



Center for
Educator Compensation
Reform

Case Summary

Arizona Career Ladder Program



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Introduction

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) and the Arizona legislature have a long history of supporting and implementing alternative compensation programs. The Career Ladder Program, developed in 1984, is one example of the state's commitment to alternative compensation. For purposes of common language, as defined in the Arizona Revised Statutes (ARS) §15-918, a career ladder:

- Establishes a multilevel system of teaching positions
- Provides opportunities to teachers for continued professional advancement
- Requires at least improved or advanced teaching skills, higher level instructional responsibilities, and demonstration of pupil academic success
- Uses a performance-based compensation system (Arizona State Legislature, 2010a)

Case Summary at Glance

- The state's goals for the Career Ladder Program are to improve student achievement; motivate educators to improve skills; attract, recruit, and reward exemplary educators; and promote collegiality.
- A teacher's demonstration of higher levels of student growth, increased teaching skills, increased responsibility, and professional growth drives his/her placement on the career ladder.
- The state allows districts the autonomy to develop a program based on their specific needs so long as their programs meet the requirements specified in the Arizona Revised Statute (ARS) §15-918 and by the State Board of Education.
- Twenty-eight districts in the state participate in the Career Ladder Program.

Through this program, a teacher's performance in the classroom drives his/her compensation. Furthermore, although the participating districts must adhere to the guidelines set forth in state legislation ARS §15-918 and state board guidelines, the districts have the autonomy to develop a program that best suits their individual needs. This case summary provides an overview of how the Arizona Career Ladder Program developed, how it operates, the advantages of the program, and the lessons learned from the program's implementation. In the process of developing this case summary, the author conducted interviews with state and district representatives who are familiar with the Career Ladder Program. Finally, the case summary examines three districts in the state that are implementing the Career Ladder Program. Examining each of these district's local contexts highlights how different districts emphasize and implement state-mandated requirements.

Arizona's Alternative Compensation History

The Career Ladder is not the only alternative compensation effort in Arizona. In addition to the Career Ladder Program, Arizona state educators have explored other alternative compensation opportunities. For example, in 2000, the state approved Proposition 301, which established a five-cent sales tax for education expenses. A small portion of this money funds higher education, but most of the funds go to district-based expenses. According to Arizona Department of Education Program Specialist Beth Driscoll, 40 percent of the money collected by the state goes to performance-based compensation for teachers (personal communication, August 10, 2010). An additional 20 percent goes to fund teacher salaries and the remaining 40 percent to various state-approved expenditures.

Another alternative compensation reform effort in Arizona began in June 2007, in Amphitheater Unified School District. The district received a Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant to implement Project EXCELL! This program provides additional compensation to teachers who (1) increase student achievement, based on standardized test scores in core content areas; (2) take on leadership positions; and (3) participate in professional development activities. Teachers who reach all objectives for each of these components can receive up to \$10,000 in additional compensation. In 2010, three additional Arizona sites received funding through TIF 3. These sites include Arizona State University, Maricopa County-Rewarding Excellence in Instruction and Leadership, and Safford Unified School District.

Finally, the recent Federal Race to the Top competition in 2010 provides another example of Arizona's commitment to implementing changes in education. In its application, the state articulated a plan to link teacher evaluation data to teacher compensation and extended the link between evaluation and compensation to superintendents. House Bill 2521, approved in 2010 and included in the state's Race to the Top application, outlined a new requirement for superintendents that noted a district must tie 20 percent of a superintendent's compensation to his or her performance. Of that 20 percent, district-wide student achievement accounts for 25 percent (Arizona House of Representatives, 2010). While the state did not receive Race to the Top funding, House Bill 2521 remains in effect.

Development of Arizona's Career Ladder Program

The Career Ladder Program, one of the oldest alternative compensation programs in the United States, signifies Arizona's commitment to alternative compensation opportunities. In 1984, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released

its seminal report, *A Nation at Risk*. Arizona capitalized on a recommendation in that report that teacher compensation practices be modified, introducing ARS §15-918. Collaboratively developed by policymakers, union representatives, teachers, and other stakeholders, this legislation introduced a competitive, statewide Career Ladder Pilot Program in which all districts could participate. The program design transformed the way the state compensated educators by basing their salaries on their effectiveness in the classroom, the acquisition of more responsibility, and continued professional growth.

