

REVIEW OF OPPORTUNITIES IN
TEACHER ASSESSMENT &
TEACHER COMPENSATION SYSTEMS

A PRIMER

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Report on Teacher Assessment and Compensation

INTRODUCTION

There is an active conversation taking place within the education community across the nation concerning alternative pay systems for teachers, innovative teacher evaluation systems, the shortcomings of the existing “single pay scale” that is the standard in the profession and a focus on student achievement as a central measuring stick for teacher performance in our public elementary and secondary schools.

At times it is difficult to work past the hyperbole and the myth, the axioms and the biases to get to the real issues, the real opportunities for productive change and the real impact that fresh ideas can have on a profession like teaching, particularly when the subject is compensation and performance evaluation.

Attracting the best teaching candidates and training, motivating and retaining them is the most important activity of most school and school district administrators.

THE STATUS QUO

One side might argue in favor of the current single scale teacher pay system in use extensively throughout the public school world in the U.S. for the past ninety years, where most increases in pay, beside “cost-of-living” increases are determined by two fixed measures integrated into a single schedule:

1. the number of years of teacher service
2. the level of advanced education and certification attained by a teacher

Supporters of this system would suggest that it is a fair system, that it rewards progress in the profession,¹ that it does not risk alienating teachers, that it does not foster competition among teachers and that performance pay systems respond to an incentive that is not meaningful to most people who choose teaching as a profession: money.

They would go on to argue that evaluation systems focused exclusively on student achievement overweight this one measure of performance, ignoring the many other factors that comprise the student achievement equation, and the role of the teacher in the education of the “whole child.” There would be understandable concern about the methods and actual individuals involved in the evaluation process. Would such innovative evaluation systems discount the hard classroom efforts of teachers working with reluctant students? Would such assessments devolve into “witch hunts” by unknowing supervisors? Concerns of this nature abound.

THE WINDS OF CHANGE

The other side of the argument cites voluminous research published over the last two decades that refutes some of the conventional wisdom about the ability of teachers to effect student achievement, what motivates teachers, what can and cannot be accurately measured and the optimal systems for managing the critical relationship between students and teachers.²

While pay is not a panacea and is not a unilateral tool for improvement, it is a key component for attracting, rewarding and retaining the best performers in many organization.

Numerous studies cite the crucial, central, singular role that good teaching plays in the educational progress of elementary and secondary school students. The quality of the classroom teacher is considered the single most critical factor when contemplating improvement in student achievement in our schools.³ Personnel costs typically represent well more than 50% of the total costs of operating schools and school districts. Attracting the best teaching candidates and training, motivating and retaining them is the most important activity of most school and school district administrators.

Exit interviews of teachers leaving the profession after three to five years – a not uncommon

timeframe for departure – include low pay and the prospects of low pay as a reason for their departure.⁴ Alternative career choices, particularly for college math and science majors, hold the promise of substantially higher remuneration, drawing talented prospective teachers to other fields.⁵ The idea that a high performing teacher with equivalent service time and training can be paid the same as a low performing teacher ruffles the sensibilities of concerned observers from inside and outside the education world. Studies conducted in recent years seem to suggest that there is little correlation between the number of years teachers teach (after an initial period and learning curve of two to five years) and their effectiveness.⁶ Similar studies find little correlation between advanced degree work and classroom effectiveness.⁷

So, these detractors might suggest, why don't we

Teaching is collaborative
and individual
performance pay will be
divisive and foster
competition not teamwork.

pay our teachers commensurate with their performance, like the pay systems pervasive in other sectors of the economy? Why don't we pay more for hard to find teachers (e.g., special education, math, science)? Why don't we at least tie pay increases to performance improvement? Why aren't we holding our teachers accountable for student achievement, after all, that is their responsibility? Some districts have responded to these questions by examining, and in some cases institutionalizing fundamental changes to their teacher evaluation and compensation systems.

While there have been strong success stories reported, not all the experiments are new, not all the experiments have had broad-based support, and not all the experiments have been successful.

