

# StateImpact

## Gaming the Merit Pay System

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Teacher [merit pay](#) systems need less objectivity and more accountability if they are to work, argues an economist at the libertarian-leaning [Cato Institute](#).

Rating and paying teachers based on student test scores is unlikely to improve teachers, [writes Arnold Kling](#). It is easier to “game” the system if it is based on a simple formula, Kling wrote.

A new [Florida law](#) requires school districts to evaluate teachers and pay educators based on their performance. Half a teacher’s evaluation hinges on student [Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test](#) scores.

“People closest to the teacher, including peers, principals, and parents, have more information about teacher quality than what can be obtained by remote administrators relying on test scores,” Kling writes.

He proposes a three-point alternative:

- 1. Teacher compensation should be determined by their supervisors, the principals. An important factor should be customer satisfaction, as measured by parent evaluations.*
- 2. “Customer satisfaction” should not be purchased by lenient grading. Accordingly, third-party evaluation of students would check the teacher’s own evaluations. That is, third parties should create and grade at least some tests. However, those tests should be tailored to the teacher’s curriculum and course objectives, rather than the other way around.*
- 3. Parent satisfaction should be measured by their decisions regarding teachers. The ultimate sign that parents value a teacher is when parents try to have their children placed with that teacher. Conversely, when parents seek to avoid a teacher, it indicates customer dissatisfaction.*

What’s your reaction? Do you think current merit pay plans will work? Is Kling’s idea any better.