



Center for
Educator Compensation
Reform

Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

*Guide to Implementation:
Resources for Applied Practice*

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Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

The primary audience for this module is the range of professional educators, school district and other public officials, academic researchers, and concerned citizens engaged in developing and implementing new educator compensation plans. These include teachers and their union or association representatives, principals and their association representatives, central office administrators, superintendents, school board members, public officials, and, in some cases, members of the wider interested community.

Appropriately engaging and systematically communicating with stakeholders is important to the successful design and implementation of a new educator compensation plan. The participation and acceptance of key stakeholder groups is crucial in developing a system that is supported by the larger community and likely to be sustained within the school environment. Ongoing and targeted communication between project leaders and stakeholder groups is critical to ensure programmatic success. Experience in districts' implementing performance-pay systems continues to show that securing teacher buy-in and commitment to a new compensation system is essential to a program's success as well as its long-term sustainability.

For purposes of the following illustrations and explanations, we assume that the alternative compensation plan is being developed and implemented at the district level and is structured around teacher pay. If, in fact, the plan is being designed at a state level or is targeted to school administrators, appropriate alterations in what follows can be made.

No matter how carefully considered or how painstakingly designed and implemented, a new pay plan for teachers, administrators, and other school employees can be controversial and fraught with tension. Change is often difficult and unsettling, especially changes in something as sensitive as employees' salary mechanisms, and is bound to produce questions and concerns. There simply is no way completely to avoid the angst and uncertainty that is attendant to organizational change of this magnitude.

Recognizing this at the start of an anticipated change is an important first step, then; planning to address these concerns from the outset is a most reasonable action. This guidebook module will share strategies that can minimize anxiety and help smooth the way for a successful alternative compensation arrangement.

The steps described here offer a range of strategies for those who are preparing to engage in an alternative compensation effort. Throughout this piece, the suggestions for the step-by-step development of a new teacher compensation arrangement and considerations in the development of a communication plan are based on the experiences of districts and states that have developed and implemented their own.

Step 1: Assemble a Representative Compensation Reform Committee

A first consideration when developing a new teacher compensation system is to assemble a working committee or task force representative of major stakeholders. By forming this committee, a district's plan has a better chance of succeeding by cooperatively engaging school and district leaders from the outset, including teacher union and association representatives.

Much hard work at the beginning of compensation reform efforts involves building a coalition for success. Some districts have made the mistake of attempting to develop and implement new teacher compensation systems without the involvement of teachers or principals. In other words, administrative officials, operating alone, designed the program and then announced it to the teachers who would be affected by it. This approach is nearly guaranteed to doom any compensation plan before it even gets off the ground, as witnessed, for example, by fierce opposition to previous district performance pay proposals in Los Angeles and New York City.¹ Governors, too, have made the mistake of announcing intentions to create statewide performance pay plans in their State of the State addresses without first consulting union leaders, state boards of education, or even their chief state school officers.² When an issue such as employees' pay is being examined, employee representatives may rightly expect to be part of the conversation from the beginning.

To be sure, this approach — involving major stakeholders in the discussion — may at times be somewhat messy and rocky. But it is necessary and sometimes legally required. In states with collective bargaining, salaries (or any change to the salary structure) must be negotiated between the district and local teachers' union or association. Yet even

in jurisdictions in which collective bargaining is not a statutory obligation, involving teachers in the design and implementation of their wage construct may prove to be a productive precursor to teacher “buy-in” to the ultimate plan.

The composition of a compensation reform committee should include a mix of policymakers, administrators, and the practitioners who will be directly affected by the new pay plan. For example, a school district should consider including the district superintendent; other staff from the school district's central office, such as the budget director; representatives of the local teachers' union or association; additional practicing classroom teachers; one or more school principals; a school board member; and other representatives from the community, such as business leaders. A rationale for the inclusion of specific stakeholder groups, as well as considerations regarding committee size, leadership, and purpose, is provided on the following pages.



Developing a new teacher pay plan should be a cooperative undertaking, involving both school district officials and teachers whose salary will be affected by the new plan.

Creating a Representative Compensation Reform Committee — Who Should Be Included?ⁱ

The Superintendent

The presence of a district's chief executive officer sends a message to others on the committee and throughout the district that this issue is of considerable importance. Particularly at the beginning of the process, when the idea of alternative compensation is being tried out and tried on, the superintendent should be at the table.

