

F. Building Teacher and Community Support for New Compensation Systems

How should states and districts structure compensation systems to increase the likelihood that teachers and teachers' unions will support them?

Research suggests that the following factors will help to secure teacher and union support for new compensation systems:

- Involvement of teachers in the design of the system
- Alignment of the compensation system with requirements for teacher training and professional development
- Evidence of sustained institutional commitment to the program, including sustained financial commitment
- Proof that implementation plans are well thought out

As research demonstrates, when teachers are involved in the design of a compensation program, teachers and teachers unions are more likely to support it (Hatry, Greiner, & Ashford, 1994; Odden, Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2001; Springer et al., 2008). Such involvement also serves to enhance the effectiveness of compensation programs (Hatry et al., 1994; Odden et al., 2001).

Compensation programs cannot be stand-alone plans. States and districts must align the demands of the pay program with other training and support efforts. In other words,

these pay systems need to be part of more comprehensive, integrated programs of teacher training and professional development (Milanowski, 2003; Milanowski, Heneman, & Kimball, 2009; Odden et al., 2001; Solmon & Podgursky, 2000).

When operating under new compensation systems, improvements in teacher quality and student achievement may take some time to materialize. Thus, district and state policymakers must display considerable patience with the new system. They also must send the message that the system is here to stay. Teachers often are skeptical of new programs based on their experience, especially in large urban districts, of frequent shifts in educational policy (Milanowski, 2006). Sustained institutional commitment to new forms of pay is essential to building teachers' comfort with and support for the program.

So, too, is sustained financial commitment. New compensation programs can be expensive (Guthrie & Prince, 2008). Successful programs will encourage skilled teachers to remain in the system, induce higher student achievement, and require higher salaries. Teachers must believe that if the program engenders higher costs, the system is prepared to pay these costs (Azordegan, Greenman, & Coulter, 2005).

After districts and states design a new pay plan, they must implement it well. As research and experience show, sloppy program implementation can destroy a plan's credibility and weaken its acceptance by teachers (Milanowski, 2006).

Research frequently cites Denver Public Schools as an example of a district that has effectively built teacher and union support for an alternative compensation system by applying these principles. Preliminary evidence indicates that nearly half of Denver's teachers are participating in ProComp; applications for teaching positions in hard-to-staff schools increased by nearly 600 during the first year, and applications for hard-to-staff positions such as special education and middle-school mathematics increased by roughly 10 percent (DeGrow, 2007; Sherry, 2007).

It is important to note that teacher support for performance-based pay systems generally increases over time if for no other reason than teacher "sorting." That is, those who like the new compensation system tend to stay or to join the applicant pool, whereas those who do not like it tend to leave. Podgursky (2007) notes that charter schools provide a good example of teacher sorting. Charters are much more likely than public schools to adopt performance-based pay, and as a result, they tend to attract and retain teachers who prefer such a system. Conversely, teachers who are not favorably disposed toward performance pay likely will seek teaching positions in other schools. In short, changing the compensation structure in a school will change the composition of the workforce, so policymakers should expect some teacher turnover.

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We are grateful to Michael Podgursky, University of Missouri, and Anthony Milanowski, University of Wisconsin-Madison, for their helpful comments and suggestions.

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 Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees in their implementation efforts through provision of sustained technical assistance and development and dissemination of timely resources. CECR also is charged with raising national awareness of alternative and effective strategies for educator compensation through a newsletter, a Web-based clearinghouse, and other outreach activities.

This work was originally produced in whole or in part by the 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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