

# Grading teacher bonuses

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## **A flawed program**

As Ericka Mellon's front-page story on teachers' bonuses accurately noted, "union leaders continue to criticize the incentive system for relying too heavily on student test scores." (Please see "Bonuses Reach Record at HISD/ Incentive pay is given generally high marks from teachers it goes to, but union leaders say it's too dependent on student test scores," Thursday.)

Over the past two years, the HISD central office staff has worked diligently designing a series of technical modifications that address many of the ongoing concerns that teachers have expressed about the district's ASPIRE incentive bonus program. While many of those program modifications have been significant, they can never compensate for the fundamentally flawed nature of HISD's pay-for-performance program.

The superintendent and the school board want a system based strictly on a quantitative formula. There is simply no way that such a limited model can ever correctly identify and fairly reward the daily contributions that all teachers on a campus make to ensure the academic growth of their students.

Even on a mathematical level, ASPIRE is filled with inequities. HISD officials admit that teachers in the district's third-quartile rankings at most schools have made tremendous measureable progress with their students; however, as "bottom half" instructors, they are excluded from eligibility for the vast majority of the bonus money.

Any program whose end-goal is to divide the faculty on a campus into a roster of winners and losers engenders divisiveness and discourages the efforts of too many hard-working professionals. And that is simply unhealthy for a school's working climate.

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