

F. Building Teacher and Community Support for New Compensation Systems

How should compensation systems be structured to increase the likelihood that teachers and teachers' unions will support them?

Research suggests that among the factors that will help to secure teacher and teachers-union support for new compensation systems are:

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

Compensation programs cannot be stand-alone plans. The demands of the pay program must be aligned with other state or district 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; 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, policymakers in districts and states 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, with the “reform *du jour*” constant 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.

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).

Once a new pay plan is designed, it must be implemented well. As research and experience show, sloppy program implementation can destroy a plan's credibility and weaken its acceptance by teachers (Milanowski, 2006).

Denver Public Schools is frequently cited 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 the district'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 that teachers will "sort." 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. Teachers who are not favorably disposed toward performance pay, on the other hand, 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 to occur.

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