Teacher Union/Association Representatives

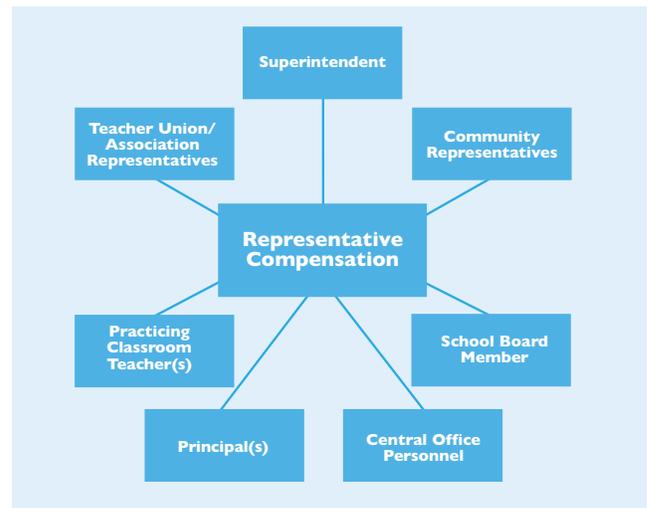
At least in the 37 states that require collective bargaining, salaries are a negotiable issue. (See pages 4 and 5 for more about the specifics of collective bargaining.) Even in locales in which collective bargaining is not legally required, there often is a teachers' union or association with which the district does business, formally or informally. One or more representatives of this organization should be part of the committee.

Additional Teachers

Consideration should be given to having practicing classroom teachers as a part of the committee. Some (small) number of these teachers should either be appointed by the teachers' union or association or agreed upon in a collaborative way by the district and union or association.

Principals

Principals need a clear understanding of the plan's components and operation and some involvement in its design, even if the pay plan is intended to affect only teacher pay. Toward that end, the compensation committee should include at least one school principal.



Other Central Office Personnel

Consideration should be given to other central administration personnel who might be included on the pay committee. If the superintendent intends to have a designee represent him or her at meetings following the initial one(s), that individual should be a member of the committee from the outset. In addition, consideration should be given to other district officials who might have information that would be useful to the development and implementation of the pay plan and, therefore, should be committee members. For example, it might make sense to include the director of human resources, the chief budget officer, the administrator in charge of teacher professional development, and so on. As an alternative to including these individuals on the committee, of course, each can be brought in on an as-needed basis.

School Board Members

Including a member of the governing board on the compensation committee can be helpful. Board members will need to approve any new compensation arrangement, so the more a representative of this body understands the specifics and the discussions that led to the outline of the final plan, the better.

ⁱ If this is a state-level compensation plan, the state-level compensation committee should be structured much as the local one would be: with the state superintendent, one or more local superintendents, representatives of the state National Education Association and/or American Federation of Teachers (there may be both organizations in a state), and a member of the state board of education.

Other Community Representatives

Sometimes it is useful to include representatives of other kinds of organizations on the pay plan committee. Is there an active parents' organization whose support might be helpful? Does the community have a business organization whose representation, or skills, on the committee might be useful to securing wider support for the plan?³

Determining committee membership size and leadership

The size of the committee is a local decision and depends, in part, on local context and circumstances. The committee should be sufficiently large to be appropriately representative of stakeholders and constituents and sufficiently small to allow deliberations to take place. As a rule of thumb,

Examples of Community Representatives Included on a Compensation Reform Committee

- A California district that is designing an alternative pay plan included a representative of an influential local business group that helps with fundraising efforts.
- Douglas County, Colorado, when designing its pay plan in 1994, included a human resources specialist from a local firm who was knowledgeable about compensation options.
- In Chattanooga, one of the business leaders the mayor appointed to help redesign compensation and attract accomplished teachers to the city's lowest performing schools was the executive editor of *The Chattanooga Times Free Press*.³

committees should generally be kept to 10-15 members so that conversations and a free exchange of ideas are possible.

The leadership of the compensation committee is symbolically important. Who then should be, at least nominally, “in charge” of the compensation work? If the pay committee is a joint labor-management undertaking, the committee might have co-chairs: one district representative and one teacher representative. This structure was used to develop the alternative compensation systems in settings such as Denver, Toledo, Minneapolis, Columbus, and Douglas County, Colorado.

Alternatively, the committee might agree on a single chair, but that individual must be able to reflect the multiple views that are likely to emerge in the course of the compensation conversation.

The role of collective bargaining

What should be the range and reach of the compensation committee's authority? Should the committee be authorized to make decisions about the new compensation plan, or just to make recommendations? If recommendations, to whom? Under certain circumstances, the role and authority of the compensation committee may depend on whether a state authorizes collective bargaining.

In states with collective bargaining, salaries are a negotiable item. Pay plans and their structure and amounts are part of the contract developed jointly between the local school board and the teachers' organization that has been elected by teachers to negotiate their wages, hours, and terms and conditions of employment.

If the new pay plan is being designed for inclusion in an upcoming contract, the compensation committee might be authorized to develop a recommended plan and report its recommendations to the labor-management contract bargaining team. Denver's 2004 ProComp system, for example, is

part of a nine-year collectively bargained pay agreement. The school board, of course, must approve the compensation plan. Its members are legally obligated to do so.

What form should teacher acceptance take? If the pay plan is a component of a comprehensive contract, teachers may be asked to vote on it as part of the contract package. This is the way Toledo's and Columbus' plans gained teacher approval, for example. Alternatively, teachers in a vote separate from a full contract can approve a revised pay plan, particularly if the plan is negotiated midway through an existing agreement. Denver and Minneapolis held special votes among teachers for the purpose of endorsing their new pay plans.

