

Education—Pay-for-Performance

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For Denver Teachers, a Pay-for-Performance Plan

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DENVER, Sept. 9 — The school teachers' union in Denver is expected on Friday to approve a plan that for the first time anywhere in the country would link teachers' raises to the performance of the students in their individual classrooms. The proposed two-year pilot program here is part of a growing national trend to give teachers a financial stake in the academic performance of their students.

Other districts reward teachers as a group for the overall improved performance of their schools, and some, including Columbus, Ohio, pay teachers bonuses for student achievement. But if the two-year Denver pilot plan leads to a permanent system, Denver school officials say, traditional criteria for annual raises, like years of service and cost-of-living allowances, would be scrapped for salary increases based solely on classroom results.

"Pay-for-performance based on student outcome is totally unheard of," said Andrea Giunta, president of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association. "No one has ever done it. But we think this is a reasonable program, so we decided, 'Let's test it.'"

The proposed experiment in Denver, a city that, like others, has struggled to improve student achievement, especially among students from poor and minority families, comes as an increasing number of school systems around the country are turning to assessment tests and other standards to determine whether students will be held back a grade or sent to tutoring sessions beyond the regular school day.

In two sections of Brooklyn, two city business groups provide money

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to pay for bonuses for teachers, principals and superintendents if their students' performances on statewide tests improve.

The issue of improved educational results has gained such currency that the leading candidates in next year's Presidential campaign, Vice President Al Gore and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas, have made raised standards and teacher accountability a cornerstone of their campaigns.

But nowhere else in the country has a school district moved so close as Denver's to tying teacher salaries directly to results achieved in the classroom. At the end of the proposed pilot program, school officials here would evaluate the results and recommend criteria on which to base pay increases. The teachers' union would then vote on whether to make the system permanent.

"Merit programs in the past have not worked because they have been based on false premises and they have been evaluated in uneven ways," said Robert F. Chase, president of the National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers' union. "But proposals like the one in Denver are taking merit pay into a different direction, and we're seeing folks around the country who are willing to look at new programs and say, 'Let's take a look at it and see what it means.'"

Jewell Gould, director of research for the American Federation of Teachers, the second-largest teachers' union, said: "Denver is clearly breaking new ground with this system. It's also one of the better proposals I've seen on merit pay."

The test program is expected to be approved by Denver's 4,300 public school teachers, partly because for two years it would supplement current pay schedules for the 450 teachers who participate. Annual salaries in Denver's public schools now range from \$24,000 for first-year teachers to \$56,200 for 41-year veterans.

Teachers in the pilot program can make as much as \$1,500 a year more.

If the plan is approved, school administrators intend to select three groups of five schools — four elementary schools and one middle school — to put the plan into effect. In the second year the school district plans to add a high school to each of the three groups.

Each teacher in the pilot schools would receive \$500 for participating and an additional \$1,000 if, by the end of the academic year, a majority of the teacher's students improved.

Each group of participating

schools would be evaluated for student improvement by a different indicator. One group would measure scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. One would measure tests and classroom work given by the teacher. The third would measure student improvement in classrooms where teachers have sought to increase their teaching skills by taking a development course. Officials conceded that the second and third groups involved a more subjective evaluation than the first.

At the end of the trial period, a panel of two officials from the school system and two from the teachers' union would evaluate the results and recommend achievement criteria for a permanent system on which pay increases would be based, replacing the current system that essentially rewards teachers just for returning each fall.

School district officials said the pilot program would cost about \$3

million, increasing the overall level of raises for the two-year period to about \$8 million. Amy Hudson, a spokeswoman for the school district, said the money would be offset by cuts "outside of the classroom."

Several teachers said voting for a permanent plan based on student improvement would be much harder than approving a two-year test program that has no financial downside.

They also expressed concern over how their students would be evaluated to measure success and how pressures to spur classroom improvement might have adverse effects on them — issues that school district officials conceded would not be known until the permanent system was devised.

Barbara Tisdell, a teacher for 29 years — the last 19 at Newlon Elementary School, where she teaches the fifth grade — said that teachers typically set performance goals for the year anyway and that putting a price tag on them might generate competition among teachers who generally work together to seek common solutions.

"I'm not sure that would be good for morale for teachers," Ms. Tisdell said.

And what if the criteria used to measure improvement do not match a teacher's academic plan?

Mary Ann Garcia-Pettit, who teaches English to Spanish-speaking children in the third and fourth grades at Newlon, said that even the most objective of the three standards in the pilot program, the Iowa tests, which are administered in English, might not be suited to the children she teaches.