When developing the Career Ladder Program, the legislature and other stakeholders acknowledged that the single-salary schedule did not adequately reward teachers who advanced student achievement and instead compensated teachers based on longevity in the classroom. The state decided that a career ladder initiative would take into account both teachers' experience and their effectiveness with students while also encouraging continued professional growth. The program introduced an expanded approach to teacher compensation and professional development: after districts implemented their local-level Career Ladder Programs, they also were to share the practices that increased student achievement with all districts in the state. As Deputy Associate Superintendent Jan Amator, Highly Qualified Professional Unit, ADE, (personal communication, August 10, 2010) explained, "The idea was that they [districts] would find several programs that were very successful and develop useful templates that other districts could then adopt. But the total funding never became a reality in Arizona."

In 1985, the state selected 14 school districts to participate in a five-year pilot program. During this time, the state also hired an external evaluator to determine the effect of the pilot program on student achievement. In 1990, at the conclusion of the pilot

program, the evaluator determined that the program had a positive impact on student achievement (Walton-Braver as cited in Nehrmeyer, n.d.; Packard & Dereshiwsky as cited in Nehrmeyer, n.d.). In response to this report, the state opened up a second round of applications and funded an additional 14 districts. In 1994, however, because of funding issues, the legislature stated that it would no longer allow new districts to enter the program. As a result of this decision, the state has continued to fund only these 28 participating districts.

During the development of ARS §15-918, the state established a representative Career Ladder Advisory Committee to discuss and develop the main components and goals of the program. The committee includes legislators, teachers' union members, principals, teachers, and district officials. Committee members discussed guidelines, program requirements, potential obstacles, and the overall goals of the Career Ladder Program. One of the early issues that the committee addressed was teacher participation, specifically whether participation in the program should be mandatory or voluntary. While one group of committee members requested that participation be mandatory, other members noted that advancing along the career ladder and fulfilling all of the requirements would be rigorous and a teacher might have extenuating circumstances (pregnancy, sickness, graduate school, etc.) that would prevent him or her from successfully participating in the program. Further, some stakeholders stated that forcing teachers already working in the district prior to the program's development would not be fair to those veteran teachers. As a result, ARS §15-918 required all new teachers to participate in the program, but the statute included the caveat that they could choose to opt out in their second year. Veteran teacher participation would be voluntary. Although the number of teachers who participate in the program (both those who voluntarily participate and

those who are required to participate) varies by district, the state requires at least 51 percent of all eligible teachers to participate (J. Amator, personal communication, August 10, 2010).

The Advisory Committee continues to participate in the Career Ladder Program. The program requires districts to reapply annually (see the Program Requirements section for more information about this process). The Career Ladder Advisory Committee reviews each district's application and makes recommendations to the state board on matters related to the implementation, operation, and monitoring of the Career Ladder Programs. The ADE also provides technical assistance to the districts and monitors their programs. The Career Ladder Network is another group of participants created through the Career Ladder Program. This voluntarily established network comprises all the career ladder directors in each district. The network meets monthly to provide updates on the implementation of each program, as well as to share the successes of the programs with the larger group. In addition to the state steering committee, under ARS §15-918-02.A.6, each district had to establish a local steering committee composed of teachers, union representatives, principals, and parents to assist in the development and refinement of the district's Career Ladder Program (Arizona State Legislature, 2010b). These committees act as local advisory groups for their respective programs. In most districts, the local steering committee is responsible for sharing information about the program with teachers in the district. The steering committee also meets to make changes to the program based on feedback from teachers and to ensure the program meets all state requirements.

Program Requirements

During the process of developing the requirements of the program, stakeholders agreed that in order to successfully implement the program, and because of the diversity of the districts in the state, districts would need autonomy to mold the program to best meet their needs. Although ARS §15-918 provides flexibility, districts must adhere to several requirements as established by the statute.

To ensure some consistency and fidelity with program implementation, ARS §15-918 outlines the goals of the Career Ladder Program and specific implementation requirements. District programs must carry out the following goals:

- Improve student achievement
- Motivate educators to improve skills
- Attract, recruit, and reward exemplary educators
- Promote collegiality

In addition to articulating the goals of the program, ARS §15-918 also describes non-negotiable criteria that each Career Ladder Program must include in its placement and rewarding of teachers on the ladder. Teacher evaluations must include evidence of the following:

- Increased student growth
- Increased levels of teaching skills
- Increased teacher responsibility and professional growth
- Equal teacher pay for equal teacher performance (Arizona Department of Education, n.d.¹)

¹ The Career Ladder Program is a performance-based compensation plan with a separate-but-parallel pay structure. It adheres to the concept of equal pay for equal performance. Education and/or longevity are not the basis for payment. The plan provides for growth and incentives for teachers and offers a support system for the implementation of district programs and projects.