It is also possible, however, that the district and union or association will decide not to try to place the new pay program in the contract immediately. They might agree to allow the system to play itself out for a while, to provide opportunities to correct any "bugs" before it is cemented into a binding, long-term agreement. In this case, the district and teachers' organization might agree to place the details of the pay plan in a trust agreement or memorandum of understanding, both of which are labor-management agreements that sit outside the collectively bargained contract. While these arrangements carry the weight of being joint agreements, they also have the possible advantage of being able to be revised much more expeditiously

than can a negotiated contract should the need arise. Under this circumstance, the district and union or association should jointly determine at what point a vote of teachers is advisable.

The role and authority of a compensation committee when there is no formal collective bargaining

Some states (e.g., Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Virginia) discourage collective bargaining. Nevertheless, in some of these states, districts and teacher organizations, by virtue of tradition and past practice, engage in contract-like discussions that result in what effectively are labor-management agreements. Texas law, for example, while not formally approving of collective bargaining, requires "consultation" on many working condition matters between a district and any teachers' organization with more than 500 members.

In a state that does not require (or even discourages) collective bargaining, a compensation committee effectively has the authority allocated to it by the school board. The board could decide to empower the committee to make a decision about a proposed new compensation plan or could decide that the committee report to the superintendent and school board for final disposition of the plan. Teachers may not be legally required to vote to approve a plan, but some kind of vote or survey to gain a "sense of the teachers" is advisable.



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Members of the pay committee need at least a working understanding of the experiences of other districts.

Committee responsibilities

The purpose of the compensation committee and the scope of its authority should be clearly defined at the outset. In some cases, a school district may grant the committee the authority to make decisions about the pay plan. In other cases, the committee's role may be strictly advisory. In either case, the compensation committee should be authorized to assume a number of important responsibilities.

Determining a timeline for the work

At the outset, the compensation committee needs to determine how often meetings will be held, where the committee will meet (e.g., district office, union or association office, neutral location), and the time by which the committee hopes to have completed its work. Determining a deadline for completion of the work will help to keep the work on track.

Understanding pay-for-performance options and experiences

Members of the pay committee need at least a working understanding of the experiences of other districts in establishing and implementing alternative teacher compensation plans, including the kinds of plans they selected, why they selected them, and the challenges to development and implementation. The committee need not conduct original research, but should rely on the increasingly more widely available reports and studies (including resources from CECR to gain the requisite understanding of today's compensation landscape.

Agreeing on what the plan should aim to accomplish

The committee must concentrate on what the district or school hopes to accomplish with a new compensation structure in order to design a new pay plan that meets the district's needs. The elements of the pay plan and the district's goals (e.g., recruiting and retaining teachers in high-need schools and subjects) should be aligned.

Step 2: Plan Carefully

One of the most important elements in designing a new compensation structure is planning. A compensation committee must exhibit and encourage thoughtful and careful planning of the performance incentive program. Rushing headlong into a plan without giving careful thought to necessary developmental efforts (such as what do we want to accomplish? what kinds of data will we need, and how will we acquire the information? which employees will the plan cover?) will jeopardize smooth implementation.

Beginning the conversation

Once a committee is in place, an obvious next step is for it to begin its work. Getting started may be a bit awkward, especially if not all of those at the table know each other. Some sort of “ice breaker” as a way to encourage committee members to participate may facilitate the initial conversation. For example, two districts in California began their alternative compensation deliberations with wide-ranging discussions of the benefits and disadvantages of their districts’ current compensation systems. These initial conversations (which lasted only an hour) provided a useful foundation both to air points of view and to begin to see where perspectives met and where they diverged.

Selecting the type of plan

The type of pay plan that the committee selects should be aligned with the reasons why the school, district or state is interested in changing the way that teachers are paid. Alternative compensation plans typically fall into one of several categories. Some plans focus exclusively on rewards for



A compensation committee must exhibit and encourage thoughtful and careful planning of the performance incentive plan.

elevated student achievement, while others “mix and match” various kinds of teacher pay incentives that are assessed on multiple measures. These may include pay for valuable gains in teachers’ knowledge and skills, pay for hard-to-staff schools or hard-to-staff subject area positions, pay for added professional responsibility, and pay for student learning results.

Additionally, the committee must decide the degree to which an alternative pay plan rewards collections of teachers, such as a school or a grade level at a school, or individual teachers and administrators. Significant initial steps in the deliberations of the teacher compensation committee will be first, to select the type of plan to be implemented and, second, to determine the kinds of indicators that will comprise a payout basis for the plan. The elements of the pay plan should be determined, at least in part, by what it is the district hopes to accomplish with a new compensation structure.

Having productive discussions

As was described at the beginning of this article, crafting a new teacher compensation system is likely to produce some tension-filled conversations. Not everyone on the committee is likely to be in agreement—on the reasons for developing such a plan, on the kind of plan that should be designed, perhaps even on data or fiscal needs. It will be essential for the committee to arrive at agreement on a plan. This requires that committee members respect differing points of view and try, as best they can, to view the work from other committee members' perspectives.

