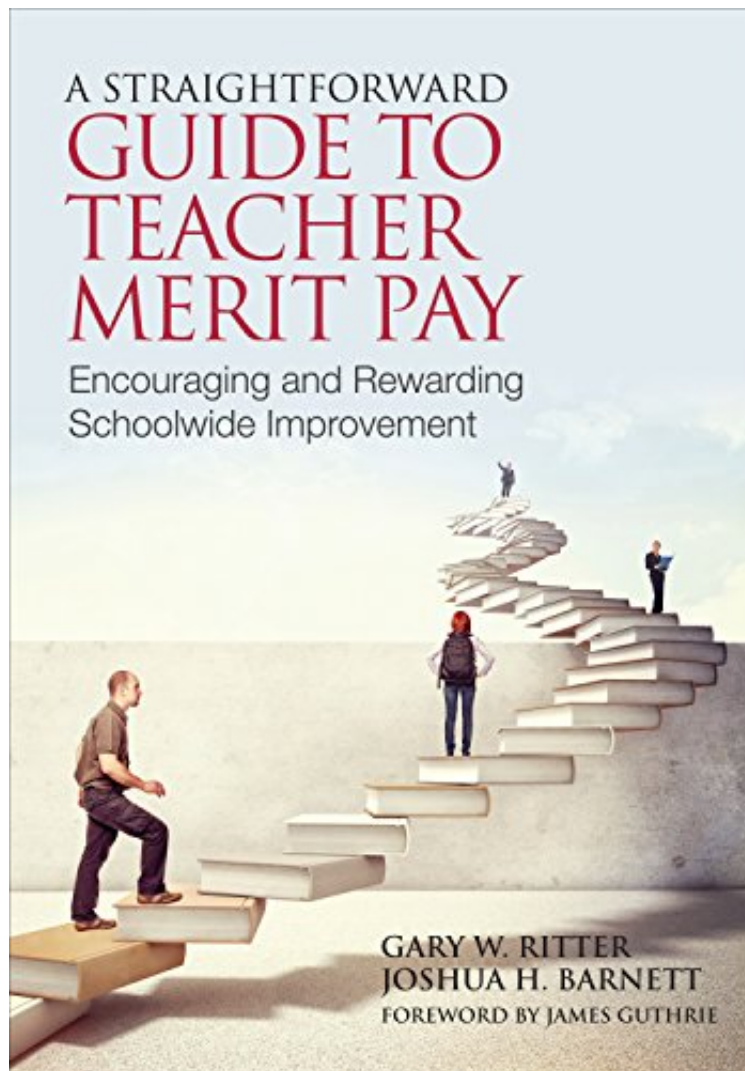


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## A Straightforward Guide to Teacher Merit Pay: Encouraging and Rewarding Schoolwide Improvement

Gary Ritter, Joshua H. Barnett  
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**Gary Ritter, Joshua H. Barnett : A Straightforward Guide to Teacher Merit Pay: Encouraging and Rewarding Schoolwide Improvement** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Straightforward Guide to Teacher Merit Pay: Encouraging and Rewarding Schoolwide Improvement:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Aimed at supervisorsBy Connie (She who hikes with dogs)This quick guide is very straightforward and is aimed to educate district superintendents and principals on how to best implement merit pay for teachers school wide. Authors Gary Ritter and Joshua Barnett have done their homework by citing their research in almost every paragraph. While I am not convinced that teachers should be paid "merit pay,"

there are a few good defenses where merit pay is a good thing. It's not just about teaching motivated students, though. It's also about adhering to school policies, having good content knowledge, being able to teach, interacting with others professionally and having additional responsibilities. The authors have "report cards" that break down the merit pay more specifically. The drawback to merit pay is simply that it requires more in-class supervision. Superintendents and principals will now be having to watch their teachers teach and then score them. This would take some time and should not be based on visits once every quarter. Another question is how will merit pay be funded? Why not just give everyone a raise? The authors provide good examples and give supervisors something to think about. The writing is very dry but at least the chapters are short and fact-filled. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Wrong. By Theoden Humphrey