As previously stated, all 28 districts also must reapply to the Career Ladder Program annually. Since their original application, all 28 districts have continued to receive funding. Within this reapplication process, districts provide an overview of their Career Ladder Program, including the mission of their program and how it operates. The application itself requires districts to provide specific information on teacher career ladder placement and the process through which teachers are eligible for advancement. An important facet of the application also requires districts to evaluate certain components of their program. Specifically, districts must include information on how they evaluate teacher instructional skills, teacher effect on pupil progress (including a description of how teachers are held accountable for pupil academic progress), and the effect of the Career Ladder Program, as a whole, on pupil progress. This evaluation of the Career Ladder Program must also include data sources and outline an improvement process for any deficiencies acknowledged in the program. Although districts are free to use whatever data sources they choose, the most commonly used sources include a teacher survey and student achievement scores on Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test. Finally, the reapplication requires districts to describe their professional development opportunities for teachers and their communication process for sharing information about the program with all stakeholders.

Professional Growth, Professional Development, and Induction

As noted, the Career Ladder Program requires all districts to focus on student achievement and teacher professional growth. Both ARS §15-918-02.A.1 and accompanying state board guidelines require that the program's focus be on pupil growth as well as on teacher evaluations. This portion of the statute also allows districts to use career ladder monies for

professional development and induction. With this focus on professional growth and increased responsibilities for teachers, many districts have intertwined their professional development activities and induction programs with their Career Ladder Program. For example, evaluation results inform the professional development activities of teachers who participate in the Career Ladder Program. Each district can decide how to incorporate its evaluation results into professional development opportunities; however, continued professional growth for teachers remains a requirement. Furthermore, incorporating teacher induction programs into the Career Ladder Program builds on the concept of connecting teacher professional growth within the Career Ladder Program. Because new teachers are required to participate in the Career Ladder Program, districts find it beneficial to incorporate their induction programs and requirements into it.

Current State of the Career Ladder Program

Several recent events have put the future of the Career Ladder Program in jeopardy. In 2007, Gilbert Public Schools sued the state of Arizona, claiming the Arizona Career Ladder Program was unconstitutional. Gilbert Public Schools argued that because the state provided additional funding for some districts to implement the Career Ladder Program without providing an equal opportunity for all districts to participate, those 28 participating districts had an unfair advantage in recruiting teachers. Thus, Gilbert Public Schools claimed that neighboring districts that received Career Ladder Program funding were able to offer higher salaries and better support to their teachers, thereby providing an incentive for teachers to teach in the districts that had the program. In February 2010, a court declared the Career Ladder Program unconstitutional as a result of this law suit.

The court cited the exclusion of some districts from participating in the program as a reason for the ruling. The state has appealed this ruling, and evidence on the ADE website suggests that the program continues to exist in its current form.

Furthermore, during the 2009–10 school year, the Arizona Legislature declared that no new teachers entering a career ladder district could enroll in the program. Additionally, teachers who did not participate in the program during the 2008–09 school year were then ineligible to enroll in the program. Although none of the interviewees for this paper were able to give a definitive reason for why the legislature ceased funding for new teachers, Sunnyside Unified School District Career Ladder Program Director Cheryl Siquieros (personal communication, August 25, 2010) speculated that—as most states are facing financial difficulties—if the program were eventually phased out, the money used for the program could be used for other state expenses.

Program Components in Action

Using Data to Inform Program Adjustments

As a condition of the annual reapplication, all districts must complete an evaluation of their program. This evaluation requires each district to identify areas where program components are working well and not working well. For those areas identified as “not working,” the district must outline steps for how it will address that particular component and make it more effective. In addition, the district must provide student achievement data to ensure that the program continues to increase student achievement. All district staff members interviewed for this case summary use a teacher survey as part of their required evaluation. These surveys gauge teachers’ perceptions of the program and are used by the district to incorporate teacher feedback into the program design.² By requiring districts to continually assess their program and make improvements, the state ensures that the programs are responsive to the needs of the participants and continue to use data to inform the goals of their program.