In part, this means accepting that there is no single model, no one right way to structure teacher compensation. Experiences of others that have gone before can provide guidance. But research cannot yet say definitively that one approach (e.g., using only test scores or using multiple measures, or, for

that matter, which measures) produces superior results. Again, selecting the appropriate mix of salary incentives is dependent on determining what is to be accomplished and making a judgment about the best means to accomplish this.

When agreement appears impossible

So what if an impasse is reached (or conversations never even get off the ground)? In instances such as these, it may be useful to bring in an outside, neutral, third-party facilitator to help the conversation move forward. The facilitator, ideally, should be someone who is trusted (or is able to gain the trust) of principal players and is able to get the conversation moving again. It may simply be someone on whom the union and the district can agree who is quite knowledgeable about alternative compensation, or just someone with the skills to listen well, hear what everyone is saying, and help to find common ground.



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Step 3: Consider Important Design Principals of Effective Performance-Pay Plans

The performance-pay plan that ultimately is developed should, to the extent possible, embrace the following six important principles.

1. Performance premiums should be based on reliable criteria

Perhaps no criteria are totally objective, but, insofar as possible, awarding teacher incentive dollars should be as objective as reasonably possible, based on agreed-upon standards, judgments, and measures. One of the chief criticisms of early “merit pay” plans was that rewards were largely determined unilaterally by principals or by individuals in whom teachers had little confidence, leading to allegations of bias and favoritism. Newer plans, such as Denver’s ProComp system, have established more explicit criteria that specify how a plan will reward and recognize teachers:

- who continue to develop and demonstrate added skills and knowledge relevant for their specific discipline;
- who demonstrate proficient and distinguished practice through a professional evaluation;
- whose students meet and exceed expectations for academic growth; and
- who work in positions designated as difficult to fill or teach in schools designated as hard to serve.⁴

2. The plan should be understandable

The plan, and all of its components, should be transparent. That means it should be understandable to all of the individuals who will be affected by it. As one leader of a teacher compensation committee noted, “Our mantra is, ‘no surprises’.”

No one should be surprised about who qualifies for an incentive or what the amount is or the criteria on which it is based. One of the most valuable lessons learned when the Houston Independent School District in Texas initially distributed bonuses under its new performance-pay plan in January 2007 was that the district needed to develop a comprehensive communication plan so that all teachers understood how awards were determined. As the *Houston Chronicle* noted:

Teachers across the district, for example, didn’t understand how a nurse ended up receiving a bigger bonus than a math or science teacher. They didn’t understand how a teacher earned no bonus even though 100 percent of her students passed the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. And they didn’t understand how an admired educator who had been named “Teacher of the Year” received zilch.

The explanation for all those queries is simple, according to the superintendent’s team: the teachers didn’t meet the requirements of the district’s unique formula, which spits out who gets bonuses and who doesn’t. But Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra had to concede that the formula is both complex and imperfect, and he and the school board [need] to tweak it.⁵

3. Rewards should be attainable

Teachers must believe that securing the bonuses, performance premiums, or rewards is possible. They need to understand how to qualify for extra dollars, be assured they will be held harmless in terms of current salary (i.e., no one loses pay as a result of the new salary construct), and know that the possibility of earning additional money is not limited to a small, pre-determined number of teachers or administrators. In Cincinnati, for example, fear that

salaries could decrease if veteran teachers received a low evaluation score is believed to have contributed to the downfall of the district's proposed performance-pay plan in 2002.⁶

In addition, once incentive dollars are awarded, teachers must be assured that those dollars will not be revoked because of a miscalculation on the district's part. Few conditions will erode teachers' faith in a pay system faster than some teachers being asked to return a bonus because the district made a calculation error.

4. Implementation of the new plan must be feasible

Before the district implements a new teacher pay plan, a school system must have or develop the capacity to manage the program. For example, necessary data systems must be in place. Depending on the plan, these might include up-to-date human resources systems and/or student tracking systems that enable the district to match teachers to individual students. In recent years, several states have made critical changes to their own teacher data systems that make it easier for districts to develop performance-pay systems.

5. The pay plan must be affordable

An alternative teacher pay arrangement is unlikely to be cost free. Thus, the compensation committee must ensure that the plan is affordable. Anticipating the long-term fiscal consequences of a new salary arrangement is an essential task, and a number of districts have been forced to abandon performance-pay plans that were too costly.

The committee must consider issues such as: What will be the level of added dollars for which teachers can qualify? How will those levels be determined? Will the money be paid in bonuses (which typically do not become part of the calculation for retirement) or become a permanent part of a teacher's salary?

6. The plan should be sustainable

The teacher pay plan must be able to be sustained. Committing to a new salary structure, only to have to abandon it a year or two later because the program's reach exceeded the district's financial capability can and should be avoided. Thus, the compensation committee must determine if additional dollars, beyond what is currently spent to maintain the salary schedule, are required and, if so, where they will come from.