Much can be learned from examining these evaluation and compensation reform initiatives as school systems contemplate changes in the way they manage their most precious resource – teachers.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Key learning from recent efforts include:

- ❖ Any changes in teacher compensation and rewards must be supported by parallel adjustments to the teacher evaluation systems
- ❖ Differential pay systems often lead to incremental overall personnel costs for a school district. Such incremental costs must be budgeted (such costs would presumably be accompanied by measurable improvements in school and student performance in a well-designed system)
- ❖ The necessary data capture and data analysis processes and systems must be in place to support any contemplated changes
- ❖ Broad-based support from all constituents and stakeholders is essential for improvements in these human resources areas (e.g., teachers, school administrators, local school board members, citizens, students, families, union membership)
- ❖ Much philanthropic, federal and state financial support awaits the appropriately scaled and designed initiatives
- ❖ While start up funding and pilot funding can be acquired philanthropically and federally, the long term nature of systemic compensation changes will likely require matched, long term revenue sources
- ❖ A collaborative spirit, a focus on the welfare of the students, a belief in the central value of attracting and retaining good teachers, and an open-mindedness about the positive potential for change, all breed confidence in these endeavors
- ❖ Confidence is the key to success in trying to align human resource policies with strategic student performance objectives for schools and school districts

THE STRATEGIC CONNECTION AMONG EVALUATION, COMPENSATION AND MISSION

How do evaluation and pay systems fit within the larger context of high performing organizations and school districts?

Any high performing organization depends considerably on its personnel and requires evaluation and compensation systems that fit strategically not only with the overall objectives of the organization, but quite specifically with the organization's human resource needs and objectives. Schools and school systems are no different. They compete in the marketplace for teachers. They have an increasingly demanding set of stakeholders who are measuring school performance and school costs with increased scrutiny. Cost effective results are being mandated by federal and state regulators and these regulations are being linked to student achievement, which in turn explicitly or implicitly points to teacher performance.

In high performing school districts, teacher evaluation is seen as a tool to help shape and improve a teaching corps, whether newly arrived or many years in service. High performing organizations in many industries acknowledge that people are their most important asset, and as is the case in the Portsmouth schools, personnel costs represent greater than 50% of all educational expenditures/costs. They play the single most crucial role in terms of overall organizational performance. Investments in personnel should include ongoing high value feedback and professional development activities dictated by the needs of the classroom and the stated objectives of the district.

Personnel assessment and feedback processes are commonplace inside and outside the school world. For maximum effectiveness, such systems need to be tightly coupled with the performance objectives of the personnel being evaluated. Systems need to be unbiased, easily understood, sustainable from a data management point of view and linked to the stated goals of the enterprise or school or classroom. Effective evaluation systems form the basis of effective employee improvement programs, insuring that organizations have the right individuals in the right positions. When such systems are functioning, employees are always well calibrated with their

own performance and the perception of their performance within the organization. Such systems operate with a "no surprises" methodology, which facilitates employee promotions, reassignments or employee separations, if ever needed. Well designed and managed employee evaluation systems are imbued with a high degree of trust and seen as an important benefit by enlightened employees and a serious responsibility by enlightened employers, who then constantly provide constructive feedback for improved performance, with clearly stated goals, understandable measurement criteria and an evenly delivered set of evaluative procedures.

If such evaluation systems are in place and understood by all stakeholders, the foundation is in place to link that information to the stated strategic objectives of the organization and to link those to a compensation and overall reward system that encourages and recognizes achievement of those stated objectives. This should be the guiding design principle of any highly effective teacher evaluation and reward system.

While pay is not a panacea and is not a unilateral tool for improvement, it is a key component for attracting, rewarding, and retaining the best performers in any organization. Pay is not the only solution, nor can it be designed in a vacuum. Reforms in this area do have the potential to address some of the perceived inequities in the existing single pay schedule system and foster the recruitment and retention of high performing classroom teachers.

WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING IN TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEMS

Four broad related topics can be included when reviewing the design of teacher evaluation systems:

- Knowledge and skill-based assessments
- Performance or standards-based assessments
- The use of Value Added Testing
- The methods of measuring individual student achievement and progress.

Student achievement is hard to measure and not the only measure of teacher success.