² Districts are not required to do a survey; however, all of the district s interviewed did use a survey to get feedback on the program.

Chandler Unified School District

Chandler Unified School District has participated in the Career Ladder Program since 1995 because the district wanted to better reward and compensate teachers who went above and beyond normal teaching activities. According to Chandler Career Ladder Program Director Lorah Neville (personal communication, August 17, 2010), “Our current superintendent has always been committed to compensation for teachers, and I think any time there’s an opportunity to better compensate teachers, it’s something we look at.” The program places participating teachers on the career ladder into one of four levels (Levels I, II, III, and IV). In order to move up these levels, teachers must meet the program requirements:

	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
Requirements to obtain this level	1-3 years of teaching experience	3-5 years of teaching experience	6-7 years of experience	8+ years of experience
	Hold a valid teaching certificate			
	Evaluation based on classroom performance competencies using the Certified Staff Evaluation Instrument (CSEI)	Evaluation based on classroom performance competencies using the Certified Staff Evaluation Instrument (CSEI)	Evaluation based on classroom performance competencies using the Certified Staff Evaluation Instrument (CSEI)	Evaluation based on classroom performance competencies using the Certified Staff Evaluation Instrument (CSEI)
	Work directly with the same group of students instructionally on a regular basis (weekly) for at least 50 percent of the student day (minimum of 15 students)	Work directly with the same group of students instructionally on a regular basis (weekly) for at least 50 percent of the student day (minimum of 15 students)	Work directly with the same group of students instructionally on a regular basis (weekly) for at least 50 percent of the student day (minimum of 15 students)	Work directly with the same group of students instructionally on a regular basis (weekly) for at least 50 percent of the student day (minimum of 15 students)
	Successfully complete the requirements for the student achievement plan	Successfully complete the requirements for the student achievement plan	Successfully complete the requirements for the student achievement plan	Successfully complete the requirements for the student achievement plan
	Teach students directly (including planning and assessment for instruction) a minimum of 50 percent of their contract time and student time with the district	Teach students directly (including planning and assessment for instruction) a minimum of 50 percent of their contract time and student time with the district	Teach students directly (including planning and assessment for instruction) a minimum of 50 percent of their contract time and student time with the district	Teach students directly (including planning and assessment for instruction) a minimum of 50 percent of their contract time and student time with the district
			Participate in 35 hours of professional development	Participate in 70 hours of professional development
			Meet the requirements for high-level instructional responsibilities	Meet the requirements for high-level instructional responsibilities

During the 2010–11 school year, as part of the reapplication process and in an effort to continually motivate and encourage professional growth, Chandler amended its Career Ladder Program as part of its annual evaluation. Chandler made two distinct changes to the program based on information gleaned from student achievement data, teacher surveys, steering committee feedback, and personal communication. The first was that the district decided to increase its focus on the use of formative assessments, specifically

in how teachers use the data from the assessments to inform instruction to increase student achievement. The second change was the streamlining of information about the program by updating the district's website.

To increase focus on formative assessment, at the beginning of every school year, teachers create an instructional unit that identifies their objectives for a single lesson. After identifying these objectives, teachers then create a pre-assessment and post-assessment for their students that provides evidence of student learning. Prior to developing these assessments, teachers receive professional development on how to best write and develop these assessments. Teachers also create a summative assessment as well as two formative assessments. Once these assessments are established, teachers submit the unit plan to the district's instructional specialists who observe, evaluate, and support teachers participating in the program. Within this process, the teachers and instructional specialists meet to discuss the plan and ensure its rigor. Teachers can submit their plan as part of a team or individually; however, all members must be present at the pre-assessment conference with the instructional specialists.

The second change was to improve the district website, one of the main avenues of communication for the district. The website allows the community to view the most up-to-date information and streamlines much of the paperwork. During the 2010–11 school year, the district responded to feedback received from teachers, principals, and the teachers union to implement a system that allows teachers to submit their HLIR activities electronically, which enables principals to approve them electronically.

Meaningful Collaboration with the Union and Teachers

As previously discussed, teacher support and investment in the program remains a priority for the state. This required stakeholder buy-in ensures that districts implement a co-developed program that represents the needs and concerns of teachers affected by the program, which facilitates program success. According to one district representative,

It's still a voluntary program. . . . We do have requirements from the state that we need a certain level of participation; otherwise, we don't get the funding. So it makes sense for us to be responsive to teachers to make sure it's meeting their needs in addition to seeing what's good for kids. (L. Neville, personal communication, August 17, 2010)

The required solicitation of teacher and union voices remains an important component in the buy-in for the Career Ladder Program.

