

Improving Student Learning through Strategic Compensation

*A TeacherSolutions Report
from the Teacher Leaders of TLN-Kansas*

July 2008



Teacher Leadership • Research • Policy



The Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) launched the TeacherSolutions model in February 2006 when a select team of 18 highly accomplished teachers from throughout the nation was assembled in a first-of-its-kind approach to study and unpack the research literature on professional compensation. Through ongoing virtual conversations and a series of virtual webinars, these expert practitioners assessed and debated the issues with researchers well versed in value-added methods. They also engaged in structured dialogue with policy analysts, community activists, teacher union leaders and practitioners who have been involved in a variety of performance-pay plans across the nation. From their work was born the TeacherSolutions model — an innovative process for calling on the true experts in education to address policy issues. This report represents a local response to the inaugural TeacherSolutions project from highly accomplished Kansas teachers. These are the experts who experience the impact of policy where it matters most: in America’s classrooms, where these accomplished teachers make a difference every day.

CTQ seeks to improve student learning through developing teacher leadership, conducting practical research and raising public awareness about what must be done to ensure that every student in America has a qualified, well-supported and effective teacher. Over the past eight years, the Center’s work, rooted in the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1996) landmark report, has sought to promote a coherent system of teacher recruitment, preparation, induction, professional development, compensation and school design policies that could dramatically close the student achievement gap. As a small nonprofit with big ideas and ambitions to promote a true teaching profession, the Center has worked on a large range of research studies and policy development initiatives designed with the goals of cultivating leadership, spreading expertise and elevating the voices of accomplished teachers so that their knowledge of students and schools can inform the next generation of teaching policies and practices.

The Center for Teaching Quality would like to thank the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation for their generous support of the TLN-Kansas initiative.

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This work was funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. The contents of this publication are solely the responsibility of the Center for Teaching Quality.



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seeks to improve student learning
and advance the teaching profession
by cultivating teacher leadership,
conducting timely research,
and crafting smart policy.*

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Examining the Policy Landscape

More so than ever before, policymakers and the public believe the fate of American public education rests with teachers. Over the last 15 years, study after study points to the powerful effects of qualified teachers and quality teaching on student achievement. However, poor children and those of color are still far less likely to be taught by good teachers — no matter how “good” is defined. Unfortunately, debates continue to rage among policymakers and researchers regarding what makes for a qualified and effective teacher. One thing is certain: The system of how to prepare, support, and reward teachers must be overhauled if our nation is going to recruit and retain teachers needed for 21st century schools. Paying teachers differently is increasingly seen as a key tool to transform public education’s moribund human capital system.

Efforts to pay teachers on the basis of performance have a checkered history. Twenty years ago Susan Moore Johnson,¹ and then later Richard Murnane and David Cohen,² presented a concise overview of failed efforts from years past — including those in the 1920s, 1950s, and 1980s. Historians Larry Cuban and David Tyack have offered more recent but similar assessments of varied forays into paying teachers on the basis of *merit* — a red-flag word in the lexicon of school reform and teacher professionalism.³

These initiatives floundered, in large part, due to unresolved technical and political issues. In some cases, student test scores could not validly and reliably measure teacher effectiveness. In other instances, poorly trained administrators could not produce useful and trusted teacher evaluation results, or union leaders resisted merit pay plans that focused on individual performance and ignored the importance of raising base salaries for all. Often, teachers were not adequately involved in the development of the performance pay plans and policymakers did not fulfill all of their promises and obligations.

In the last decade, Cincinnati and Iowa encountered similar problems when their alternative compensation and teacher evaluation systems did not meet appropriate psychometric standards and policymakers failed to raise salaries as promised. Throughout the history of these efforts, union leaders who were critical of teacher compensation in general fought the introduction of market incentives until overall salary increases were in place.⁴ In 2003, the Philadelphia School District, under School CEO Paul Vallas, scrapped its teacher performance pay plan due to its expense and difficulty in administering it (as well as the plan’s failure to provide teachers useful feedback). In the wake of these many failed attempts, Bryan Hassel, a long-time advocate for performance pay, has developed three principles to help guide design of compensation systems: widespread experimentation, school-level flexibility in implementation, and fairness — including provisions to ensure plans do not reduce teachers’ current salaries.⁵

In recent years political pressure and leadership has once again emerged in support of differentiated teacher pay. In an attempt to move away from the negative feelings associated with “merit pay,” a number of political leaders, from both sides of the aisle, are advocating for *new professional compensation, incentive pay or pay for performance*. In 2004, The Teaching Commission, headed by former IBM chief executive Lou Gerstner, called for the federal, state, and local governments to invest an additional \$30 billion in teacher pay so that all teachers get paid more and the best teachers are most highly rewarded. The Teaching Commission report outlined four major imperatives, including bolstering accountability in teacher education, strengthening state teacher licensing and certification requirements, empowering school leaders as CEOs, and compensating teachers more effectively.⁶ Although the Teaching Commission report has considerable flaws in laying out some of the critical implementation issues, the document — like other compelling blue-ribbon reports — has generated momentum for paying teachers more and differently. Increasingly, researchers and practitioners are beginning to realize that if teaching is ever going to reach full status as a profession, then the traditional means of compensating teachers must be reexamined.

