

## Australia risks repeating US mistakes on teacher bonus pay, expert says

December 3 2012, by Sunanda Creagh

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Student scores do not necessarily reflect teacher performance, Professor Berliner said. Credit: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/masseoe>

Bonus payments for teachers based partly on student results put Australia at risk of following the US in encouraging educators to "game the system", a US education expert has said.

[The Australian government has introduced a new teacher assessment model](#) under which teachers undergo annual performance reviews. Those who do well can apply for certification as a Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher. If they achieve certification, they will be eligible for a reward payment of \$7500 or \$10,000, a spokeswoman for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations said.

Teacher performance will be based on lesson observations, student results, parental feedback, and contribution to the school community, a departmental [fact sheet](#) said.

The government said the system is designed to reward good teachers but unions and some educators have decried it as unfair to include test results as a measure of teacher performance.

In his keynote address at the [2012 joint International Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education and the Asia Pacific Educational Research Association](#), Professor David C. Berliner, Regents' Professor of Education Emeritus at Arizona State University, warned against using student test scores to measure good teaching.

"Your Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, is on board with other GERM (global education reform movement) advocates in wanting achievement test scores to be a part of teacher evaluations. And as I understand it, she will use those scores to provide bonuses to 'high performers' beginning in 2014," he said.

"While the weight given to the test scores in the evaluations is presently low, I predict that the importance of the test scores in determining a 'high performer' will go up in the next few years, crowding out the other ways she hopes to measure effectiveness. I also predict that there will be increased gaming of the evaluation system by teachers and administrators, as now occurs in the USA."

Professor Berliner gave the example of a study of Houston teachers that showed how teachers quickly learned to seek mid-level students or well-behaved middle class low achieving children, "because they are the 'money kids'."

"They are the ones that are likely to gain the most and get you a bonus. To be avoided like the plague, say these teachers, are English language learners and gifted students because they don't show growth on the tests, and thus you could get fired or receive no bonus if you teach those kinds of students."

The system also allowed principals to punish disliked teachers by ensuring that they get the students expected to show the least growth on [test scores](#).

Professor Berliner decried what he described as "misplaced worship of numbers as seen in the Western countries that try to quantify teacher effects on students."

Because test results can be influenced by so many factors, some teachers occasionally have a 'bad year' of results followed by a 'good year', even when their teaching methods or work ethic has not changed.

"The implications of these results for Gillard's scheme are clear. The likelihood of a high performer really being one a year later is not as sure a bet as she thinks," said Professor Berliner.

David Zyngier, senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, echoed Professor Berliner's sentiments.

"There is no robust evidence anywhere in the world that suggests that performance pay has increased teacher performance or enhanced student achievement. It only serves to act as a divisive instrument, a very blunt

instrument in the staff room," he said.

"It's a way of shifting the blame downwards. Instead of resourcing our schools properly and equitably, let's blame those people – teachers – who can least impact on disadvantage themselves."

Underperforming teachers should be treated the same way as an underperforming worker in any profession, by "giving them the tools to improve their work over a designated period of time" with consequences for those who fail to improve, he said.

"The whole notion of performance pay is part of this neo-liberal package, to try and control what our teachers are doing based on the assumption we cannot trust them to be left alone to do what they are well educated to do."

Professor Barry McGaw, Vice-Chancellor's Fellow, Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne said nationwide tests such as the NAPLAN were useful but not as a method of assessing [teacher performance](#).

"It makes sense for schools but not for individual [teachers](#)," he said.

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Australia risks repeating US mistakes on teacher bonus pay, expert says (2012, December 3) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-12-australia-teacher-bonus-expert.html>

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