



Ex-staffer's lesson for Labor

By David Wroe

Canberra

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The Labor Party should be more open to education changes such as performance-based pay for teachers and publishing test scores, an academic and former Labor staffer has urged.

The call by economist Andrew Leigh closely echoes changes pushed by the Howard Government.

In a paper released yesterday, Dr Leigh, a former adviser to senior Labor senator Peter Cook and now a fellow at the Australian National University, argued that teachers should be paid according to their performance, especially those working in the neediest schools.

"It is difficult to think of another profession where the rewards to performance and experience are so low," he wrote.

Failure to reward performance did more damage to students in poor suburbs than rich ones, "whose schools will rarely have difficulty attracting good teachers," he wrote.

Dr Leigh also argued that "Australian Labor should be more open to . . . publishing test score results, promoting healthy competition between schools and finding new ways to attract and keep the best teachers."

Labor education spokeswoman Jenny Macklin said the Labor Party welcomed new ideas but she avoided endorsing or repudiating Dr Leigh's arguments. "We strongly support higher standards of literacy and numeracy and improved reporting to parents," Ms Macklin said.

"I'll be having a good look at what's being put forward."

A spokesman for Education Minister Brendan Nelson said Labor should take heed of Dr Leigh's paper.

"We've been arguing that performance-based pay for teachers should be incorporated into our schooling system so that our best teachers are rewarded appropriately and are retained in our schools," Dr Nelson said. "The federal Labor Party seems unable to bring itself to back teachers through performance-based pay."

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Emerson attacks 'divisive' ALP flaws

[Matthew Franklin](#), national political editor

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A SENIOR federal Labor MP has accused his own party of alienating voters by promoting class and division into its thinking and policy development.

Brisbane MP Craig Emerson (Rankin) has also rejected any Labor push to cut the top marginal tax rate unless high-income earners also lost access to social welfare such as family payments.

Dr Emerson made the comments when launching *Progressive Essays* – a series of essays produced by Labor figures and other thinkers to promote policy debate.

The former frontbencher joined Canberra MP Bob McMullan yesterday to launch three essays and said more would be published regularly as a market for ideas.

Dr Emerson said that before the campaign for last October's federal election, Labor had indulged in "exclusivity – the politics of division".

"We set workers against bosses, small business against big business, 'outsiders' against 'insiders'," Dr Emerson wrote. "We derided 'the big end of town' as if big business plays no valued role in generating Australia's prosperity."

Dr Emerson wrote that Labor did not have to agree with the views of big business nor its representative organisations. But all representative organisations should have a place at Labor's table.

"Introducing class and division into politics has been a fatal flaw in Labor thinking and policy development," he wrote.

Dr Emerson said the approach was changing under new Opposition Leader Kim Beazley, who based his leadership on searching for consensus.

When pressed on the issue at a press conference, Dr Emerson said former Labor leader Mark Latham had a divisive style.

Dr Emerson also accused Labor of failing to present voters with "a fully cogent" view of the

nation's future since it lost office in 1996.

He agreed Mr Beazley had led the party to two election defeats during that period but said he expected Mr Beazley to remedy the problem before the 2007 poll.

He also said he disagreed with a weekend policy suggestion by Labor finance spokesman Lindsay Tanner for cuts to the top tax rate.

"When the national debate occurs about whether we should be cutting the top marginal tax rate or not, how about high-income earners forgo the welfare that this government gives them in terms of family payments and other benefits?" he said.

In another essay, Australian National University economist Andrew Leigh called for changes to the structure of teachers' pay to reward experience and performance.

Dr Leigh wrote that failing to reward performance had a disproportionate effect on disadvantaged children.

"Without incentives for the best teachers to work in the most needy schools, these areas will continue to attract teachers (who) are younger and less experienced," Dr Leigh wrote.

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