Without question, policymakers, business and community leaders, and the general public view new compensation structures as critical in efforts to recruit and retain quality teachers and reward the most accomplished ones. With teacher shortages escalating, the student achievement gap looming, and current measures of teaching quality under constant questioning, growing numbers of education stakeholders are arguing for a renewed focus on professional compensation or pay for performance — to some significant effect. For example, nearly 200 schools are currently implementing teacher development and pay reforms as part of the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) — which includes multiple career paths, performance pay for learning relevant knowledge and skills, and individual and school-wide performance-based compensation.⁷ Also, the U.S. Department of Education’s Teacher Incentive Fund — currently funded at \$99 million — has offered grants to 30 states, districts, and education agencies to implement performance-based compensation systems for teachers and principals serving in high-needs schools.⁸

Denver’s highly touted ProComp system, seven years in the making, has shown how teacher unions, administrators, and community leaders can collaborate in developing comprehensive pay reforms and selling it to their public. Denver voters approved a \$25 million annual tax increase to fund ProComp that focuses on student learning gains, targeted and proven professional development, more reliable and useful teaching evaluations, and incentives for teaching in high-needs schools and assignments. A critical component centers on student growth objectives, where teachers work with administrators in defining learning goals for their classrooms and measuring the effects of their efforts. Brad Jupp, senior academic advisor for the Denver Public Schools noted, “The best practices that we want teachers to use in the classroom — setting aca-

demic goals, reflecting on instructional practices, and collaborating with the principal on student learning — those are what teachers are now doing.”

One of the key issues facing these and other programs is how to define good teaching and what “counts” as performance worthy of additional compensation. Recent opinion polls show that the public — regardless of political affiliation — is quite willing to pay more for quality teachers, and they are willing to pay an even greater amount when acceptable, measurable forms of accountability are introduced into the pay equation. A recent poll found that 67 percent of the public believed teachers should be paid extra for “gains in student achievement as measured by test results — *and other indicators*.”⁹ But while the public believes that teachers should be paid for performance, they are skeptical of using only current standardized student achievement tests as *the* metric. Only 35 percent of survey respondents agreed that standardized tests were fair measures of what students learn and how well teachers teach.¹⁰

Even today’s performance pay reports and policy proposals miss the point when it comes to developing valid measures of teacher effects. In many cases the nuanced issues so apparent to many teachers are left out of the policy conversations and debates. In addition, a number of current pay-reform efforts are still falling prey to the failed strategies of the past. As a result, school districts (e.g., Houston) and states (e.g., Florida) have developed disastrous performance pay plans over the past several years. In Houston, for example, the school community found itself in an “uproar over teachers’ bonuses” when some of its most recognized and effective teachers did not qualify for the standardized test-based “merit pay” rewards.¹¹

More sophisticated policymakers are beginning to understand that while performance pay can be a powerful lever in transforming teaching as a profession, it is not the only one. For example, while the *Tough Choices or Tough Times* report calls for teachers to be paid for producing student learning gains on new, more valid and authentic performance assessment measures, it also pushes out such ideas as creating a much more differentiated teacher workforce, frontloading incentives to new talented teachers, and proposing that teachers be hired by states, not districts. Other groups studying the relationship between pay incentives and school improvement (like the national TeacherSolutions team organized by the Center for Teaching Quality and the Teacher Leaders Network) suggest that teachers might be paid more like college professors where they negotiate their base salaries based on a mix of experience, qualifications, and past performance, and can then maximize their earning potential by what they do and achieve.

New ideas about professional compensation abound in an era when public education is increasingly a high-stakes enterprise. But one thing is certain: Before they act on plans to pay teachers more and differently, policymakers and the public need to listen to teachers and involve them as full partners in their design.

A New Course For Teacher Leadership And Professional Pay

In 2006, the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) and its Teacher Leaders Network (TLN) successfully launched the TeacherSolutions initiative — a unique approach to elevating the voices of accomplished teachers on policy issues affecting their profession and the students and families they serve. In our inaugural TeacherSolutions project, 18 of the nation’s best teachers focused their attention on professional compensation, researching past efforts to create alternative pay models, and crafting new and different solutions based on their understanding of the professional work of teachers.