"For example, there's a question about crop rotation," Ms. Garcia-Pettit said. "This is an urban school — we don't teach crop rotation."

"I'll go along with pay-for-performance," she said of the pilot program. "You'd be crazy not to. But I'm a little leery of the future. I want it all spelled out. I'd want to know exactly what they're talking about. Right now, I just don't know."

The New York Times

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1999

pet themes — fighting corruption and encouraging computer technology — and Mr. Naidu wowed him. The bank has since committed almost \$3 billion to development projects in the state, more than in any other.

Mr. Naidu gave the same treatment to Bill Gates, flying to New Delhi to meet him in 1997, and then to Seattle to see him last year. He convinced Mr. Gates to locate a Microsoft research center in a new building called Hitech City in Hyderabad. Oracle, I.B.M., G.E. Capital and Toshiba have located there as well.

He also lured a group of top business people, organized by the consulting firm McKinsey & Company, who were looking for a place to build a new \$150 million business school. They had planned to locate in Bombay, but Bal Thackeray, the political boss there, insisted that 10 percent of the students be from Maharashtra state and suggested a site 50 miles outside the city. Mr. Naidu set no conditions and found a spot for the school in Hyderabad itself.

In fact Mr. Naidu's personal courting of C.E.O.'s and his eagerness to cut through the red tape that normally ensnares new businesses in India has helped transform the state's image.

A market research survey of the chief executives of 70 big companies, conducted for Business Today magazine in 1997, found that in just two years' time, Andhra had vaulted to 5th place, from 22d, in a ranking of the 26 states as a desirable place to invest.

But while Mr. Naidu was courting the international heavy hitters, he was also tending his own backyard.

He has pumped more money into education, health and rural development through a vast network of local groups that have bypassed the traditional village councils, of which many are controlled by his political rival, the Congress Party. Mr. Naidu says the local committees have helped involve people at the grassroots in governing themselves, but they have also insured that Mr. Naidu gets credit for the largess.

In the quiet of his office in Hyderabad,

he explained his strategy.

Yes, he said, he is pursuing an economic plan that includes reducing broad subsidies, privatizing the power sector, increasing state revenues, attracting private investment and spending more on primary education. But he must also deal with the reality that voters want government to help them now.

"I have initiated so many things," he said. "They're all going on and will pay off after some time. But people need something today."

On a recent campaign swing, Mr. Naidu boarded a tiny helicopter that darted over the delicate minarets and sprawling slums of Hyderabad and out over vast forests and monsoon-soaked farmland.

As the propeller droned rhythmically, his head sank to his chest and he fell asleep, the toll of grueling campaigning visible. But shortly before the chopper landed in Atmakur, he roused himself and read through the list of things the state had provided the area, the same list he would tick off for the tens of thousands of people waiting for him.

Mr. Naidu is not a particularly handsome man, with his helmet of black hair and patchy salt-and-pepper beard, nor is he an inspiring speaker. But when he bounded out of the helicopter, his presence electrified the crowd.

After the rally, people poured into the streets of Atmakur, where pigs root in mud puddles and young men sell salty snacks from pushcarts. The people had come from villages all around, on foot, by bicycle, in ox-carts, to see and hear the most powerful man in the state.

Most were for him. Virtually all the working people interviewed cited some direct benefit they had re-

A politician with a Web site and a common touch.

ceived from the state as their reason for supporting either the Congress Party or him.

Sheik Ahmed, a 24-year-old mason, is for Mr. Naidu because the state built 40 latrines in his village. Abdul Rahim, 32, recently got an \$1,100 government loan to open his own bicycle repair shop.

And Akhtar Angadi, 21, whose family runs a tea stall, is with Mr. Naidu because when their house was flooded, the state gave them \$12 to replace water-logged food grains. "When the floods came and spoiled the houses, the Naidu government came to the rescue," he said.

But some of the more educated residents said Mr. Naidu is popular not just because he has doled out so much patronage but because he has done a better job at the nuts and bolts of governance.

The people of Atmakur may not realize that he put in place a computerized method of monitoring the quality of roads and identifying faulty contractors, but they do know the roads are in better shape. They may not understand the nuances of the budget, but they notice that there are more teachers in the schools and more doctors in the clinics.

"He's calm," said Garimella S. Sarma, who has practiced medicine here for 40 years. "He's not exciting. He works and he makes others work."