

A tale of two teachers

Two highly qualified teachers at Hillsborough's Clair Mel Elementary, a high-poverty school, had very different experiences with the state's merit pay plan. One received the bonus; one did not.

By Letitia Stein, Times Staff Writer
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JANET CARABALLO

Fifth-grade math and science teacher

Resume: 31 years' experience; master's in learning disabilities; national board certification

Honors: Teacher of the year at Gibsonton (1992) and Kingswood (1995) elementary schools; selected for specialized training through a teaching American history grant and a Florida teachers seminar on Asian religions.

Became a teacher because of: "Fifth grade. I had Mr. Smith at Yates Elementary. I can honestly say it was not because he helped me on any kind of a test."

Reaction to merit pay announcement: "When I checked it out, I didn't share it with anybody because I was too embarrassed. This is one day, one test score. Can you judge yourself on one day?"

On being judged by her students' performance: "This constantly being looked at and told you're not good enough, it's difficult, because I could so easily go to a middle-class school and be lost with all the other teachers."

Caraballo did not receive the merit pay bonus.

DONNA VIOLETTE

Third-grade math, science and social studies teacher

Resume: 34 years' experience; master's in reading; national board certification

Honors: Teacher of the Year at Gibsonton Elementary (1995); Fulbright Scholar to Japan; delegate to Global Learning Summit in Tampa, two terms on Hillsborough's gifted steering committee.

Became a teacher because of: "Mrs. Beveridge, first grade, was an absolutely amazing teacher."

Reaction to merit pay announcement: "I found it embarrassing. My colleagues who are exceptional, exceptional teachers did not get it and that was embarrassing."

On being judged by student performance: "My children on that given day showed enough growth to get it. If the test had been given a week later, or a week earlier, who knows?"

Violette received the merit pay bonus.

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