Focus on Student Achievement and Teacher Professional Development

By including language that focuses on student learning in ARS §15-918, Arizona recognized that evidence of student learning is paramount in education. Without a focus on student learning, any reform effort would be pointless. Equally important, however, is to provide teachers with the necessary resources and supports to ensure that they have every opportunity to develop into effective teachers. The Arizona Career Ladder Program requires individual districts to incorporate evidence of student learning into teacher professional development and induction activities thereby demonstrating a commitment to both student and teacher learning.

Crane School District

Crane School District in Yuma County has participated in the Career Ladder Program since 1990. The district decided to participate in the program because the district strongly believed that the Career Ladder Program aligns with its objectives. Specifically, the district believed that focusing on professional development best supports and develops better teachers. As Career Ladder Coordinator Judy Munger (personal communication, August 19, 2010) explained, “The district was looking at professional development and having a support system for our teachers to help them grow as a key to improving our student achievement.” District leaders believed that Crane’s investment in supporting and developing teachers would translate into increased student achievement; consequently, the district developed its Career Ladder Program to support teachers.

One way Crane School District implements its Career Ladder program is by requiring new teachers to establish Student Achievement Plans at the beginning of the school year. Student Achievement Plans are long-term teaching units that integrate elements of effective instruction. As part of these plans, teachers keep a journal in which they reflect on their lessons throughout the year, use student achievement data to adjust instructional practices, and work to implement their plan in the classroom throughout the year. In addition to implementing these plans, trained peers evaluate teachers during the school year. The district uses a rigorous rubric to evaluate teaching skills in the classroom and to provide specific feedback on instruction. The district believes that the self-reflection process and teacher evaluation contribute to professional growth and differentiated instruction. A Crane district representative stated, in regard to the district’s goals,

The first one is improvement of student achievement, and that’s always first. Provide and promote effective teacher performance, which is the professional development. . . . We ask our teachers to be lifelong learners and continually try to learn from one another and from other resources. . . . It’s really being open to new ideas and doing what it takes to help the students in your classroom. . . . We motivate the teachers to always be looking and open to trying to grow.”

J. Munger, personal communication, August 19, 2010

The top-level teachers who have been with the district for a long period of time and implemented several Student Achievement Plans have another option for professional growth. These teachers can participate in action research projects that allow a group of teachers to identify an issue area and hypothesize on the cause of a problem. Teachers then use their classes as case studies and implement an intervention on which they have agreed. During the year, teachers must meet at least eight times, with each meeting focusing on a specific step of the action research project. The collaborative nature of the meetings and projects contributes to the growth of the teacher. Judy Munger (personal communication, August 19, 2010) said that teachers “are growing at the meetings and learning from one another.” These research projects are helpful throughout the year as teachers continue to reflect on the intervention and then share the results of their project with other teachers in the district.

Although beginning teachers are not required to create Student Achievement Plans, the district has incorporated its beginning teacher induction program into the Career Ladder Program as a way of supporting new teachers and acclimating them to district processes. The program coordinator described the following course of action:

We know that our new teachers come here, even from other states, and we expect a lot of them in a classroom. We want them to have time to develop those skills without having to do the full requirements [of the Career Ladder Program]. So what one of those teachers would do is receive coaching. ... There's a pre-conference. ... We watch them teach; we give them feedback. They work on it a little while. Then we go back in again.

J. Munger, personal communication, August 19, 2010

In addition to the monetary incentives for teachers to increase their effectiveness in the classroom, the district has found that intrinsic rewards, such as a sense of helping students learn, have been equally motivational. According to Judy Munger, the process of supporting and developing teachers in the classroom throughout their career helps them become highly effective and increases the retention of those teachers.

Developed Locally

When the state first introduced the Arizona Career Ladder Program legislation, the Career Ladder Advisory Committee decided that districts needed autonomy to develop and tailor their programs to best suit their individual needs. Several interviewees commented that this freedom has been the most beneficial piece of the program. Districts agree that providing autonomy helps ensure district stakeholder buy-in to their programs—and that a one-size-fits-all approach to a Career Ladder Program would have been unsuccessful and detrimental.

