



Bernstetter on Education Reform

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By: Timothy B. Lee

We've got a [new article](#) up by Steve Bernstetter about a promising bill by two Saint Louis-area Democrats to implement some common-sense education reform ideas:

The proposal would offer incentives for teachers to specialize in the most needed areas, particularly science, math, special education, and English as a Second Language. It would also offer bonuses to teachers for student performance. By the same token, those teachers that do not meet performance standards would receive professional development training; those failing more than once would be fired. Setting benchmarks that reflect a teacher's performance and are not tied solely to the performance of each individual student is the key to making this system of compensation work. Such a rubric would reflect the unfortunate reality that some students simply don't want to learn, and avoid blaming the teachers for those student's failures. This will create a pay structure that acknowledges the reality faced by teachers in the public system; a structure that encourages innovation and emphasizes performance.

The plan also calls for state-funded pre-kindergarten education for all children between the ages of three and five, as well as tax credits to private donors who fund after-school enrichment programs. Both of these ideas are good on the surface, but the devil is in the details. A robust pre-school market already exists, and any attempt to require such additional schooling should take advantage of that market. It would be highly inefficient to build separate infrastructure for a network of new, state-funded, state-administered preschools. Rather, a practical approach would be to give every child a voucher to attend the existing preschool of their parents' choosing. This method would place responsibility for kids'

educations squarely on the shoulders of parents, getting them involved in the education process early and hopefully keeping them involved throughout. If necessary, minimum performance standards could insure that preschools are optimally preparing student to enter kindergarten in the public system.

About the Author



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