues in the entire school district to pass on my new knowledge and skills to help other educators be effective.

How Performance Pay Plans can Boost the Quality in Teaching

Aspiring teachers rarely go into teaching for the money, however, once hired, they quickly see who does what for how much. There is great disparity in pay. Experience does not equate with quality, and likewise the pay. The talented teacher shouldn't have to wait 25 years to earn a reasonable salary that a talented engineer might earn in the private sector in eight years. If any company stifled its employees in such a fashion, it would go out of business.

Not much skill if any at all is required to have students do bookwork in class, it's like managing cattle. However, it takes a great skill and effort to lead a "pumpkin catapult contest" every fall involving more than half of the student body, as well as parents, businesspeople, and others from throughout the community and the region. This hands-on project nurtures skills in cooperation, teamwork, and friendly competition, as well as providing motivation for seniors to take a challenging science elective instead of a "free period or study hall". A plan that rewards those with skill, **can keep effective people as teachers** in the classroom.

In order to lead and earn more money, teachers are forced to become administrators where their teaching expertise is often not used. Can't we encourage our best to stay in teaching by offering them chances to work with teacher education students, mentor novices, train colleagues while still teaching children part of the time? Our best surgeons perform an operation one day and prepare future doctors the next. Why can't our pay systems do the same for teachers?

Our country needs world class learners with the global skills necessary to take this great nation into the 22nd century. I highly encourage you to read our full report. We do not have all the answers – but we do have "TeacherSolutions" from some of the nation's most accomplished teachers.