Crane's Judy Munger (personal communication, August 19, 2010) summarized the benefit as follows:

The program really does allow for the individual districts to have different programs that they've developed, but with the same core guidelines in the program. And one of the things that I believe has made it work so well is that [because] it's not so directed from the state level, we can make it into what works for our district. We have some of that ability to make it work here, but yet with high expectations from the state that it stays a quality program.

Flagstaff Unified School District

Flagstaff Unified School District entered the Career Ladder Program during the second round of applications. District officials originally decided to participate in the program because of the opportunity it provided in moving the teaching profession forward and adequately compensating teachers who went above and beyond their normal teaching duties. As the state guidelines clearly articulate, all participating districts must first focus on increasing student achievement and ensuring that all students perform at academically acceptable levels. Unfortunately, Flagstaff did not meet its student achievement goals for the first time during the 2009–10 school year. To address this issue, the district implemented several changes to the operation of the Career Ladder Program, including establishing a single-school collaborative project and changing the evaluation of professional development activities.

Flagstaff implements its Career Ladder Program much as the Crane School District does. One option for participating teachers is to focus on a lesson unit and then measure its implementation over the year. These teacher-developed student lesson units, called Student Achievement Progress Reports (SAPRs), allow teachers to develop their own pretest and posttest to use as evidence of student learning during the lesson. Another way teachers can participate in the program is by working on Collaborative Achievement Projects (CAPs), which involve groups of teachers working together by identifying an issue in student learning and developing a plan or intervention to address that issue. Teachers choose their own groups and issue areas; however in the 2010–11 school year, the district introduced a new approach to CAP. One school identified as “in need of improvement” collaborated as a cohesive unit and worked on the single issue of moving its school off of the “school improvement” list. While all teachers had the choice to select an individual CAP, they agreed as a school to focus on one issue. As Flagstaff Career Ladder Program Director Steve Larson (personal communication, August 19, 2010), said,

The principal at that school this year has elected to suggest strongly to its teachers that they all participate in the same CAP program this year. ... But they are all going to be working with the same focus. ... Teachers still have the autonomy to choose a different CAP theme; however, the ability of the program to rally an entire school in improvement around a common focus is a great advantage of the Career Ladder Program.

This single focus facilitates the connection of the Career Ladder Program and school improvement objectives into a cohesive and comprehensive school reform approach.

Another change brought on by the failure to meet student achievement goals is the way the district has altered the professional development opportunities it makes available to teachers. For example, this past school year, Flagstaff wanted to be able to measure the impact of professional development activities on student achievement. In years past, the district focused on “event” professional development, where teachers attended single events that counted toward their professional development requirements. It was difficult for the district to measure the impact of those single events on student achievement, so the district now implements “program” professional development, which allows the district to have more control over the rigor and quality of the professional development. Larson (personal communication,

August 19, 2010) explained, “The problem for us—and one of the things that’s driving us a little crazy—is tracking that [professional development] all the way down to student achievement is really, really difficult to see what the follow-through has been. That piece of it has been kind of a weak link right now.” By responding to a need to concentrate on student achievement and by capitalizing on the local autonomy bestowed to districts, Flagstaff has redirected resources and focused its priorities on increasing student achievement.

Conclusion

Regardless of its ultimate fate, the Arizona Career Ladder Program provides several important lessons to states and districts interested in developing and implementing a career ladder program. First, the meaningful use of data to inform and improve program components allows districts to continuously meet the needs of their teachers and students. Through the systematic and thorough evaluation of the programs, career ladder districts must acknowledge deficiencies in their programs and develop a plan to address those issues. Second, meaningful collaboration between unions and teachers can develop a sense of investment in the success of an initiative. By requiring a majority of eligible teachers to approve a career ladder program, the state ensures that the participating districts develop a program that is responsive to the needs of the teachers affected by it. Third, it is important to maintain a focus on both student and teacher learning. Arizona’s focus on the continued growth of teachers has created a culture that focuses on the investment of teachers and not on punishing them. Further, a focus on student achievement ensures that the investment in the initiative results in increased student performance in the classroom. Finally, allowing districts to develop programs that fit their local contexts can go a long way in sustaining a reform effort and establishing stakeholder investment in the program. The combination of state-mandated guiding principles coupled with district autonomy ensures the incorporation of the state’s priorities into district-specific contexts.

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