In virtual webinars they assessed and debated the issues with researchers well-versed in systems that tie teacher performance to incentive pay. They also engaged in structured dialogue with policy analysts, community activists, teacher union leaders, and practitioners who are implementing a range of performance pay plans in U.S. school systems. Together, they developed a framework, which is premised on the idea that teachers must be rewarded for helping students meet or make significant progress toward high academic standards. Their framework also recognizes that teachers cannot help students learn more if they do not have sufficient resources, quality training, access to data, and the necessary time to learn from one another.

In their final report, *Performance-Pay for Teachers: Designing a System that Students Deserve* (see www.teachingquality.org/teachersolutions/TSreport.pdf), the TeacherSolutions team defines both why and how teachers need to be paid more when they: (1) help students learn more; (2) develop and use new relevant knowledge and skills; (3) fulfill special needs in the local labor market; and (4) provide school and community leadership for student success.

Developing *TeacherSolutions* For Kansas

Using these comprehensive principles as a foundation, CTQ began working in 2007 with a small cadre of accomplished teacher leaders from across Kansas to develop a localized vision for strategic compensation. (See Appendix A for a full list of these teachers.) A central tenet of the approach recommended by the national TeacherSolutions team is that a viable performance-pay framework must be flexible enough to allow districts and states to tailor incentives that advance their specific student-learning goals — with the expectation that teachers will be full partners in the design. In Kansas, with the support of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, CTQ has helped lay the groundwork for deeper conversations among some of the state’s most accomplished teachers around strategic compensation at both the state and local levels.

In early fall 2007, CTQ used its suite of virtual communication tools to facilitate live webinars and ongoing email discussions with the core TLN-Kansas planning team. These discussions focused on the potential impact of strategic compensation on student learning, the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, local labor market needs, and teacher leadership. The virtual interactions helped the accomplished teachers sharpen their own leadership and policy advocacy skills, while also developing their knowledge and understanding of the complexities of teacher pay systems and the uneven history of compensation reform. At a Wichita-based working conference in November 2007, the core team shared their thinking and gathered the insights of teacher colleagues from across the state, along with key stakeholders from the Kansas National Education Association (KNEA) and Kansas State Department of Education.

The Kansas Perspective

In Kansas, professional pay conversations have been underway for some time. In 2000, the KNEA established an Alternative Compensation Study Committee, comprised of union leaders from across the state, which carefully studied the strengths and weaknesses of past plans and outlined a proposed resolution for consideration. Their deliberations concluded that the current single salary schedule “lacks recognition for other factors that the system may value” (outside of advanced academic study and professional experience).¹² In addition, the committee surmised that “many teachers also believe that current salary systems do not adequately recognize their hard work or skills as a teacher.”¹³ Key concerns included paying teachers for extra duties, developing new knowledge and skills, demonstrating expert performances (e.g., through the use of student learning data), and teaching in high-demand subjects and low-performing schools. The desirable features of past pay plans, the inherent weaknesses, and their underlying belief systems were fully explicated.

The well-crafted 19-page report from the Alternative Compensation Study Committee eloquently addresses teacher union apprehension toward performance pay as well as the necessary steps needed to create a locally-derived differentiated compensation plan. Its recommendations, which included assisting local unions interested in pursuing alternative compensation initiatives through training and creation of a support consortium, were certainly critical first steps in moving these conversations forward.

Podcast: To Coach or Not to Coach

DeAnn Nelson explains that becoming an instructional coach — an opportunity for teacher leadership — meant making some sacrifices.



Unearthing The Issues

Conversations at the TLN-Kansas conference in November 2007 centered on the four pillars of compensation reform identified in the TeacherSolutions report: student learning, knowledge and skills, market incentives, and teacher leadership. The intent of the seven-hour session was not to generate a Kansas-specific framework but to provide a context for a preliminary discussion of the potential of alternative compensation systems in the state, to address substantive teacher concerns, and to consider potential stumbling blocks in implementation. Below is a brief summary of key ideas that surfaced throughout the day's activities, from the perspective of the TLN-Kansas cohort.

Hopes

We believe that creating a quality strategic compensation system fully supported by educators could re-define the teaching profession and give us opportunities to spread our expertise to each other. We are hopeful that a nuanced pay system could be developed – one designed around student achievement and teaching quality goals. Such a system would allow us to be compensated fairly for the knowledge, skills, and services we provide our students, schools, and communities.