Knowledge and Skill-based Evaluations

This is a departure from treating all advanced degree work as worthy of reward. These systems attempt to measure teacher competency around specific skills, methods and content areas germane to their responsibilities in the classroom. Any efforts in assessing teacher skills must have demonstrated validity, reliability and include teacher input. Additionally, targeted, quality professional development opportunities must be made available once areas for improvement have been identified. The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards has created a rigorous framework for knowledge and skills assessment and a process to certify teachers. The Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching includes four domains and detailed sub-categories underneath each of these. This rubric is used to assess teachers at regular intervals by trained evaluators through classroom visits and reviews of teacher planning, preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities. Versions of the Danielson rubric have been applied to teacher evaluation since its introduction in the mid-1990's.

Standards and Performance-based Evaluation

Standards and performance-based teacher evaluation systems include components of the knowledge-based approach with additional elements. Along with classroom observations used to assess teacher abilities, performance analysis can include parent, peer and student survey results; interviews; student statistics such as attendance and graduation rates; and student achievement measured in a variety of ways. Student achievement captured in the form of standardized test results and the establishment of student learning goals and objectives developed with administrative support or done directly by the teacher are two methods of capturing student performance for the purposes of measuring teacher performance.

Value Added Testing Methods

Through work initiated by Dr. William Sanders at the University of Tennessee in the early 1990's and applied widely within the state of Tennessee, researchers were able to construct models predictive of specific student's academic achievement potential. Results from standardized testing at the beginning and ending of each year allowed researchers to track each student's progress and measure how much academic

growth each student experienced.⁸ This "value added testing" method (VAT) controlled for other factors and presented researchers with a way to capture the contribution of a given student's teacher to that student's academic progress. VAT has since gained popularity and supporters such as the University of Pennsylvania School of Education and Michigan State University. VAT is deemed as an important measure of teacher accountability and is used in conjunction with other methods of gauging teacher performance.

Student Achievement Assessment

Along with Value Added Testing mentioned above, two other methods of measuring student achievement are the direct use of standardized test results and the use of learning objectives.

While certainly not perfect, nor representative of a complete stand-alone solution, standardized tests can play an important role in establishing objective baseline data on individual students, schools, teachers, and districts, they lend themselves to cross-district and state-wide analyses, and they are considered easy to administer and manage.

Learning objectives are established by teachers for each of their students in an individualized process at the beginning of each school year. Sometimes this is done in conjunction with school administrators. This approach is seen as a competency-based approach with a description of what a student will be able to do, the conditions under which the student will be able to perform the task and the specific criteria for evaluation of student performance.⁹

Summary

Innovative districts and states around the nation, supported by governmental agencies and philanthropic organizations, have experimented with and in some cases institutionalized novel approaches to evaluating the work of classroom teachers, linking teacher evaluation with student achievement, closely coupling school-wide and district-wide objectives with teacher accountability and then reflecting some of these changes in the compensation schemes for classroom teachers.

In most of the successful cases, designers have:

- ✓ Developed clear and transparent review procedures and templates
- ✓ Anticipated the need for improved, objective data collection and analysis systems

- ✓ Included the use of a variety of classroom observers from inside and outside the school (e.g., peers, supervisors, master teachers from other schools and other districts)
- ✓ Incorporated a range of factors in assessing teaching performance
- ✓ Factored in a balance between school-wide and individual teacher measurement

WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING IN DIFFERENTIAL TEACHER PAY SYSTEMS

“ Successful compensation changes need to reflect local needs, organizational capacities and realistic financial projections...”¹⁰

The most common teacher compensation system in place today is a “single pay schedule” where pay raises are based almost exclusively on years of service and academic level achieved by classroom teachers. Much research suggests that neither factor, years of teaching (past the first 3 – 5 years), nor academic degrees achieved correlates well with improved performance in the classroom or specific improvements in student achievement.¹¹ This system does not recognize high performing teachers, nor does it penalize low performing teachers. It does not reflect the variance in market value of college graduates in the math and science arena, who can command higher wages in other professions outside of teaching. It does not use pay to reward high performance, nor the willingness to take on more difficult assignments (e.g., special education, challenging schools within a district). It is not a system conducive to retaining high performing teachers, when factors other than performance drive compensation. Pay decisions are made away from the actual classroom performance and decoupled from student achievement results that are central to teaching. In essence, such a system is considered by some to be totally at odds with market forces at play when trying to recruit and retain high performing classroom teachers.