There are a number of problems with this book. The worst is: it's wrong. I don't say that because I am a public school teacher who opposes merit pay (though that is true), I say it because the first sentence of the foreword is "Gary Ritter and Josh Barnett have written a timely and practical book." Neither of these descriptors is true. Of course, this comment comes from a different person, not the authors; it would be absurd to judge their work using what someone else thinks it is as the definitive measure. I'll just let that sentence simmer for a minute. Look: the problem with the book is straightforward, and readily apparent from where the authors themselves begin. This book is too early. It is an instruction manual for an unproven and questionable solution, and it treats an ongoing debate as settled enough to move in the direction the authors want to believe is forward. The stated intention of the book is to offer guidance for school leaders who wish to create a merit pay program in their school or district, but the Preface from the authors points out that "the question of teacher compensation may be the most controversial in the already heated world of education reform." The debate is heated because, as the authors themselves go on to show, there is no definitive evidence that merit pay accomplishes its primary goal of improving education either for teachers or students. Now, that should mean that the authors, as experts in education reform, should point out that until the data supports the claim, the argument is specious; merit pay seems like a reasonable way to solve the apparent problems in education, because the system works in other industries that use it; but by that standard, I should be able to teach by giving my students Milkbones when they do well and a swat with a newspaper when they do poorly, as that is how I trained my dog. (Actually, that may not be a terrible system . . .) The devil, as the authors point out several times, is in the details: just because it works in some other industry doesn't mean it works in education. Merit pay may influence car salesmen to work harder and sell more cars, but car buyers come in motivated, and are gone within hours, having accomplished a single, clearly-defined task; they generally have copious background knowledge and are in search of a single, definite, physical object, which the salesman possesses and for which the customers trade money -- and that is the sole purpose of the car salesman, to bring in that revenue and send out the inventory. This is not what educators do. Therefore the argument is not settled, and therefore, merit pay should not yet be the course set for all. But that doesn't sell books, does it? So instead the authors offer this justification: Everybody (President Obama, Bill Gates, the Economic Policy Institute -- all the top experts in the world of education) is talking about merit pay like it will work, so that means people will be bringing merit pay to their local schools, especially since some of those people are currently throwing money at the idea. We will show you how to do it (and advise you how to get the money being thrown). We hope that later evidence will show that merit pay actually works to do good things in education. In that case, I would like to teach my high school language arts classes using "Fifty Shades of Gray." Everyone is talking about the book, and I feel confident that later data will support my decision. The authors do summarize what data there is to support their position, but it is poor at best -- and when they point out, and quite rightly, that one of the problems with bringing in merit pay is overcoming teacher resistance, the lack of good data becomes even more problematic, because even if you have faith that the system will work, you aren't going to convince teachers without evidence, which means you must impose it over their objections. They describe a few studies (eight, some strong and some weak, according to their analysis) that surveyed teachers in merit pay systems and showed that, in most of the studies (five out of eight), positive outcomes outnumbered negative outcomes. For student outcomes, the data shows this, in the authors' own words: "Overall, the evidence base suggests that we should not expect the adoption of merit pay programs (of the types used up to this point) to lead to short-term gains in student achievement." (The systems have not been in place long enough to show long-term gains or losses.) So some teachers have enjoyed getting bonuses, and student outcomes have not changed. Oh, sign me up. I have been somewhat disingenuous in focusing on the above issues of the effect on teacher morale and student outcomes from merit pay; the real reason for merit pay, as the authors point out in several places, is to change the makeup of our teaching corps. They claim that the focus of teacher compensation has been on creating stability, with reliable annual increases, good benefits, and tenure as the perquisites of the profession. They imply that this brings only mediocre people, those who seek stability and comfort, those who wish to hide in an anonymous sinecure, to the profession; they imply that the people who become teachers for these reasons are not risk-takers, not experimenters, not movers and shakers, and therefore not the ideal teachers for America's youth. They claim that the best prospects would be drawn in by merit pay, by the opportunity to gain income based on one's own hard-won success, and the chances of earning more money when one does well. This argument barely deserves the name. Good people are not drawn to professions that offer the possibility of bonuses, based on annual data gains; that draws gamblers, primarily those who think they can game the system and earn