A new pay system would enhance the perception of and respect for our profession, which is still rightfully labeled as a “semi-profession” by sociologists. We are hopeful that with a professional pay system new teachers could have a clearly defined pathway for continued growth and development. In order to make this hope a reality, teachers must be full partners in the design, planning, and implementation. Indeed, teacher buy-in is critically important to the long-term success of any strategic compensation plan, and teacher buy-in means teacher voices at the planning table.

Concerns

We are not without concerns about creating a strategic compensation framework for teachers. Our major hesitation is related to the use of student achievement data. Incentives should not be tied solely to test scores, which cannot uniformly and fairly represent teacher impact on student learning. We learned that only about one-fourth to one-third of teachers in any given district can have student standardized test scores tied to their teaching. We also learned that many scholars are now pointing out that even some of the best statistical strategies for measuring teacher effects, such as value-added models, have considerable error. Consequently, new methods of assessment should be designed, drawing on the experience and insights of teachers who know their students and their subjects. Strong evaluation tools, proper training, and ongoing oversight should also be provided to all evaluators to ensure consistent standards of practice and to guard against favoritism with these new methods.

One other concern is worth noting ... words. They are important. When describing professional pay reforms we choose to use words that can clearly define, inform, and inspire — not alienate. All too often when the words “merit” or even “performance” pay are used, educators and the public believe teachers are to be solely paid for student test score results. We liked how educators from Austin, Texas have coined their professional pay reforms as “strategic compensation.” The word “strategic” aligns with our vision of a new compensation system that fits tightly with what teachers, administrators, and parents value in our communities. “Strategic compensation” connects everything we do to develop teachers — from recruiting, preparing, and inducting to assessing and paying.

Stumbling Blocks

Any new compensation system will encounter stumbling blocks. Perhaps the most significant will be lack of information and fear of change. Educating colleagues about strategic compensation will be critical. There are several other systemic stumbling blocks, which must also be addressed, including finding time for teacher leadership and professional development activities; balancing the needs of diverse school districts, ranging from rural to urban to suburban; building the infrastructure for collecting and using student achievement data; and creating the adequate funding streams needed to implement any plan.

Digging Deeper

Following the TLN-Kansas conference in Wichita, the Kansas team continued its study and conversations. Over 450 substantive messages were exchanged within the group of 16 teacher leaders, as they posed provocative questions, shared challenges, and brainstormed solutions. The teachers read research reports and engaged in virtual conversations, including teachers from Denver who could discuss the impact of its professional compensation reform efforts. While the conversation remained global and more work will be needed to implement their ideas at the state or local levels, they agreed that Kansas is ready for a strategic compensation system.

The remainder of this report is in the collective voice of the TLN-Kansas team.

Knowledge and Skills

The current compensation system in place in most districts across this country recognizes acquisition of new knowledge and skills by simply rewarding teachers for completion of advanced degrees. For many of us, our advanced degrees earned at local universities have not been strategic and, in some cases, have been irrelevant. But

our school districts do not have the “lock” on sound professional development for us either. We have attended too many irrelevant or repetitious “sit and get” in-service trainings that did not improve our instructional practice. Sam Rabiola, a high school teacher from Lawrence, put it this way:

“The current process for professional development in my district is seen as a series of hoops to jump through, rather than encouraging teachers to gain new knowledge and skills. If teachers had control over what the new knowledge and skills are, many teachers would be reinvigorated.”

“I’m still waiting for someone ... maybe the NBCTs or the TOYs or the Eisenhower winners or a blend of all of them ... to step up and create a Teacher Leadership Academy, which would take the Kansas Exemplary Educators Network (KEEN) conferences one step further. At this Academy, you could consider all aspects of what it means to be a teacher leader in the context of your classroom, in the context of your community, and in the context of your personal professional growth.... In my wildest dreams I think about learning more, having time to reflect, looking at new options. For example, I could learn more about becoming an author or a professional development speaker ... about how to serve on boards within the community to represent teacher voice or work with legislators on policy issues. These activities would help to promote activism and innovation in as many roles of leadership as we can define.”

Marsha Ratzel
Teacher, Blue Valley

“One-size-fits-all” workshops simply do not drive our development as much as teacher-driven initiatives would. In addition, what is good for a new teacher may not be appropriate for a 20-year veteran who has earned the distinction of National Board Certification. Instead, we would like more robust opportunities to pursue areas of our own interest and need at different points in our careers.

We welcome opportunities to be held accountable for acquiring new knowledge and skills — like learning a new research-based reading program or how to work with an influx of second language learners in our classrooms. The need for teacher cadres to improve their instructional practice as a collective team is critical. Dave Clark, a middle school teacher from Wichita, noted:

“I think having an all-faculty cohort to advance skills would be worthy of increased compensation. If a majority of faculty was teaching in a predominantly English as a Second Language (ESL) school, yet the majority did not have an ESL endorsement, it would benefit the teachers

and students if all staff members worked towards this endorsement. It would increase knowledge and skills for teachers and in turn, produce better results for students.”

