



Toward a More Comprehensive Model of Teacher Pay

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In “Toward a More Comprehensive Model of Teacher Pay”—a paper presented at the February 2008 National Center on Performance Incentives research to policy conference—Julia Koppich examines recent policy initiatives implementing new approaches to teacher pay. Her discussion focuses on four current initiatives: ProComp in Denver, TRACS in Toledo, Minneapolis’s alternative compensation system, and New York City’s new teacher pay plan. She describes commonalities among the four programs and challenges for future performance pay programs.

Landscape of the Teacher Pay Debate

Historically, the single-salary pay schedule, used by nearly all U.S. public-school districts, has been viewed as a means to offer teachers an equitable salary system by virtue of its objectivity, predictability, and noncompetitive structure. However, several circumstances surrounding the nation’s education system have incited new considerations for the structure of teacher pay.

First, the standards-based education movement has shifted policy emphasis from inputs to outcomes, thereby reconceptualizing the role of teachers from that of providers of instruction to improvers of student learning. Second, research has raised questions about the value of the single-salary schedule system, questioning its ability to measure what matters most in teaching, encourage continuous improvement of

professional practice, and reward good professional performance. Additionally, teacher shortages in high-needs schools and subject areas have prompted the use of new policy mechanisms, such as monetary incentives, to attract people to the profession.

Advocates for teacher pay reform argue that adapting the teacher pay structure can further efforts to professionalize the field of teaching by making it more competitive with other professions. They also purport that new pay structures should be more tightly aligned with student achievement, citing research findings that years of experience and level of education, the criteria for pay determination on the single-salary schedule, only weakly explain a teacher’s contribution to student achievement.

Those favoring the single-salary schedule have concerns about using less objective measures to determine teacher pay. They also fear that an over-reliance on students’ standardized test scores in new pay structures would encourage narrowing of the curriculum and teaching to the test. Further, they claim that the teaching profession relies on a culture of cooperation among colleagues which would be destroyed by any element of competition introduced by reforms such as pay for performance. Some opponents even believe that efforts to reform teacher pay are actually attempts to keep teachers’ salaries low.

The two national teacher unions, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation

of Teachers (AFT), remain among the most ardent defenders of the single-salary schedule. The NEA opposes both pay to attract and retain teachers in hard-to-staff positions and pay for performance based on student test scores. The AFT maintains a more open policy position, supporting additional pay for the following: acquired knowledge and skills; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification; accepting assignments in high-needs schools and subject areas; and mentoring and accepting additional professional responsibilities that lead to schoolwide improvement.

Design of Current Teacher Pay Reform Initiatives

Several recent teacher pay reform initiatives rely on pay structures that are not tied exclusively to student achievement results, but rather to a range of professional skills and accomplishments that are arguably related to improving student achievement.

Denver's ProComp

ProComp, launched in 2004, is a cooperative effort of the Denver school district and the local teacher union. Under the ProComp system, teachers earn additional compensation based on the following criteria: increased knowledge and skills linked to improved student performance; teaching in hard-to-staff schools and subjects; high ratings on professional evaluations; and increased student test scores. Teachers hired before January 2006 can choose whether or not to opt into the program. As of January 2006, all new hires have been required to participate.

Toledo Review and Alternative Compensation System (TRACS)

TRACS, launched in 2002, was also created from a collaboration of district and teacher union officials. It consists of three tracks for teachers: (1) professional development for individual teachers needing remedial assistance; (2) rewards for teams of teachers at schools meeting or exceeding pre-established student achievement goals; and (3) a career ladder program that rewards teachers for various skills and accomplishments, including contribution to student achievement, acting as a peer reviewer or curriculum developer, and teaching in high-needs schools.

Minneapolis's Alternative Teacher Professional Pay System (ATPP)

Minneapolis's ATPP system is part of Minnesota's Quality Compensation for Teachers (Q Comp) program, enacted by the state in 2005. ATPP is a cooperative effort between Minneapolis Public Schools and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers. The voluntary program is aimed at improving teacher practice with professional development and multiple teacher advancement opportunities on the salary schedule. Teachers can advance their pay by meeting the following criteria: gaining years of professional experience; participating in professional development; submitting professional portfolios; achieving National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification or subject-specific master's degrees; and acquiring teaching specialization in areas of designated district need. Teachers can also earn extra pay for serving as mentors, coaches, professional development providers, and site leadership team or district committee members.

New York City's new teacher pay plan

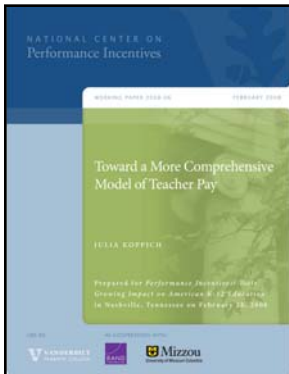
In 2007, stemming from a collaborative agreement between the City of New York, the New York City (NYC) Public Schools, and the United Federation of Teachers, teachers in 200 low-performing public schools became eligible for bonus payments based primarily on school-level performance of students on standardized tests. School committees consisting of teachers, the principal, and another principal designee decide how to apportion the dollars earned by the school.

These four programs share some noteworthy commonalities. First, each was designed to address multiple system goals, such as improving teacher quality and raising student achievement, and adapts to the unique organizational needs of the system. Each program includes several pathways for teachers to achieve those goals and earn additional pay. Additionally, the programs all originated from collaborative efforts between district and teacher union officials, and teacher participation is mostly voluntary. With the exception of Denver's ProComp, the new pay structures supplement rather than replace the single-salary schedule.

Conclusion

The future of teacher pay reform remains somewhat unclear, but the study of existing initiatives provides insight about likely challenges that face forthcoming reform efforts. Despite the teacher union-district collaboration evident in some school systems, many local teacher union presidents remain wary about moving away from the single-salary schedule. However, as of the summer of 2008, both national teacher unions have elected new presidents potentially more open to alternative pay structures. Additionally, a recent Public Agenda Foundation survey suggests that a majority of teachers themselves, especially the newly hired, are becoming more open to alternative pay structures.

Districts also need the capacity to support implementation of new teacher pay structures, including the provision of professional learning opportunities for teachers to achieve performance pay criteria, and the infrastructure to manage the data inherent in a system that relies more on teacher outcomes to determine teacher pay. Securing sustained funding streams to support new teacher pay systems represents another challenge for districts, especially for systems supplementing the existing single-salary schedule.



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