Additional design considerations that productively might be part of the compensation committee's deliberations are discussed below.^{7, 8, 9}

Key Principles of an Alternative Compensation Plan

1. Awards are based on equitable criteria.
2. The system is clear and transparent.
3. Rewards must be attainable.
4. Implementation must be feasible.
5. Plan must be affordable for the district, both now and into the future.
6. System must be programmatically and fiscally sustainable in the long term.

Step 4: Build Support for the Performance Pay Plan

Once the committee reaches agreement on the purpose of the teacher incentive system and selects the type of pay plan; ensures that rewards are aligned with the educational priorities of the school district, state, or country; reaches agreement on a number of details about the new compensation system, such as who should be included, how big the rewards should be, whether to reward individuals, groups, or both; which indicators will make up the pay plan; and how performance will be measured; the committee is situated to build momentum for the plan by spreading the word.

Among the most important tasks for the compensation committee is developing and implementing communication strategies. Keeping interested parties informed as to the work and its progress is important to ensuring smooth implementation when that time comes. In order to build support and momentum for the performance incentive plan, a number of strategies can be used to keep stakeholders informed.



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Strategies to “spread the word” and build support and momentum for the plan

1. Written materials

A set of clear, concise, but comprehensive written materials should be designed as early as possible. In some instances, it will make sense to tailor written materials for specific audiences—teachers, principals, parents, and community members. At the beginning of the project, it may also be helpful to distribute a letter signed jointly by the superintendent and the union or association president explaining the work about to be undertaken. Thereafter, regular updates are key.

Denver developed a ProComp handbook that is available on-line and distributes a special ProComp newsletter to all district personnel.¹⁰

2. Meetings

School-based meetings are helpful to inform teachers and principals about the compensation work in an in-person format. One strategy that has been used (especially in small districts) is for the superintendent or some other high-level district official and a union or association official to conduct a “road show,” bringing the conversation and a question-and-answer period to schools so that teachers and principals have an opportunity to learn firsthand about the compensation work.

Denver holds “voluntary information” sessions after school in different parts of the city so that teachers can drop in at their convenience and ask any questions they might have about the pay system and how it will affect them personally.¹¹ Denver has also established a hot line that teachers can call and an email address that they can use to submit written questions and requests.¹²

3. Electronic communication

An electronic newsletter or a Web site dedicated to compensation is another way of ensuring wide-spread communication.

Denver, Minneapolis, and Guilford County are examples of districts that have developed extensive Web sites to explain how their alternative teacher pay systems work.¹³ Guilford County posts an electronic newsletter to its Web site each month.¹⁴ And Denver has developed an on-line video about ProComp and an on-line calculator that teachers can use to project their earnings under the ProComp system over the course of their teaching careers.¹⁵

All TIF grantees are strongly encouraged to develop a written communications plan outlining how they intend to communicate details of the new compensation plan to various stakeholders, the methods they will use, who will be responsible for developing and communicating information, and timelines for implementation. A sample communications plan developed by one TIF grantee, the South Carolina Department of Education, is included as a model. This model (please see appendix) provides the goals of the communication plan, specific action steps associated with the plan, as well as methods for evaluating the effectiveness of the plan. We also provide in the appendix an illustrative plan that displays Tennessee's effort to gain media coverage around an important school reform initiative.

Building Support and Momentum

- Develop written materials; tailor the message for different audiences.
- Host meetings to spread the message and to answer questions and address concerns of teachers and others.
- Use electronic communications to ensure widespread communication.

Important lessons learned about effective communication strategies

Whatever form your communication plan takes, some basic rules should be your guide:

1. Choose language carefully

The language used to describe the pay plan and its intent is important. For example, the term “merit pay” has an unfortunate recent history in education. The term itself, rightly or wrongly, can raise red flags with teachers. Avoiding this term just makes sense. In addition to avoiding hot-button terms, it is important that the terms used be explained clearly. For example, if the proposed compensation plan uses a “value-added” calculation of test scores, this term and its application need to be adequately and accurately explained.

2. Give the plan a name and an identity

Many districts have selected their own names for their pay programs. Naming the program provides it with a local identity and, often, a shorthand way of referring to it. Denver's is called ProComp; Minneapolis' is the Alternative Teacher Professional Pay System; Toledo's plan is called TRACS (Toledo Review and Alternative Compensation System); Guilford County's is called Mission Possible; and Columbus' is the Performance Advancement System. Several states have also selected names for their statewide pay programs. Minnesota's program is Q Comp (Quality Compensation for Teachers).

3. Anticipate the critics and skeptics

No matter how well planned, how clearly articulated, how thoughtfully described, any new compensation system will have critics and skeptics. One of the lessons from districts and states that have developed and implemented these systems is to anticipate the questions and criticisms and be ready with a response. Minneapolis made sure a group of well-informed teachers was ready at a moment's notice to answer teachers' questions and respond to

Tips for Effective Communications

- Choose the language carefully and define key terms.
- Develop a name and identity for the compensation plan.
- Anticipate critics and skeptics; work to address their concerns in advance.
- Communicate with the media regularly.

critiques. Douglas County put a vocal teacher critic of the plan on the compensation committee (and eventually won him over).