Paralleling the innovations described for teacher evaluation systems, schools and districts are experimenting with and institutionalizing reforms in their teacher

Teachers don't do it for the money, so they are not motivated by the money.

compensation systems. Paying for skills and knowledge, paying for added responsibilities, paying for performance and paying for difficult to staff positions are all in use. Career ladder systems, which represent a fusion of traditional years of service and advanced degree attainment on the one hand, with more focused demonstrations of skill and knowledge acquisition, have seen a revival as another compensation system improvement.

Skills and Knowledge-Based Compensation

When paying for skills and knowledge, specific district objectives must be clearly stated, they must be measurable and demonstrable and related professional development opportunities must be made available. The aforementioned national and state certification systems (e.g., National Board for Professional Teacher Standards) provide skill/knowledge evaluation and certification processes. The Milken Family Foundation Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), launched in 1999, also provides a “turnkey” approach to finding, motivating and rewarding high performing teachers. It offers professional development, evaluation and compensation to encourage and support high performing teachers. It emphasizes both professional development and merit pay.¹² It not only provides the tools to implement the system, it is a source of the incremental compensation funding as well.

Pay for Added Responsibilities and Difficult Assignments

Many school districts acknowledge that certain teachers take on additional assignments, like department chairs, administrative roles, and extracurricular activity supervision and they are paid incrementally for such work. Extending this concept to include the work of master teachers in mentoring and coaching at the school or district level is the idea behind pay for “added responsibilities.” If a district has a difficult to staff school, hard to fill special education, math, science or other classroom teaching posts, paying more to attract and retain such teachers is the concept represented by “difficult assignment pay.”

Pay for Performance, “Merit Pay”

The most controversial area of new teacher compensation is the idea that teachers should be paid based on their performance in the classroom. If their students excel, they should be financially rewarded for that accomplishment. Critical to the success of any such approach are:

- ✓ Clear, quantitative and understandable evaluation methodologies and student achievement measures
- ✓ Individual and school-wide rewards
- ✓ Multiple paths and opportunities for rewards
- ✓ Measure not only student achievement through standardized tests, but also include broader measures of teacher performance through direct observations and formalized procedures
- ✓ Teacher performance measurement that includes
 - Multiple classroom observations within the year conducted by trained master teachers, peers and administrators
 - A well accepted rubric like the Danielson Framework or like tools¹³

Systems that have failed to gain support have been plagued by:

- ✗ Little or no teacher input has been solicited
- ✗ Weak or subjective assessment methods
- ✗ Lack of sufficient and/or sustainable financial support
- ✗ A perceived single-sided effort to implement rather than a fully collaborative initiative
- ✗ Opaque assessment rubrics or lack of broad and balanced approach to assessment¹⁴

Career Ladders

Career ladders are not new, but have received renewed interest in discussions of differential pay.¹⁵ When combined with the encouragement of skills development, the potential for attainment of “teaching mastery” and the inclusion of clear progress measurement, career ladders make exceptional sense in the formulation of improved teacher compensation systems.

According to Susan Rosenholtz and Mark Smylie, “...career ladders can provide formal specification of helping roles...identifying the most effective teachers...charging them with duties to advise, assist, evaluate, and model good teaching for others within the school.”¹⁶

In their examination of the success in Tennessee of a career ladder system used in conjunction with other systemic changes, Thomas Dee and Benjamin Keys summarized the key components of a successful system.

The Career Ladder Evaluation System included multidimensional evaluations and a hierarchy of available professional development. There were well defined stages of career progress, both in terms of direction and hurdles to enter each next stage. Clarity surrounded all performance review and evaluation procedures. Data sources included student questionnaires, principal questionnaires, peer evaluations, teacher portfolios, written testing and classroom observations.¹⁷

In many Career Ladder Systems three to five levels are identified from Probationary/Apprentice status up to Master/Leader teacher status. Clear pathways in and out of each stage and the typical timing for such evaluations are spelled out. One major benefit of such a system and one of the stated objectives of the Milken Family Foundation’s TAP initiative is to keep good teachers in the classrooms of our schools.

