

Perspectives on Teacher Compensation and Master Teachers

Remarks to the State of Texas Senate Select Committee on Education Reform

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Danny L. Gentry, M.S. Ed

Good morning. On behalf of myself and my fellow professional educators, I would like to thank the committee for inviting me here today to testify. I would especially like to thank you, Madame Chairman, for taking the time to listen to the concerns of Texas teachers and for providing this forum for us to express our concerns and offer our ideas and opinions to this committee.

As a third generation Texan and as an educator with experience both as a teacher and as an administrator, I am deeply committed to seeing to it that the children of Texas lead the nation in academic achievement. Since the mid 1980's, policy makers and educational leaders have been beating the drum of reform and many attempts have been made to raise student achievement. However, despite the many worthy reforms that have been instituted, they have failed to produce more of the one thing that my research and experience has convinced me is the number one predictor of student success: The presence of highly trained and motivated master teachers in the classroom. We need to design a system that ensures that EVERY student has the benefit of having a MASTER TEACHER. Only then, will we see the kinds of gains in student achievement that we desire.

While Texas has many of the best teachers in the nation, it is without question that we are facing a shortage (and a critical shortage in some areas) of highly-trained and motivated professionals wishing to fill the teaching vacancies each year. It seems logical from a public policy standpoint that we would support efforts to produce, keep and attract more of these outstanding teachers. However, a compressed salary schedule that rewards the mediocre and low-performing teacher the same as an excellent teacher, coupled with the lack of career advancement opportunities within teaching, puts teaching at the bottom of the list of professions for many of the best and brightest.

Continuing with the current arbitrary salary schedule is not acceptable and new and better options must be developed to save and strengthen the teaching profession. The solution I am advocating today is the creation of a Master Teacher career path that allows teachers who have completed the requirements, to "go off the salary schedule" and negotiate their compensation packages with their districts, similar to what is done in the private sector. Teachers whose students are making great advances in the classroom deserve to be compensated for their achievement and for their commitment to implementing best practices in the classroom.

Already, these master teachers are toiling away by the thousands in classrooms all over Texas as a labor of love, and at the same time they are being jilted by a system that refuses to recognize their excellence through additional compensation. Policy makers need to produce a workable system to reward these teachers for their excellence and provide an incentive for highly trained and motivated individuals to choose teaching as a career. This will also keep our excellent teachers in the classroom, by not forcing them to seek advancement through administration or taking higher paying jobs in the private sector.

Certainly, as a teacher, I would appreciate an across the board pay raise such as the one currently being proposed, but it ultimately fails to address the real issues. I believe that the by talking to educators and looking at the research, policy makers CAN craft some rules and regulations for districts to create a system that rewards excellent teachers and creates a career pathway leading to Master Teacher status.

I believe that this committee, along with Governor Perry, and leaders at the national level are now looking seriously at reforming the system of teacher compensation. While the "devil may be in the details" of creating the type of system that I am advocating, there are a few worthy models already developed that I encourage the committee to seriously consider: The Milken Foundation's Teacher Advancement Program and Denver's ProComp system are two great examples. Both systems reward teachers for high performance and support and encourage professional growth. Both create a career path for teachers so that they can advance in their profession while staying in the classroom where they are most needed.

The road to creating a system that rewards teachers for excellent achievement and confers upon them a career pathway that leads to Master Teacher status, will be difficult. There are many in the education community who oppose any system that attempts to compensate teachers based on performance. However, creating such a system is essential if we want to ensure that Texas public school students have access to more MASTER TEACHERS who are well-equipped and motivated to raise student achievement and prepare them for the future.

Thank you again for allowing me to be here today and thank you for the work that you do for the students of Texas.

