



Teacher groups leery of performance pay

Web Posted: 10/27/2005 12:00 AM CDT

Gary Scharrer
Express-News Austin Bureau

AUSTIN — Like a star quarterback who gets paid more than one who throws lots of interceptions, great Texas teachers deserve higher pay than mediocre teachers, the House public education committee chairman said Wednesday during a debate on performance pay.

"This is absolutely the right thing to do for teachers. This is something that has to happen," Kent Grusendorf, R-Arlington, said.

Teacher groups generally oppose the idea — at least until their base pay is increased and until they get a better idea of how performance is defined.

"Until we get our salaries up to par, it's way premature to talk about performance pay," Holly Eaton of the Texas Classroom Teachers Association said during the teacher performance-pay discussion sponsored by the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

A recent national teacher pay survey by the American Federation of Teachers showed Texas teachers trailing the national average by \$6,101, Eaton said, adding that some studies put Texas last among the 50 states when both pay and benefits are tallied.

Grusendorf said Texas fares better when cost-of-living adjustments are made for teacher pay.

A beginning public school teacher in Texas makes about \$32,000. Teachers midway through their career earn about \$40,000 while those with more than 25 years can expect to reach the upper \$40,000 range.

Roughly half of all teachers leave the profession before they complete five years, and offering performance pay won't help retain teachers, Eaton said.

"We are losing teachers at alarming rates. It's clear they are leaving because of low salaries," she said.

Teachers would be particularly concerned if student test scores define teacher performance, Eaton said, because doing so would elevate the high-stakes pressure of those tests.

Grusendorf acknowledged it would be unfair to measure performance solely by raw test scores but emphasized that incremental growth in student achievement should be a factor.

"What are we paying teachers for in the first place? It's to educate children," he said. "Those who do a better job should earn more."

San Antonio educator Don Horner said he's willing to consider pay incentives.

"I'm not worried about it. There should be accountability. We agree with that," said Horner, an 18-year teaching veteran at Highlands High School in the North East School District. "I'd like to see the details on how I could make more money."

Horner said his support for performance-based bonus money would hinge on whether the criteria was reasonable.

Nearly 30 of the state's 1,039 school districts have some form of performance pay plan. The San Antonio School District has approved the concept, Associate Superintendent Toni Thompson said, and is working with teachers to develop a plan.

Texas lawmakers considered setting aside money to reward high-performing teachers but the failure of a school finance plan earlier this year scuttled the effort for now.

gscharrer@express-news.net

Online at:

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/metro/stories/MYSA102705.05B.teacherpay.adb0ee1.html>