

Testimony by Cindy Lewis for the Senate Select
Committee on Education Reform and Public School
Finance

I am honored to have been asked to testify before you today. As the Texas Elementary TOY I represent 290,000 teachers who serve 2.5 M children in their classrooms everyday. Now, while I wasn't able to talk to all 290,000 to get their opinions and hear their concerns, I did visit with as many as I could in the last few weeks so that I could more accurately represent them. After attending the stakeholders meeting in January, hearing the presentations given by Becky Wissink and Dr. Ted Hershberg, participating in the discussion, then reading and researching much more on my own, I am optimistic and encouraged about the potential for a successful incentive pay plan for teachers.

This Committee, led by Senator Shapiro has the opportunity to make a public statement of worth about our profession as educators.

An incentive pay plan could actually:

- * be motivation, encouragement to teachers
- *Recognize and reward teachers who have proof of progress from their students
- *Entice and retain new teachers
- *Lower attrition rates of more experienced teachers who are leaving.
- *be compensation for teachers who daily are waking up earlier, spending more on gas to drive farther to arrive at the higher crime area to serve a lower-income, high minority population of children who often struggle with basic academic skills, inappropriate, and sometimes dangerous social skills and behaviors, ...teachers who know in their hearts, that it is worth the drive across town, worth the extra time and money spent to arrive each day because these children can not only “catch up” to their peers, but can compete successfully. This plan could reward those teachers who choose to work in these schools and want to be there.
- *I'm very encouraged and optimistic about the potential impact that an incentive pay plan could have on our profession, yet it is not without complications...

Several questions came up as I shared with teachers the 3 main options, and we compared different plans from Florida to Denver to Houston.

The following are some of the concerns:

- *Will the incentive plan foster collaboration among teachers or will it breed an unhealthy competitive environment?
- *When will teachers finally have quality professional development of our choosing, and how will the 65% rule support more professional development?
- *How will necessary and vital teachers and staff in special areas such as librarians, counselors, art, music, P.E., technology, and nurses, just to mention a few be compensated since they don't "test" students?
- *Where do special ed. or ELL students and their teachers fit into this plan?
- *After "weak" teachers who unfortunately make inadequate progress after remediation are let go, who will replace them in this age of teacher shortages that we are experiencing?
- *Is this going to mean more summative assessment and less formative assessment?

*If the top 2 reasons for teachers leaving the profession are Pay and highly-stressful working conditions, let's take this opportunity to address both!

Conclusion

*Representative Delisi spoke at a conference last week and urged us to get the 3 R's of education done: Recruiting, Retaining, and Rewarding.

*Texas is ranked 33rd in the nation in teacher pay. I'm sure our cost of living is lower here than in many other states, but 33rd? This is Texas...we're bigger and better than that!

* Instead of the revolving door of least experienced new teachers forced to work there or disenchanting teachers who are quitting or transferring out, let's make the AYP schools so desirable financially to teach in that there's actually a waiting list of highly qualified teachers trying to transfer in to these schools.

*It's really not a question of either/or, I believe it truly can be both/and...a pay raise AND an incentive plan.

*I am excited and optimistic about continued efforts that will be made to reach a consensus for a fair and equitable incentive pay plan, that can be funded by our state, to insure current and future educators that their quality efforts and results are being noticed, applauded, and financially rewarded. I am especially honored to be a part of this historical impact on our future.