Rewarding teachers for the acquisition of knowledge and skills should be just the first step in a strategic compensation system, however. We also emphasized the importance of applying what is learned to the classroom environment. A strategic compensation system that paid teachers for demonstrating how their new knowledge and skills made

a difference for their students would be advantageous. Lory Mills, a kindergarten teacher from Derby, explained:

“Teachers who demonstrate that they have taken what they have learned and have applied it successfully in their classroom would be good candidates for extra compensation. We should not allow anybody to get paid to just attend workshops, classes, etc. without demonstrating the application of those newly acquired knowledge and skills and their impact on students.”

Podcast: Knowledge and Skills of an NBCT

Andrew Davis has witnessed the transformative process of National Board Certification as a facilitator for nearly 200 candidates.



National Board Certification is one example of quality professional development for us, whether pursued singly or as a group. This rigorous advanced certification process requires teachers to analyze and reflect on their teaching through a portfolio of videotaped lessons, student work samples, and documented accomplishments, as well as assessment center exercises in their respective fields. The process is estimated to take 200-400 hours for completion, resulting in considerable professional benefits for candidates. Andrew Davis, a high school English teacher and NBCT from Wichita, reflected, “As an NBCT I have demonstrated the ability to identify the needs of my students and meet them, regardless of what they are.”

We believe that balancing the current professional expectations with reform efforts will prove critical to the success of any new strategic compensation system. “People have worked to get their advanced degrees, amassed many graduate hours and done other things to accumulate the ‘things’ you need to maximize your compensation under the old system,” said Marsha Ratzel, a middle school math and science teacher from Blue Valley. Therefore, we need to “show that the new system provides *more* possibilities — that all they’ve already done won’t go to waste. And have some kind of grandfathering or extended transition time so people can figure out what’s happening.” Research in Denver and other districts experimenting with incentive pay shows that a transition period will be particularly important for buy-in and acceptance of any strategic compensation reform system.

As a result of our inquiry, we recommend the following guiding principles for including the knowledge and skills component in any strategic compensation system:

- Current teachers need a way to transition from the existing system that rewards for advanced degrees to a new strategic compensation plan that focuses on student learning.

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- Teachers should continually gain new knowledge and skills. In order for this to be successful, however, they must have a prominent voice in the decision-making process. “One-size-fits-all” professional development will not work.
 - Expectations for teachers at different times in their careers should be defined, with the input of teachers themselves, and then tied to compensation.
 - Teachers should demonstrate that they apply their newly-gained knowledge and skills in the classroom to gain additional compensation for it.
 - Self-defined teams of teachers could, as one option, be rewarded for learning new knowledge and skills together as a means of attaining school or district goals.
 - National Board Certification is an effective way to recognize teachers for acquiring new knowledge and skills and could serve as one option for increased compensation. Sharing those newly gained knowledge and skills with colleagues is another option for increased compensation.

Student Learning

We recognize and embrace the research evidence that shows the relationship between what we know and do as teachers and how our students learn. We understand how

and why some policymakers have expressed interest in revamping professional compensation based on *what students learn*. Although we have some concerns (stated previously), we believe we must focus on student learning *and* the learning environment that supports the academic and socio-emotional growth of those we teach. Focusing just on test scores can have negative consequences on a school’s culture or educational practice.

One way to ensure a positive learning environment is to focus on student growth, rather than proficiency. Our colleague Cynthia Corn, a seventh grade social studies teacher

“I can visualize a system that would allow a teacher to propose three ways of documenting student growth. When I was working on my master’s degree and conducting action research, I had to select three ways to assess how student learning was impacted by whatever new strategy I was trying with my students. I used one standardized test score along with a district level assessment score and then samples of student work when appropriate. This always provided a very good picture of whether or not the new strategy enhanced student learning. I suppose this would lead to some sort of committee that would have to approve proposals at the beginning of the year and then review the data again at the end of the year to determine whether or not a teacher qualified for increased compensation. It might resemble our current Professional Development Council system.”

*- Lory Mills
Teacher, Derby*

in Garden City, suggested that the system not focus on achieving a certain score, but on how much the student has improved overall, including test scores and other measures like grades, attendance, and successful efforts in extracurricular activities. The focus on improvement would be particularly encouraging to teachers who serve students with unique needs at both ends of the spectrum — that is, special education students as well as the academically gifted. “If you’re working hard to get your kids up from the 20th percentile or from the 90th percentile, you are making strides,” concluded Ronda Hassig, a middle school media coordinator from Blue Valley. We need test score analyses that can fairly compare teachers who are helping very different populations of students improve.

