Cristina Romero

University of Cincinnati

December 2, 2013

Governor John Kasich

Riffe Center, 30th Floor
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215-6117

Dear Governor Kasich:

 In a short time, you and lawmakers in Ohio will make a decision about whether to implement performance pay for public school teachers. This decision would give teachers the chance to earn more money based on mostly their students’ performance on standardized tests, along with teacher observations, professional development, and student and parent evaluations. While I am for teachers getting more money for their profession, I do not think performance pay is the best way to go about giving teachers more money. I believe performance pay ultimately leads to minimal if any positive results for public schools, the teachers, and the students. Performance pay also discredits teachers whose subjects are not tested by standardized tests and does not show the full picture of students’ education and performance.

 By suggesting performance pay for individual teachers rather than providing them with more resources and development opportunities, schools, overall, will not improve because the teachers will not truly be improving, as Donald B. Gratz writes, “Some teachers could certainly do a better job, but they mostly need mentoring, support, supervision, and training in new techniques—plus opportunities to learn, grow, and take on additional responsibilities—just like the rest of the workforce” (Gratz, 2009, p. 76-79). In addition, some results from cities that have attempted merit pay have shown negative results, for example: “After three years attending schools [in New York City] involved in the project, middle school students’ math and English test scores declined by a statistically significant amount compared to students attending similar schools that were not part of the [merit pay] project” (Green, 2011). Another example comes from Nashville, where “offering teachers incentives of up to $15,000 to improve student test scores produced no discernible difference in academic performance” (Anderson, 2010). While performance pay may work in theory, the results are showing that it does not work in schools.

 Though I am against performance pay, I am not against the idea of merit pay as being used as a form of motivation rather than as something based off students’ performance. Some different forms of merit pay that I think would benefit Ohio would be merit pay to encourage teachers to teach at low-performing or high-risk schools, pay to allow teachers to attend or receive more development help and training, and pay to encourage more teachers to work with students with special needs. All these forms of merit pay place the risks (whether they receive merit pay or not) on the teachers rather than on the students (whose performance would determine teachers’ bonuses in the performance pay method). In addition, both the teachers and the students would benefit, as students with higher needs would be receiving more teachers with better development and training.

 Another positive that come from alternatives of merit pay is states showing support for teachers and education in different areas of schooling. By encouraging teachers to work in high-risk areas by providing them with monetary incentives, states are providing more resources to the most in need schools and diversifying the highly wanted teaching locations and schools. In addition to that positive, teachers may be able to use this additional money to buy more resources for their classrooms, attend more professional development, and perhaps to give themselves more financial security in their career.

 As a future early childhood education teacher, though I am not eligible for any type of merit pay, I am still invested in how the state chooses to reward teachers in a way that positively affects their students. I am asking that you take some time to read some of the sources I cited in this paper along with some additional readings that were not cited but are listed in postscript to this letter. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for considering my suggestions.

 Sincerely,

 Cristina Romero

 Early Childhood Education Major

 University of Cincinnati

References

Anderson, N. (2010, September 21). Teacher bonuses not linked to better student performance, study finds. *Washington Post*.

Gratz, D. (2009, November). The problem with performance pay. *Educational Leadership*, *67*(3), 79-79.

Green, E. (2011). *Study: $75M teacher pay initiative did not improve achievement*. Retrieved from http://gothamschools.org/2011/03/07/study-75m-teacher-pay-initiative-did-not-improve-achievement/

Additional Readings

Au, Wayne. “Neither Fair nor Accurate,” Rethinking Schools, 25, n. 2, 2011

Marshall, Kim. “Is Merit Pay the Answer?” *Education Week*, December 16, 2009

Economic Policy Institute, “Problems with the Use of Student Test Scores to Evaluate Teachers,” August, 29, 2010.

About the Letter

 I chose Governor John Kasich because he and other lawmakers are the ones who will be making the decision on performance pay. I chose Governor Kasich specifically because I knew his exact position and was able to find his contact information. I wrote to one person rather than sending to any groups who support performance pay because I felt that was more direct in sending my letter and sharing my thoughts. I know most politicians like to hear from voters and tend to respond to their letters, so I figured I would get some type of response from Governor Kasich or one of his staff members. I kept my letter short for the governor because he most likely gets many letters through out the day and would probably only read the first few pages of my letter anyway. I also left him some recommended reading that is relatively short in case wanted to learn more about the facts behind my argument against performance pay.

 I constructed my arguments by mentioning a few things against performance pay, but by mainly focusing on the strongest argument: studies that have shown the ineffectiveness on of performance pay. I would have liked to go into more detail about each argument piece, but I knew that would make my letter very lengthy and taxing to read, so I kept it to the most direct point. By focusing on my main argument, I was able to include some quotes that supported it without overbearing the letter with words from other people rather than with my own words.

Two of my sources reported on similar studies involving merit pay in two different major cities in the United States. Elizabeth Green’s article discussed New York City and the negative effects of merit pay, while Nick Anderson’s article involved Nashville and the lack of education gains despite merit pay. I felt since both articles had a similar topic but focused on different parts of the country that they showed a general trend in the unsuccessfulness of merit/performance pay that would be important to emphasize to Governor Kasich. I attempted to show him the information without sounding superior in my knowledge and view of performance pay.

I also tried to keep my argument from sounding like I was ridiculing the idea of performance pay, as I did not want to offend the person whose view I am trying to change. I, hopefully, kept my arguments logical and well supported by both my references and my additional sources. I also knew that I could not make an argument and then not provide a solution, so I left my solution for the end to leave the letter on a positive side for both me as the writer and Governor Kasich as the reader.

I finished my letter with the suggestion of other forms of merit pay that I think would be better for public schools in Ohio and, in general, the country. I suggested three alternatives to performance pay that are all viable and applicable to public schools in Ohio. I chose alternatives that were beneficial to students, teachers, and schools and that promoted more advancement in the education. I think I embodied the principles of good education change by encouraging options that will lead to more continual growth in teacher development and training, which should lead to continual growth in students’ performance in both the classroom and on standardized tests. My other options were just as economically feasible for the state in providing extra money for teachers and can help more in need areas of public education in Ohio to receive the teachers they need, both through encouraging teachers to go to those areas and through improving the teachers already in those areas by ways of professional development and training.

I tried to keep this letter as professional as possible, but also with a semblance of personal qualities through my final paragraph. By telling Governor Kasich that I am future teacher who is not even directly affected by his decision, I am able to show him that there are educators in every level and in every area of education that care about all educational changes and try to stay informed on the issues. Though my letter would probably not change Governor Kasich’s mind about performance pay, I would hope that it would at least make him consider the issue very thoroughly before coming to an immediate decision on it.

I found myself leaning towards Dean Fink’s view of educational change while writing this letter. I know that not one thing can change schooling in the U.S., but rather a multitude of changes all working towards a common goal. In order for any of the merit pay alternatives I suggested to work, teachers’ work and lives would change, the culture of the state towards education would have to change, and there would need to be more leadership and meaning in implementing the more positive merit pay options. Hopefully, all of these changes would be positive for everyone involved, but most importantly, would be positive for schools in the state and across the country.

Reference

Fink, Dean. *Good Schools/Real Schools: Why School Reform Doesn’t Last*. NY: Teachers College Press, 2000. Chapter 1, pages 1-10.