4. Communicate with the media

Developing a good working relationship with the local media is critical. Teacher pay is bound to generate a newspaper, radio, or TV story, and stakeholders will want the paper or broadcaster to write an accurate portrayal of the work. It may be useful to select a single district spokesperson, or a spokesperson each from the district and the teachers' union or association, to be the point persons for media contact. When the pay project

begins, consider a meeting of district and union or association officials with the newspaper and broadcast media editorial boards and education writer(s) and reporters to explain the intent of the emerging work. Thereafter, periodic news releases (even if they do not result in a news story) can help to keep the press aware and informed.

By engaging the media early and often, districts and states may be able to ward off the type of negative headlines generated in North Carolina in 2005 when the state distributed performance bonuses to teachers in improving (but still very low-performing) schools. Under the state's ABC program, teachers whose students show one year of academic growth on state achievement tests are eligible for \$750 bonuses. If their students exceed the target, they are eligible for \$1,500 bonuses. However, it is possible for schools to meet or exceed growth targets and qualify for performance bonuses while still scoring at very low levels. This was the case in seven North Carolina schools in 2005. Fewer than 60 percent of the students in each of the schools had passed state tests, but their gains had been large enough so that teachers qualified for \$3.2 million in state performance bonuses. Rather than focusing on the achievement gains that had been made, the headlines focused on rewards for low levels of attainment in "failing" schools.¹⁶



Developing a good working relationship with the local media is critical.

Step 5: Develop a Feedback Loop to Make Midcourse Corrections

An essential element in any school reform initiative, and one that must be done by the school system in collaboration with key stakeholders, is continual appraisal of progress in order to make necessary adjustments to practice. Once major stakeholders agree to a compensation plan, a process needs to be put in place to assess regularly the extent to which the plan is being successfully communicated and implemented. Focus groups and Internet-based satisfaction surveys among teachers, and perhaps principals, are relatively easy and inexpensive ways to take the temperature of the new compensation plan.

It may be that periodic mid-course corrections are necessary in the early phases of implementation. Overwhelming demand for mid-course corrections to Florida's statewide performance-pay plan led the state legislature effectively to replace the original program in March 2007 so that it now gives local districts greater flexibility, relies less on state FCAT scores to determine teacher effectiveness, rewards a larger pool of teachers, and increases the maximum size of the bonuses that teachers can earn.¹⁷

A number of modifications to Houston's performance-pay program are also underway, based on lessons learned during the district's first payouts to teachers and principals. Changes include allowing teachers to opt out of the new pay plan; increasing the size of the bonuses that teachers of pre-kindergarten to Grade 2 can earn; basing high school teacher awards on departmental student gains, not just the gains of students in their individual classrooms; and moving to a value-added measurement system that bases teacher awards on more stable, multi-year patterns of student achievement gains.¹⁸

The details of the value-added model may be complex; however, Houston has worked hard to assist schools, teachers, and principals in gaining a deeper understanding of the value-added model. Houston officials believe that schools and the public now have confidence in the fairness of the system. The district developed a series of four levels of value-added training. The district also is working on a credentialing process that will track the levels of training that staff complete, and the district will recognize schools that have a high percentage of staff who have completed all four levels of training.¹⁹

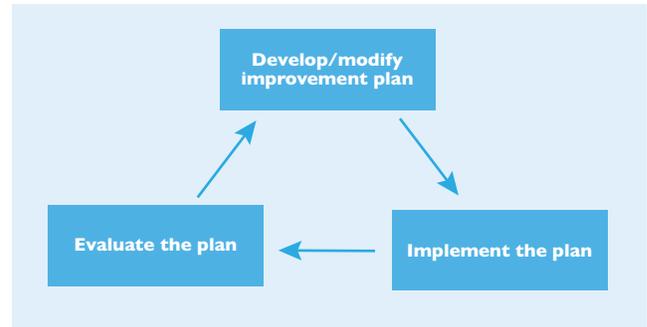


Focus groups and Internet-based satisfaction surveys are relatively easy and inexpensive ways to take the temperature of the new compensation plan.

Step 6: Evaluate the Results of the Performance Pay Plan as well as Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Strategies.

Finally, the compensation committee should make plans early in the plan's implementation to evaluate impact and effects. A neutral third party should conduct the evaluation. Formative evaluation reports that examine the fidelity of program implementation and provide feedback for the purpose of making revisions are most useful for the first one or two of years of the plan's implementation. Summative review to determine the overall impact of the program, including whatever outcome data can be derived, should wait until the plan has been in place at least three or more years.

Once a school system develops an incentive program in collaboration with key stakeholder groups and implements it, it is imperative that they evaluate the full spectrum of programmatic elements to determine the impact of the program on key process and outcome variables. These would include teacher perceptions of the program, influences of the plan on the school culture, ability of the plan to enhance retention and attraction of teachers, and elevations in student performance. The systematic collection, analysis, and utilization of data can serve as a catalyst to propel organizational learning. Education leaders can harness the regular information flow from data to sustain a culture of continuous improvement within their districts and schools. In the case of performance-pay programs, which involve much complexity and many moving parts, it is essential to continually engage in these activities: develop/modify – evaluate – implement.



