



Merit pay for teachers misses the real problem

Here is the real problem and its several inter-related parts:

- Virtually all of Texas' 370,000 schoolteachers are underpaid.
- Forty-one percent are so underpaid that they have to take extra jobs during the school year to meet their families' needs.
- Texas teachers, on average, are making 1.54 percent less than they were in the 2012-13 school year, when inflation is factored in.
- The state of Texas underfunds public education so badly that these teachers, on average, spend \$846 a year on classroom supplies for which they are not reimbursed, according to a recent TSTA survey of members.
- Their pay is so bad — more than \$7,500 below the national average — that 12,000, almost one-third, of new Texas teachers leave the profession by their fifth year.
- Every school child deserves a high-quality, effective teacher, but hundreds of effective teachers are leaving Texas classrooms every year for more financially rewarding professions. And these departing teachers would have become even more effective if they had been paid enough to stay.
- The exodus of teachers is a waste of money. Every teacher lost due to underfunding costs an additional \$20,000 in training and preparation for a successor.

Like everyone else, teachers can't pay the rent or the mortgage or the grocery bill on dedication alone. But singling out a handful of teachers for "merit" pay is not going to solve the problem.

"Merit" pay, as implemented by the Teacher Incentive Allotment, doesn't even measure merit. It measures a teacher's ability to teach to the test and jump through other data-driven hoops.

The best way to keep effective and soon-to-be-even-more effective teachers in the classroom is through differentiated pay that recognizes advanced education degrees and professional development — with a state-funded, across-the-board pay raise for every teacher.