Other team members suggested setting shared goals for student learning and developing multiple measures for achievement. For example, Marsha Ratzel from Blue Valley proposed:

“I would like to see a compensation system work towards tapping the teacher expertise that comes with well crafted and aligned classroom assessments. The type and style of these assessments would vary by content and age of student. But the brilliance of multiple measures is that, as a byproduct of a compensation system, we may learn how to better utilize formative assessment data.”

We have begun to brainstorm possible solutions for how these assessments could be evaluated for strategic compensation incentives, including implementing action research projects and selecting peer review committees to assess teacher portfolios of student success. A number of us are using what is now called formative assessment as part of the mix of tools we employ to judge how well we are teaching our students. Researchers have concluded that these “closer-to-the-ground” assessments, if properly designed and implemented, can tell us a great deal more about *how* individual students are learning — not just *what* they are learning. And this will help us as teachers. Whatever the system, collaboration, teamwork, and a sense of fairness among all teachers (not just those receiving rewards) are essential.

From our collaborative discussion, we recommend the following guiding principles for including the student learning component in any strategic compensation system:

- Any strategic compensation plan that includes rewards for student learning must focus on student *growth*, not just *proficiency*.

Podcast: Collaborating Around Common Standards

Rhonda Hassig explains how specialty-area teachers make a vital contribution to core skills and assessment.



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- Incentives for student learning must be available to *all* teachers, not just those teaching in the tested, core content areas; therefore, rewards for student learning should be offered to teachers in a variety of ways, including: (1) *individual* teachers who meet (or exceed) pre-determined, teacher-selected objectives; (2) *teams* of teachers who meet (or exceed) pre-determined, team-selected objectives; (3) *entire school faculties* who meet (or exceed) annual state *standards for proficiency*; and (4) *entire school faculties* who meet (or exceed) *pre-determined, school-selected objectives* for cohorts of students over time.
 - Multiple measures for evaluating student learning, including classroom-based assessments, should be used to determine rewards for student learning in a strategic compensation plan.

“A colleague of mine and I developed a Math Relays competition for the middle and high school students of USD#500 three years ago. The number of participants grew from 450 students (in its initial year) to 1000 students. Except for receiving compensation for the hours spent at the actual relay event, there was no additional compensation offered for the idea or for the implementation of a very successful initiative.... Just a few years ago students, parents, and citizens in Kansas City, KS heard and spoke only of the deficiency of students in mathematics. It was unimaginable to think that 1000 students would be interested in sacrificing a Saturday in February to compete in mathematics competitions. Not only has it helped to change the attitudes of students, but teachers, administrators, and parents see the potential in the students more clearly as a result of the event. We are changing the culture and the thinking around mathematics.”

- Jarius Jones
Teacher, Kansas City

Teacher Leadership

In reality there are relatively few teacher leadership opportunities in schools today and even fewer options that really reward teachers for meaningful and transformative work. Long-time observers of schools as organizations have concluded that the majority of teacher leadership tasks are best classified as *task du jour* and as such, teachers are expected to represent administrative purview, not to transform schools.¹⁴ Most teacher leadership continues to be viewed through the prism of in-classroom support, professional development activities, and indirect support to classrooms. Until school culture changes and hybrid roles for teacher leaders are developed, many educators, including TLN-Kansas team member Andrew Davis, believe that teacher leadership will have limited effect. Mr. Davis, a high school teacher, noted:

“As long as the fundamental job of teachers remains the same, leadership will remain top down, hierarchy heavy, and based on a mechanical model of organizations.... [This] sets the principal and superintendent up to be the ‘experts’ and allows those below him or her to contribute, but only within the framework provided by those (experts).”

Many school districts across the United States have gotten “in the game” of rewarding teachers for traditional leadership roles. Teacher leaders may receive additional stipends for mentoring novices, coaching National Board candidates, or serving as department chairs, but few programs have provided solid examples of how to expand teacher compensation reform to include more substantive leadership positions. For example, teacher leaders could help to design and implement parent involvement activities to bridge the gap between home and school. Some could assist in the recruitment and selection of new teachers by working with university faculty to identify candidates and conduct school-based interviews. Others may serve as teacher educators themselves, holding joint appointments with both the university and the school district. Still more could be utilized to serve as consultants for decision-makers in developing sound educational policies at the local, state, and national levels.