The employment of well designed career ladders as an alternative to, or in conjunction with, existing experience-based and educational attainment-based pay scales makes perfect sense, when trying to attract, motivate and retain high performing classroom teachers.

Forms of Compensation Used

A number of compensation methods are employed in these various systems. Researching the case studies of Denver, Cincinnati, Toledo and the structure of the Milken-financed TAP initiative can provide considerable detail. Generally the following elements can be found in differential teacher pay efforts:

- Bonuses (which are “one-time” compensation events)
- Salary increases (permanent pay increases)
- Increased pay for the duration of an “identified” assignment
- Designated professional development and advanced degree remuneration
- Non-financial rewards, such as national programs to expose gifted teachers to research opportunities during summer or sabbatical time¹⁸

CONCLUSION

High quality classroom teachers are central to any high performing school and school district. Human resource policies are critical in attracting, motivating, developing, and retaining high performing employees, including classroom teachers.

Compensation and evaluation systems must be consistent with the strategic objectives of the schools and districts for which they are developed. Additionally, such systems should foster and support high quality classroom teaching. Does a "single pay schedule" best accomplish this? Can more extensive teacher evaluations, opportunities for professional development and differential pay systems improve this? If the success of the handful of innovative teacher evaluation and compensation systems and the numerous human resource studies performed in other industries are indicators, then more should be done in this direction. At a minimum, all school districts should actively examine their current system, its effects, and the potential impact of some or all of these innovations.

Design Elements and Issues for Any Contemplated Changes in Teacher Evaluation and Compensation Systems

Key Success Factors in Other Efforts:

- ✓ Involvement of all constituents
- ✓ A belief in the positive potential for improved human resources from such innovations

Overall System Design Features:

- Transparency and simplicity
- Balance and fairness
- Consistency with strategic objectives
- Direct link to student and school achievement

Support System Design:

- Mechanics and process of evaluation
- Data capture and analysis
- Computer capacity and software capability

Financial Considerations and Identification of Needed Resources:

- Short term planning budget
- Cost of pilot program
- Cost of support system improvements
- Cost of quality evaluation procedures
- Long term cost of fully functioning system in terms of increased personnel costs

Simple Litmus Test for Teacher Compensation Reform:

Meeting the "APPLE" Criteria put forth by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)¹⁹

- A – Administratively feasible
- P – Professionally acceptable
- P – Publicly credible
- L – Legally defensible
- E – Economically affordable

The Most Talked About Teacher Evaluation and Compensation Initiatives in the Nation

- Vaughn Learning Center, Los Angeles, CA
- Denver, CO
- Cincinnati, OH
- Toledo, OH
- State of Minnesota.

Teacher Compensation Resources²⁰

1. Education Commission of the States: www.ecs.org
2. The Consortium for Policy Research in Education: www.cpre.org
3. National Governor's Association: *Rewarding Teacher Quality* www.subnet.nga.org/incentivepay/
4. Denver Public Schools: <http://denverprocomp.org>
5. Minnesota Department of Education, Q Comp Program: http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Teachers_Support/QComp/index.html
6. Arizona Department of Education, Classroom Site Fund: www.ade.az.gov/schoolfinance/FAQS/CSF?CSF.asp
7. U.S. Department of Education, Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) Program: www.ed.gov/programs/teacherincentive/index.html

FOOTNOTES

¹ www.nea.org/home/12661.htm

² Jupp, 2005, 11.

³ Palumbo, 2007, 3.

⁴ Rosenholtz, and Smylie, 1984, 153.

⁵ Rotherham, 2007, 69 – 75; Jupp, 2005, 17.

⁶ Baratz-Snowden, 2007, 3.

⁷ Hassel, 2006, 6.

⁸ Sanders, William L. and June C. Rivers. (November 1996).

⁹ Kaufmann, Jeanne. 2007, 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹ Baratz-Snowden, 3.

¹² Rotherham, 81 – 82.

¹³ Baratz-Snowden, 11 – 17.

¹⁴ Ibid., 11 – 17.

¹⁵ Rosenholtz and Smylie, 1984.

¹⁶ Ibid., 162.

¹⁷ Dee and Keys, 62 – 63.

¹⁸ Rotherham, 85.

¹⁹ Baratz-Snowden, 23.

²⁰ Palumbo, 15.

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