

The Community Page

Who's Grading the Teachers?

There's at least one in every school, it seems. You remember them—teachers who've given up on educating, who'd rather not be there, who are counting down the hours until the end of the day and counting down the days until retirement, who pick their favorites and then crush the confidence of any other student in the classroom, or who said or did things entirely inappropriate for an educator to do. And while you most certainly wished you could do something about the situation, it's likely you just endured the semester and moved on. What recourse could you have had? What could you have possibly done?

Unfortunately, the answer is, "not much." The truth is that the process involved in firing a teacher is long and complicated. And, as you've likely seen in the news, it usually results in a wrongful dismissal lawsuit, making it expensive for the school administration. Things only get more complicated if the teacher is tenured.

Teachers are in a powerful position to influence their students. Even sometimes rebellious teenagers will absorb and trust the information given to them by the teachers at the heads of their classrooms. Whether through less-than-passionate teaching, inappropriate example, or teaching biased (politically or otherwise) information, a sub-par teacher is a dangerous character in our schools.

Almost everyone knows who the sub-par teachers are. The students know, the parents know, other teachers know, and even the administration knows. But, because of the bureaucratic barriers, their hands are tied, and no one can or will do anything to



Everyone knows who the bad teachers are but nobody can do anything about them.

change the situation. These sub-par teachers remain at the front of the classroom, and the students suffer for it.

The unfortunate reality in the case of our schools is that too many poor teachers still have jobs despite doing nothing to aid their

students academically or pragmatically. The terrible teachers are still on the payroll receiving YOUR tax money.

At a time when nearly everyone—from politicians to parents—is concerned about our children leaving school without basic skills and knowledge, we can't afford to have foolish teachers who would rather not be in the classroom or who would attempt to jade young students' views. It is essential that we place the best possible candidates—not the most tenured—in front of our children, and that those teachers leave their biases, their gross personal failings and even their job frustrations at home.



PAYING ON MERIT

What, then, is the solution for our educational woes? How can good teachers be fairly compensated and poor teachers find their way to other employment?

While a perfect system may be a ways off, one of the steps toward a perfect system is an idea called "merit pay," though in business it would be called simply a "performance bonus" system. With merit pay, exceptional teachers receive greater income than those whose work is sub-par.

The obvious question about merit pay is, "How do you measure a teacher's performance?" While it's true that students' test scores don't always reflect a teacher's abilities, standardized testing must play a part in evaluating teachers. Math, writing,



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reading comprehension and scientific reasoning are perhaps the most important foundations any student can glean from secondary education. Basing income on these student measures will compel teachers to spend that extra time helping individual students develop those basic skills.

"What about teachers whose subjects aren't tested?" you ask? While the exact details aren't yet determined (clearly, performance reviews and classroom

observation must be factored in as well), Idahoans need to support State Superintendent Tom Luna in determining a workable merit pay solution soon. Until that occurs, some disappointing teachers will continue to be untouchable, while good, passionate teachers will continue to be unrewarded for their efforts.

As the old adage dictates, "When performance is measured, performance improves. When performance is measured and reported, the rate of performance accelerates. When performance is measured, reported and rewarded, performance is optimized."