Unfortunately, the way in which teachers are currently compensated for their leadership roles does not reflect the importance of their contributions. Professional work deserves professional compensation, as Blue Valley teacher Marsha Ratzel explained:

“I think the interesting part of teacher leadership as it is currently being done is that teachers are paid on an hourly basis.... Hourly work seems different to me than leadership. Leadership, to my way of thinking, spans much more than a defined period of time. Leaders ask the eye-opening questions and inspire you to try things you might not have ventured out into on your own. This cannot be accounted for in a discrete amount of time, as hourly pay would imply.”

If hybrid teacher leadership roles were developed such that teachers could spend part of their day with students and the remainder serving their schools, communities, and colleagues, teachers would be offered new opportunities for advancement. The current career path for teachers is relatively flat. If individuals desire new and different responsibilities, they must leave the classroom to pursue an administrative position. Relatively few alternatives presently exist for teacher leaders who want to keep at least one foot in the classroom. A strategic compensation system, however, could offer defined career stages, adjusting compensation to reflect the expertise of each stage and providing a path for all teachers to reach excellence.

To achieve this new vision of teacher leadership, we recommend the following guiding principles for including this central component in any strategic compensation system:

- Teacher leadership opportunities should go beyond the typical department chair, committee representative, and mentor positions.

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- Before teachers can be compensated as leaders, school culture must change so that administrators accept teachers as true partners in the decision-making process.
 - Creating incentives and job descriptions for teacher leadership provides a career path for teachers, beyond going into administration or other out-of-the-classroom positions.
 - Districts and universities need to provide support and funding to enable teachers to lead.

Market Incentives

Twenty-first century schools face a disconcerting dilemma. As more and more teachers near retirement, student enrollment also rises and rosters in education programs wane. With diverse employment opportunities available (particularly in the areas of math and science), fewer college graduates are looking to education as a long-lasting career. To counteract this growing phenomenon, one key element of strategic compensation systems must be to incorporate market incentives to attract individuals into teaching.

“I know of a district very close to mine that offers housing for new teachers. It’s definitely a draw to someone new to the community who can’t afford housing (which is sad to say that a new teacher coming in to their first ‘professional’ job can’t afford to buy a house). The district even furnishes most items in the house too. It’s a definite advantage they offer if a person is trying to decide between school districts.”

Garrett Panzer
Teacher, Lakin

While we must pay attention to the difficulties of staffing math, science, and special education positions, we must also focus on an even more daunting challenge — our high-needs schools. These schools are often beset by seemingly insurmountable social and economic conditions, including poor nutrition, a lack of quality health care, and neighborhood instability. The high-needs communities in which these schools are located tend to be home to children of color and poverty (but clearly not uniformly), whose parents and families are under a great deal of stress. For teachers to help students in hard-to-staff schools achieve academically, they must be able to focus on more than just the proverbial 3Rs. For these students to meet high academic standards and pass high-stakes tests, effective teachers must address other cognitive performance measures and student outcomes, including attitudes, self-concept, motivation, and cultural connections. In addition, effective teachers in high-needs communities need to know how to work well with parents and other family members whose past negative school experiences make these connections more difficult to achieve. Teachers in these situations also need to know how to traverse a number of sociological and cultural land mines.

All teachers do not have the skill set necessary for success in high-needs schools. Teachers in one school may be effective with a particular student population, but lack the knowledge and experience to meet the needs of a different group. Consequently, market incentives for strategic compensation should

only be offered to those who have demonstrated the requisite skill set to teach in high-needs schools. To determine the unique qualifications for the targeted schools, educators already employed at these sites should be utilized to help brainstorm the required knowledge, skills, and dispositions. And the rewards should be meaningful, equally significant as those that promote the right kind of student learning, professional development, and teacher leadership in these schools.

In strategic compensation systems, local factors should determine which subject areas need market incentives. At the national level math and science teachers tend to be difficult to recruit, but that is not the case in all communities. In other districts, different target groups, such as special education or foreign language instructors, may be hard to find. As a result, school systems should be allowed to examine their own staffing needs to better develop market incentives that fit their demands. This process — just as the one used for identifying high-needs schools — should be transparent to teachers, parents, and community members so that everyone understands how the selections were made. Local control assures that context-specific needs are actually being met — and resources are not being misdirected to other imagined needs pre-determined at federal or state levels.

Podcast: Market Incentives

Marsha Ratzel reflects on the reasons bright math majors like her daughter might not become teachers.



Successful strategic compensation systems should include a variety of financial incentives that go beyond the traditional signing and retention bonuses offered by many school districts. Teachers in high demand (i.e., those willing to serve in hard-to-staff schools or subjects) want options. Jarius Jones, a math coach from Kansas City, emphasized this key point:

“There is no doubt in my mind that in order to attract quality teachers to fill these teaching positions, something else must be thrown into the pot ... other than just a one-time \$1,000 bonus. Perhaps the market incentives are in the form of: relocation allowances, an opportunity to live in a new housing development with property tax forgiveness, and/or higher salaries that are sustainable beyond the first year or two. In Kansas City, teachers are offered an opportunity to earn their master’s or doctoral degrees from the University of Missouri-Kansas City and Kansas University. In return for fully paid tuition, teachers commit to teach in the district for so many additional years.”

