



NEWSBREAK

Volume 3, Number 9

September 2009

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What's New?

CECR Introduces a New Emerging Issues Paper

CECR's new Emerging Issues paper, *Alternative Compensation Terminology: Considerations for Education Stakeholders, Policymakers, and the Media*, examines the way many stakeholders in the education field communicate about alternative compensation programs and the implications these communication practices have on program success.

The paper discusses the following potential effects of using the terms *performance pay* and *merit pay* interchangeably: (1) the terms can start to lose meaning and (2) reform efforts may falter before they even begin as a result of inaccurate descriptions.

The paper puts forth three main ideas for policymakers, education stakeholders, and the media to consider:

- CECR argues for the discontinuation of the term *merit pay*. It is an outdated term that typically refers to teacher pay based on principal evaluations, which have been traditionally rife with problems.
- CECR suggests that alternative compensation programs should be described consistently. Key stakeholders working to implement reforms should develop a communication plan that uses clear and consistent language to describe the title, goals, and design features of the program. A well-constructed plan can ensure the consistent use of terminology and must be widely shared with the public and media.
- CECR recommends that stakeholders develop specific language to describe the performance measure that the program will use. A specific common language helps those who communicate about the program to share a clear message with various audiences, avoiding public speculation about what a program entails.

The paper also provides a framework of things to consider when developing a communication plan to discuss the program. It is available online at http://cecr.ed.gov/guides/EmergingIssuesReport2_8-21-09.pdf.

Hot Off the Press

Teacher-Designed Performance-Pay Programs Offer Smaller Incentives to More Teachers—VUCast (Vanderbilt University's News Network). August 20, 2009.

<http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/news/releases/2009/08/20/teacher-designed-performance-pay-programs-offer-smaller-incentives-to-more-teachers.87113>

A study by the National Center for Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University suggests that when teachers have a hand in designing performance-pay programs, the programs offer smaller awards to a higher proportion of teachers.

Gates Foundation Focuses on Teacher Quality—Associated Press. August 19, 2009.

<http://www.newsday.com/gates-foundation-focuses-on-teacher-quality-1.1378881>

Calling research on teacher effectiveness the “silver bullet for education reform,” the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will spend half a billion dollars over the next five years researching and testing methods for rating teachers and piloting new ways of recruiting, training, assigning, and assessing teachers in a handful of districts across the United States.

Teachers Debate Merit Pay—FOX23.com. August 11, 2009.

<http://www.fox23.com/news/local/story/Teachers-Debate-Merit-Pay/dj4X9kS4yk2hauBmhPeAhg.csp?rss=77>

The Tulsa teachers' union expressed support for a performance-based pay plan for the city's teachers, but not all teachers agree.

Bid to Boost Teacher Incentive Fund Falls Short—*Education Week*. July 30, 2009.

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2009/07/senate_appropriations_panel_ok.html

An amendment proposing an additional \$100 million for the Teacher Incentive Fund failed to pass in the Senate Appropriations Committee. Both Republicans and Democrats voted against the amendment, some expressing concern that an increase would siphon too much money from programs that already support teachers.

Poll Finds School Leaders Cool to Performance Pay (Abstract)—*Education Week*. July 6, 2009.

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/07/06/36poll.h28.html?r=325890967>

A June survey conducted by the American Association of School Administrators reveals no consensus among school leaders that pay-for-performance as a school improvement strategy is workable.

Grantee Spotlight: Harrison School District Two, Recognizing Engagement in the Advancement of Learning

Harrison School District Two (HSD2) is located in the Pike’s Peak region of Colorado. The district currently implements the Recognizing Engagement in the Advancement of Learning (REAL) program. REAL is a performance-based incentive plan that uses a three-pronged approach to compensation reform. First, REAL provides incentives to teachers based on student achievement gains. Second, the program provides opportunities for teacher advancement through professional development that is focused on mathematics and reading or other subjects for which HSD2 schools fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). Finally, the program provides funding for more teachers in high-need and hard-to-staff positions. To implement the program, the district created a new measurement for student achievement, “Real AYP,” that is based on value-added theory—the variable measures student achievement against the expectation that students remain at the same level of achievement throughout the course of a year.

What need is the project trying to address?

A significant number of HSD2 residents are considered low income; 21 percent are below the poverty line, and approximately two thirds of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. HSD2 also has a larger minority population than the surrounding county: 34 percent white, 24 percent African American, 35 percent Hispanic, 5 percent Asian, and 2 percent Native American. Further, at the time of the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) application, HSD2 had been on state academic watch for three years and had not made AYP for five years. The district was on Corrective Action notice by the state department of education.

What is the goal of the project?

The goal of the program is to reform HSD2 educational practices and significantly raise student achievement. HSD2 is committed to sustaining reform by developing organizational leadership, investing in professional development, and focusing on recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and support staff.

How much are the incentives?

Teachers and school administrators earn incentive pay for meeting schoolwide Real AYP goals. When a school meets all three Real AYP goals and/or 90 percent of students make Real AYP, the incentive structure is as follows:

- Full time, licensed staff: \$1,000
- Part time, licensed staff: \$500
- Full time, other staff: \$500
- Part time, other staff: \$250

When a school meets two out of three Real AYP goals and/or 80 percent of students make Real AYP, the incentive structure is as follows:

- Full time, licensed staff: \$500
- Part time, licensed staff: \$250
- Full time, other staff: \$250
- Part time, other staff: \$125

HSD2 also offers the Distinguished Educator or Support Staff Certification Award. The process consists of four stages:

1. Nomination and prior exemplary summative evaluation
2. Submission of the application
3. Classroom or workplace observation by a review committee
4. Review and scoring of packet

Teachers and special service providers who achieve the distinguished educator award receive a \$2,000 bonus each year for three years (May 2009 through 2011). After three years at the distinguished performance level, they receive \$3,000 per year for three years. Support staff members receive \$1,000 per year between May 2009 and 2011, after which they receive \$2,000 per year for three years. Finally, HSD2 provides tuition assistance to teachers for participation in professional development, or for certification in high-need and hard-to-staff positions.

What are recent highlights of the project?

During the first year of the program, HSD2 developed an efficient data system to monitor its incentives, track student progress, and track implementation of the program. HSD2 will fully implement all components of the grant during the second year of the program.

For more information, visit the following sites:

- Harrison School District Two website: <http://www.hsd2.org/departments/human-resources/incentive-programs>
- CECR National Map profile: http://cecr.ed.gov/initiatives/maps/pdfs/CECR_CO_ColoradoSprings.pdf
- CECR TIF Profile: <http://cecr.ed.gov/initiatives/profiles/pdfs/HarrisonSchoolDistrict.pdf>

Contact Us

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The Center for Educator Compensation Reform (CECR) was awarded to Westat—in partnership with Learning Point Associates, Synergy Enterprises Inc., Vanderbilt University, and the University of Wisconsin—by the U.S. Department of Education in October 2006.

The primary purpose of CECR is to support the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees with their implementation efforts through the provision of ongoing technical assistance and the development and dissemination of timely resources. CECR also is charged with raising national awareness of alternative and effective strategies for educator compensation through this newsletter, a Web-based clearinghouse, and other outreach activities. We look forward to an exciting partnership with the TIF grantees as we embark together on blazing a new path for education reform.

This work was originally produced in whole or in part by CECR with funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-06-CO-0110. The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of CECR or the Department of Education, nor does mention or visual representation of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by CECR or the federal government.

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