Conclusion

The ideas and strategies presented here will help establish a strong foundation for engaging teachers and others in the development and implementation of new teacher compensation systems and communicating information about those systems to educators and the public. The ideas are derived largely from the experiences of districts and states that have paved the way. It is important to emphasize here that reconceptualizing the way in which teachers are paid is just one prong of a more comprehensive strategy to improve the quality of teaching to improve levels of student learning. Taken together with other improvement strategies, new forms of teacher compensation have the prospect of providing powerful incentives to attract and retain high-quality teachers and encourage teachers to take on more challenging assignments. The success of performance pay plans will be enhanced to the extent that teachers are involved from the very beginning and the degree to which they are continually communicated with throughout program implementation.

Appendix A:

South Carolina's Community Relations/Communication Plan

The goals of the Community Relations Plan are as follows:

1. Establish a regular and timely communication process between the SCTAP (South Carolina Teacher Advancement Program) office and each participating school.
2. Raise the awareness of SCTAP among educators and non-educators (parents and community members) across the state.
3. Use positive publicity to increase funding.
4. Garner support for the program from statewide stakeholders.
5. Use media outlets effectively to promote SCTAP.

Action Plan:

An effective communication plan includes multiple vehicles and methods for delivering communications. The table below illustrates the type, audience, person responsible, and the timeframe.

Type	Audience	Person Responsible	Timeframe	Goal
Provide monthly newsletters to participating schools	Internal	Administrative Assistant	Monthly	1
Provide quarterly reports to USDE and private foundations	External	Project Director	Quarterly	3,4
Air SCTAP updates on SCETV (South Carolina Educational Television)	Internal and external	Project Director	Annually	2,3,4,5
Present SCTAP at various conferences around the state	External	Project Director/Program Specialist	Monthly	2
Present SCTAP at Rotary Clubs and other non-educational meetings	External	Project Director	Monthly	2
Sponsor SCTAP State Conference	External and internal	ALL SCTAP Staff	Annually	2,3,4
Establish positive relationships with journalists across the state who cover education	External	Program Specialist	Weekly	2,3,4,5
Create pamphlets for local libraries and conferences	External	Administrative Assistant	Annually	2
Provide current and interactive Web site	External and internal	Administrative Assistant	Weekly	1,2,5
Provide training and guidance to principals on media relations	External	Program Specialist	Annually	5
Hold "Legislators in Schools Day" to increase knowledge about SCTAP	External	Program Specialist	Annually	4,5
Train at least one career teacher from each school on calculating payouts	Internal	Project Director	Annually	4
Establish e-mail address (hotline) for questions	Internal and external	Project Director		1,2,4
Hold after-school Q/A meeting at each participating school	Internal		Monthly	1,2
Conduct regional (town hall-type) meetings	External	Project Director	Monthly	2,4
Establish a focus group of stakeholders to expose concerns in the communication plan	External	Project Director	Annually	2,4,5

ⁱⁱ These stakeholders include the governor, superintendent of education, members of the state legislature, Palmetto State Teachers Association, South Carolina Education Association, South Carolina Association of School Administrators, parents, teachers, administrators, etc.

Evaluation:

Listed below are the goals of the SCTAP communication plan and the methods proposed for evaluating attainment of the goals.

1. Establish a regular and timely communication process between the SCTAP office and each participating school.
 - a. Evaluation: Feedback forms will be provided to all school leadership personnel to solicit specific information on whether they perceive the communication is regular and timely. In addition, all SCTAP staff will complete a similar Likert-style survey about each participating school. The survey results will be aggregated for the SCTAP office and disaggregated for each participating school. Results from the surveys will be used to guide changes in communication policy.
2. Raise the awareness of SCTAP among educators and noneducators across the state.
 - a. Evaluation: In partnership with the Anderson Research Group, conduct a baseline (Y1) survey of educators and noneducators across SC via random sampling to rate the awareness of SCTAP. Administer the survey each subsequent year to note if the awareness levels are increasing.
3. Use positive publicity to increase funding.
 - a. Evaluation: Conduct annual budget reviews and survey those involved (or their assistants/aides) with allocating money for SCTAP to determine their motivation.
4. Garner support for the program from statewide stakeholders.
 - a. Evaluation: Sponsor a SCTAP annual conference with a specific list of invitees; administer a Likert-style survey at the conference to gauge the support for the program. Compare the data longitudinally.
5. Use media outlets effectively to promote SCTAP.
 - a. Evaluation: Monitor the news outlets across the state, looking for a) the number of stories/pieces on SCTAP each year and b) the percentage of positive, neutral, or negative stories/pieces. These data will be compared longitudinally.

Annually, the data sources mentioned above will be analyzed, and the community relations plan will be changed accordingly. The Project Director will conduct the data analysis and meet with the team for input on appropriate changes.