“There is no doubt in my mind that in order to attract quality teachers to fill these teaching positions, something else must be thrown into the pot.”

Building off these valuable ideas, we recommend the following guiding principles for including market incentives in any strategic compensation system:

- Strategic compensation systems should include market incentives as one of many elements.
- Teaching in a high-poverty school takes a special skill set in order to be successful; therefore, teachers must demonstrate that they can be successful in this environment in order to receive market incentives.
- Districts should examine their unique market needs when considering incentives for hard-to-fill positions (such as math, science, special education, etc.) or high-needs schools. These market incentives should be determined at the local level.
- Market incentives should include a variety of financial incentives, including student loan forgiveness, housing allowances, etc.

Putting It All Together

A wide variety of policy proposals are on the table to pay teachers more and differently. Growing numbers of districts and states are experimenting with new professional compensation reforms. We believe it is time for Kansas to join the effort. While there are many examples of pay reform gone wrong, we believe that our recommendations pave the way for doing it right. The reform mix needs to include compensation strategies that: (1) provide alternatives for gaining new knowledge and skills, (2) allow multiple measures for assessing student learning, (3) develop new school structures and positions for meaningful teacher leadership roles, and (4) offer non-traditional market incentives for high-needs schools and subjects.

In creating any new compensation system, we believe teachers must be **full** partners in the design, planning, and implementation. We also believe that:

- All teachers should be eligible to participate fully in a strategic compensation system; therefore, quotas and caps for rewards and incentives should be avoided;
- Funding for the new system should be sustainable; and
- Open lines of communication must be maintained so all stakeholder groups understand the system that is ultimately developed.

To move these ideas forward we must bring more teacher leaders to the table. But how should we proceed — and which teachers should be at the table? Our colleague, Andrew Davis, of Wichita suggested:

“Part of the dilemma facing school districts that find themselves confronting previously unimagined challenges is not only learning how to use teachers as part of the leadership team that transforms our schools, but knowing with at least a limited degree of certainty what they are getting with ‘teacher leaders,’ particularly if funding for these positions is to ever become sustainable.”

“By drawing on the basic framework of this report, it is possible to imagine that teacher leaders should have general knowledge about the four strands developed here — knowledge and skills, student learning, teacher leadership, and market incentives — with specialized expertise in at least one of these areas that would allow him or her to become a designated ‘change leader’ for that area in a school and/or district.”

“This is significant because two of the most common barriers to bringing about systemic change in schools (without the traumatic upheaval that tends to force a system back to the status quo) is a lack of both grassroots leadership and trust between labor and management. And, while it is a policy decision made by boards of education to embrace strategic compensation as an alternative to the traditional salary schedule, successful change will require that teachers lead the way.”

“A Teacher Leader Academy could guarantee the presence of enough teachers in each building with the needed skill sets to guide a district through sweeping systemic change, leaving principals free to handle their already overwhelming jobs. Administrators will have to be involved in the change, but if they, along with the majority of teachers, are equal consumers of those changes, barriers to progress can be significantly lessened.”

“We seek to promote the rich dialogue between myriad stakeholders necessary to move our schools beyond current compensation structures that do not adequately address the problems we all face today. It is time to start talking.”

The point of sharing Andrew’s example and other ideas contained in this report is not to dictate what comes next. Instead, we want to encourage conversation within and among local communities all across Kansas. We seek to promote the rich dialogue between myriad stakeholders necessary to move our schools beyond current compensation structures that do not adequately address the problems we all face today. It is time to start talking.

Appendix A: TLN-Kansas Team Members

Core Planning Team

Andrew Davis, *Wichita*

Ronda Hassig, *Blue Valley*

Jarius Jones, *Kansas City*

DeAnn Nelson, *Wichita*

Sam Rabiola, *Lawrence*

Marsha Ratzel, *Blue Valley*

Other Participating Teachers

David Clark, *Wichita*

Cynthia Corn, *Garden City*

Jamie Hibbs, *Arkansas City*

Lory Mills, *Derby*

Sam Rabiola, *Lawrence*

Justin Olmstead, *Winfield*

Garrett Panzer, *Lakin*

Jacob Reeser, *Lansing*

Linda Runyan, *Pittsburg*

Renita Ubel, *Ottawa*

Betsy Wiens, *Auburn-Washburn*

Endnotes

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