maximum result with minimum effort. Good people are drawn to professions that have reliably high incomes and are granted a certain amount of respect or prestige in our society: doctors and lawyers and investment bankers. If you want to draw those people, you need to double, or triple, the average teacher's salary, and stop talking about how lazy and mediocre and ineffective teachers are. Merit pay is not the answer. Again. Let me also point out that there is no particular reason to think that the "top candidates" as the authors define them, meaning those with the best college credentials, would make the best teachers, simply because they make good doctors and lawyers (Assuming that the good doctors and lawyers are those "top candidates."). There is surely no reason to think that those who are attracted to high bonuses without good base pay would be the best teachers. The real arguments behind this system are presented at the very end of the book: because once merit pay becomes the standard for compensation, it would surely become the means by which teachers would be laid off, rather than the current system of seniority; and in order to pay for the bonuses, current payroll systems would need to be reconfigured. The goal here is to eliminate the stability that teachers now enjoy. To make their salary, and their employment, unreliable. To make teachers nervous and uncomfortable. To make them easier to manipulate and control. Whether or not it makes them better teachers is essentially irrelevant. Let me think I am only grinding my paranoid axe on the whetstone of my self-righteousness, let me quote the authors directly. "In many schools, fewer teachers are being hired, and some teachers are being furloughed. The question is, how are we determining who should be released? In many instances, these releases are based on seniority, which follows a certain rationale. Creating a merit-based-plan . . . where teachers have agreed to the evaluation measures, would seemingly be a much more effective manner of reducing personnel when needed." And in the next paragraph: "Barring the short-term problem with the economy, the costs of a merit pay plan also can be largely absorbed by restructuring the existing payroll plans. That is, consider the bonuses attached to years of experience and additional degrees, which could be reallocated to merit." As for the desire to control teachers, that's here: "Thus, under the current single-salary structure, teacher pay cannot be used to motivate teachers to change their teaching strategies, to collaborate with their peers more, or to work harder. The current single-salary system simply does not allow school leaders to use compensation as a lever to motivate particular behaviors, efforts, or strategies from teachers." "This is not a book intended to improve education. It is a book intended to help those who wish to break the backs of teachers' unions and turn teaching into a profession based on commission. And that, quite frankly, is wrong. So if you are an administrator genuinely curious about the value of merit pay: look elsewhere for better data, more studies, and a how-to text without a ready-made agenda. If you are a teacher and your administrators have this book: run. Or fight. If you are seeking only to destroy the teaching profession as we know it and replace teachers with more malleable, lower-paid workers, here's your step-by-step guide. I hope you reconsider." 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not For Me By Traci zwj;??zwj;zwj; I don't want to diss this book simply because I'm a public school teacher and/or I'm not a supporter of merit pay. I'm truly able to see both sides of issues. I gave the authors a chance to state their ideas and what they feel about merit pay. Merit pay is very controversial so kudos to them for even writing a book about it. The authors explain to the reader what merit pay is, the negatives of it and the pros of it. They did a very good job of doing that. Just not a convincing job, in my opinion. Many people should consider checking this book out from the library: teachers, administrators, politicians, parents, and taxpayers, in general. Why did I write "Not For Me?" I wasn't convinced that merit pay is the way to go. There are simply too many variables that are beyond a teacher's control to base pay on test scores. I won't go into politics here as I'm merely writing a review. I just wasn't convinced.

Reward your best teachers for the great work they do! Is your school system considering teacher merit pay? Now is the time to know the potential pitfalls and learn from the experiences of other districts. Respected experts Ritter and Barnett provide a step-by-step approach to merit pay that draws on best practices from effective, successful programs. Yoursquo;ll find: A user-friendly summary of existing merit pay programs and their strengths and weaknesses Six essential principles for designing a program that supports teacher professional development, schoolwide progress, and student achievement How-torsquo;s and tools for every phase of program development, including collaborating with teachers to create balanced assessment toolsnbsp;

"A Straightforward Guide to Teacher Merit Pay examines the research and history of merit pay that is quite enlightening to those who may not know so much on the topic, as well as by those who think they know about this topic. The practical recommendations are grounded in common sense and experience. Decision makers will be delighted in the way in which the authors present this topic."--Jude A. Huntz, Chancellor (09/19/2012)"A Straightforward Guide to Teacher Merit Pay is your one-stop resource for understanding the history, research, and implementation tools for establishing a merit pay program in your school or district."--James Drexler, Dean of Education (09/19/2012)"Gary Ritter and Joshua Barnett have captured and shared extensive information that provides historical background as it relates to and resulted in the current context of the public schools. A Straightforward Guide to Teacher Merit Pay has helped me process my thinking through four decades in the profession."--Douglas Gordon Hesbol, Educational Consultant and Retired Superintendent (09/19/2012)The education reform initiative referred to as Teacher Merit Pay has unleashed a tsunami of controversy throughout the nation. Even as the issue is hotly debated,

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This guide *A Straightforward Guide to Teacher Merit Pay* by Gary Ritter and Joshua Barnett is a useful resource for undertaking merit pay, preventing pitfalls, and most importantly, offering solid recommendations for creating well-designed implementations.--Gary Stark (12/03/2012)*A Straightforward Guide to Teacher Merit Pay* presents a thoughtfully crafted and research based investigation of how merit pay could work in a school system. For policymakers and practitioners alike, the principles for developing a merit plan in this book should reframe the merit pay debate. Moreover, school leaders will resonate with how skillfully the authors have bridged theory with practice to offer a practical guide to proposing and implementing a merit based pay system. --John C. Pijanowski (12/03/2012)"*A Straightforward Guide to Teacher Merit Pay* presents a thoughtfully crafted and research based investigation of how merit pay could work in a school system. 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