For additional information about South Carolina's communication plan, contact:

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Illustrative Performance Pay Media Plan

Adapted from Tennessee's Statewide Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE)

(Reaching out via Print, Radio and Television to launch SCORE initiative and gain momentum)

Friday, February 13

- Distribute media advisory statewide to daily newspapers, Associated Press, TV stations, news/talk radio station and Nashville-area community papers and magazines.
- Follow up with Nashville media outlets, Associated Press and Nashville-based reporters for statewide media.
- Follow up with targeted talk radio to schedule interviews for both the afternoon of the 18th:

Tennessee Radio Network (Can schedule the interview earlier if necessary and request that it not run until the 18th after the announcement. We expect the same for public radio.)

WPLN (Nashville NPR affiliate)

WKNO (Memphis NPR affiliate)

WUOT (Knoxville NPR affiliate)

WUTC (Chattanooga NPR affiliate)

And the morning of the 19th:

“Thinking Out Loud” with Dave Hogan and Carl Swan (WJCW, Tri-cities area)

Hallerin Hilton Hill Show (WNOX, Knoxville)

“The Morning Press” (WGOW, Chattanooga)

Ben Ferguson (WREC, Memphis)

Steve Gill Show (WTN, Nashville)

“It’s Your Turn” with Bill Way (WNWS, Jackson)

- Follow up with education reporters to encourage participation on the February 18 conference call.

Chattanooga Times-Free Press (Chattanooga)

Commercial Appeal (Memphis)

Jackson Sun (Jackson)

Kingsport Times-News (Kingsport)

Leaf Chronicle (Clarksville)

Daily News Journal (Murfreesboro)

The Oak Ridger (Oak Ridge)

Herald-Citizen (Cookeville)

Bristol Herald Courier (Bristol)

The Mid-South Tribune (Memphis)

Advocate-Democrat (Sweetwater)

Paris Post-Intelligencer (Paris)

Shelbyville Times-Gazette (Shelbyville)

The Daily Times (Maryville)

Memphis Business Journal (Memphis)

East Tennessee Business Journal (Knoxville)

The Business Journal of Tri-Cities TN/VA (Johnson City)

Johnson City Press (Johnson City)

- Begin coordinating Op-Ed placement for major daily newspapers

Monday, February 16

- Begin follow-up with out-of-area TV stations, providing satellite coordinates for b-roll and sound bites.
- Begin follow-up with local news outlets to secure event coverage.

Tuesday, February 17

- Continue follow-up.

Wednesday, February 18

- Distribute news release at news conference to attendees.
- Distribute news release statewide through Business Wire.
- Distribute news release to targeted media representatives across the state, including all daily and community newspapers, radio station news and program directors, business magazines, and TV stations.
- Monitor conference call.
- Post news release and event photos on the Web site.
- Distribute news release to partner organizations.
- Post event video on YouTube.

Thursday, February 19

- Morning radio talk show interviews.
 - “Thinking Out Loud” with Dave Hogan and Carl Swan (WJCW, Tri-cities area)
 - Hallerin Hilton Hill Show (WNOX, Knoxville)
 - “The Morning Press” (WGOW, Chattanooga)
 - Ben Ferguson (WREC, Memphis)
 - Steve Gill Show (WTN, Nashville)
 - “It’s Your Turn” with Bill Way (WNWS, Jackson)
- Continue any follow-up on news release; send photographs to interested media outlets.
- Coordinate letter to the editor to newspapers carrying the announcement.

Friday, February 20

- Distribute camera-ready Op-Ed to remaining daily and community newspapers.

End Notes

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- ⁴ Denver Public Schools. Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp). <http://denverprocomp.org/>
- ⁵ Mellon, E. “Teacher bonuses strike a nerve,” *Houston Chronicle*, January 25, 2007.
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- ¹¹ Personal communication with Shirley Scott, Denver Public Schools, February 26, 2007.
- ¹² Denver Public Schools. Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp). <http://denverprocomp.org/>
- ¹³ Denver Public Schools. Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp). <http://denverprocomp.org/>; Minneapolis Public Schools. “Welcome to the Alternative Teacher Professional Pay System (ATPPS).” <http://atpps.mpls.k12.mn.us/> Guilford County Public Schools; “Mission Possible Overview.” http://www.gcsnc.com/mission_possible/background.htm
- ¹⁴ See, for example, Guilford County Schools. *Mission Possible Monthly Newsletter*, September 2007. http://www.gcsnc.com/mission_possible/September%202007%20Newsletter.pdf
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- ¹⁷ Palm Beach Post staff. “New bonus program for teachers signed,” *Palm Beach Post*, March 30, 2007.
- ¹⁸ Radcliffe, J. “Houston tying teacher bonuses to teamwork,” *Houston Chronicle*, August 23, 2007; Radcliffe, J. “Houston teachers could opt out of new incentive pay plan,” *Houston Chronicle*, August 23, 2007; Houston Independent School District. “New HISD teacher-performance-pay ideas a big improvement.” News release, August 23, 2007.
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Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

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