

Ratings pay for teachers

Written by Judge Greg Mathis
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After years of fighting proposals that would tie teacher salaries directly to student performance, the American Federation of Teachers, the nation's second largest teacher's union, is showing signs of coming around. While the union does not directly support the idea of merit pay, it does now favor ratings pay for teachers, moving closer toward the Obama administration's desire to hold teacher's accountable – rewarding or punishing them financially – for student success.

In short, merit pay pays teachers primarily based on student scores. If students do well, the teacher gets a raise. If the students do poorly, the teacher doesn't get a raise. However, ratings pay considers other factors along with student scores when determining teacher compensation. The teacher union favors this approach and argues that classroom observation by supervisors, portfolios, lesson plan reviews should also be factored into teacher evaluation.

This slight change of heart comes as the Obama administration considers how to doll out funds from The Race to the Top Fund, a \$4.3 billion competitive grant that is being distributed to states to encourage and reward locales for improving and reforming local education. The goal of the U.S. Department of Education is to tie student test scores to the grant awards.

Teachers unions are still concerned that uncontrollable factors – like the home lives of students and lack of parental involvement – interfere with student achievement. They argue that these elements are out of their control and that they should not be held accountable for poor parenting and the like.

At least the unions do now agree that, in some way, their pay should be tied to student performance. After all, what happens in the classroom is, in my opinion, more valuable in creating a successful student than what may happen at home. If a child is motivated in school, they are more likely to complete homework at home, parental involvement at home. After all, many first generation college students may not have received parental guidance at home but went on to become successful students and adults.

The best way to improve schools is to continually monitor and improve teacher performance. When teachers are motivated to ensure a student's success, we will see more students doing well. The union's concession on this point is a strong step toward making sure our student's get the education they deserve.