

Victorian teachers get Performance Pay ... or not

By David Knuckey

Since 2007, SAASSO has called for performance pay for our public school teachers. While Australia languishes with a system that rewards teachers for time served, half of the OECD countries have performance pay systems, which reward teaching excellence. A key component of the Education Revolution is the Rudd Government's promise of Performance Pay. The benefits are obvious and many, and include:

- Encourages top calibre candidates into the profession
- Keeps good teachers in the classroom
- Provides incentive for teachers to continue to develop their skills and knowledge over their career.

The Victorian State Government recently announced that in 2010 it will trial performance pay in some of its public schools...unfortunately, it will trial the wrong model.

Essentially, there are three types of performance pay models:

- Knowledge & Skill Based: where pay increases for every teacher are based on demonstrated improvements in their teaching practices, subject knowledge and skills.
- Certification Based: as with other professions, where certification is developed by an external professional body.
- Merit Based: where bonus payments are directly linked to student performance.

The Victorian Trials

Victoria is actually trialling two programs: both merit based with bonus payments.

Trial 1 is called Teacher Rewards and will be trialled in 25 schools. It will pay the top 30% of teachers a bonus of up to \$7,000. The school's leadership team will decide which teachers get the bonus and one

measure they will use in making their determination is student NAPLAN scores. Other criteria may include:

- State / school-based test results
- Classroom performance
- Community engagement
- Professional development

Trial 2 is called School Rewards and will be trialled in 50 schools. This will pay a bonus to the top 20% of schools demonstrating the greatest improvements. The bonus will amount to 7.5% of total teacher salaries at the school.

Funding for the trials is coming from the Rudd Government; which is puzzling given that:

And yet, Victoria now has the model nobody recommended, based in part on student test scores, which everyone opposes.

- The 2007 ACER Report was declarative that evidence showed a knowledge & skill model is more likely to lead to improved student learning.
- In the Rudd Government's Education Revolution manifest, specific reference was made to the Business Council of Australia's suggested model, which is a combination of a knowledge & skill model and a certification model.
- Education Minister Julia Gillard has espoused a preference for a national certification model.
- SAASSO and the national parent body ACSSO have declared a preference for knowledge & skill and certification models.
- The union opposes merit based bonuses.
- The only aspect education stakeholders have really agreed on is that the model should not be heavily based on student tests.

There is valid argument that student test scores are not a true reflection of a teacher's worth, but merely an arbitrary snapshot influenced by countless factors over which the teacher has no control. However, this concern is perhaps secondary to the damage a competition model may do to a profession that is absolutely dependent on collegiate cooperation.

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Teachers should be accountable for their performance and rewarded appropriately; rewarded for their knowledge, skill, and dedication - The argument against the current pay system is that it only rewards teachers for time served and therefore encourages time-serving. To reward for test results will encourage test-teachers - rather, we need to engender and encourage a life-long commitment to improvement and excellence in our teachers. ■