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Attracting, rewarding, and keeping quality teachers

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Attracting, rewarding, and keeping quality teachers

Abstract

The quality of American education was severely questioned in *A Nation at Risk*, released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983. Approximately 30 national reports concerned with educational reform have been published in recent years and nearly all have had one thing in common: the belief that excellence must be rediscovered and returned to our American schools. Cross (1984) pointed out that the 50 states had commissioned almost 300 task forces and had sent them out in search of excellence.

ATTRACTING, REWARDING, AND KEEPING
QUALITY TEACHERS

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David Michael Heeney
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 QUALITY TEACHERS

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The quality of American education was severely questioned in A Nation at Risk, released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983. Approximately 30 national reports concerned with educational reform have been published in recent years and nearly all have had one thing in common: the belief that excellence must be rediscovered and returned to our American schools. Cross (1984) pointed out that the 50 states had commissioned almost 300 task forces and had sent them out in search of excellence.

One of the main problems identified by the various task forces was attracting, rewarding, and keeping quality teachers in the classroom. The teacher shortages that currently exist in math and science illustrate the need for teacher salaries to be improved, as is evidenced by the exodus of teachers from the field of education to the business world. The task forces recommended that salaries for all teachers should be increased to a degree proportionate with their training. That is a requisite first step if education is to attract and retain quality teachers.

Rhone (1982) explained that the typical salary schedule used in education today is primarily an automatic device which establishes the pay of a teacher based on degrees or credits earned and the number of years of teaching experience. Salary increases are granted on the theory that additional study will increase the effectiveness of the teacher. While this should be the case, it is not always true.

Setting up a fair compensation system that will reward outstanding or meritorious teaching is a complicated task. The following suggestions, advanced by those who want to move away from the single salary schedule, will prove fruitless without hard work by (1) political leaders, (2) school board members, (3) administrators, and (4) teachers, and without enough new money to finance the programs.

These proposals, made by politicians and educators, revolve around "merit pay." English (1984) noted that merit pay is nothing new. Merit pay was first used in Newton, Massachusetts schools as early as 1908. Since then merit pay has been used with mixed success, but has never been firmly entrenched in our school systems across the United States. Once again, however, merit pay is becoming a popular subject with the public, which is demanding more accountability if teacher salaries are to be increased. Those advocating merit pay use the term to mean at least three different things:

(1) Performance Pay - English maintained that teacher salaries should be linked either to an objective or subjective assessment of teacher achievement in the classroom.

(2) Differentiated Pay - Holifield (1984) specified that teacher salaries should be linked to the willingness of the teacher to assume additional duties similar to a "career ladder" and should represent a division of labor in the teaching profession.

(3) Market-Sensitive Pay - Guthrie and Zusman (1982) believed that teacher salaries should be based on scarcity or the principle of supply and demand.

The balance of this paper is directed to an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of these three alternatives to the standard salary schedule.

(1) Performance Pay

Coffman and Manarino-Leggett (1984) explained that straight performance pay simply gave teachers who were identified "superior" a higher salary than other teachers. At first glance, the argument seems valid, because if some teachers earn higher salaries, those thinking of entering the teaching profession could see that with outstanding performance they might be able to earn higher wages also. A closer look, however, reveals that performance pay is not the solution, because it does not address the crucial problem of entry-level salaries.

People tend to look at average starting salaries when deciding on careers, and Fischer (1984-1985) noted that the average teacher starts out at approximately \$14,700. (p. 79) In many states, it is much lower than that. Current statistics on average teacher salaries range from \$20,000 - \$27,000, depending partly on whether you are an elementary or secondary teacher. Fischer also pointed out that when inflation was taken into consideration, teachers' purchasing power had risen only 4.2% in the past 17 years. (p. 87) It is clearly

unlikely that teacher salaries can close the gap on other professions unless salaries for all teachers are substantially upgraded.

Hawley (1985) pointed out that under most merit pay plans proposed recently, the bonus for "superior" teaching ranges from \$1,000 to \$4,000. Many plans also have limited the number of teachers who can qualify for merit pay.

According to Cornett (1985), Florida was supposedly the first state to okay merit pay for teachers on a statewide basis. From 5,000 to 12,000 of Florida's 90,000 public school teachers were expected to qualify for yearly bonuses of up to \$3,000. Bonuses were to come from \$80 million the 1983 Legislature appropriated to pay for the merit raises and for a longer school day.

Teachers were eligible for merit pay if they had:

- (1) A master's degree in their field or an out-of-field master's degree with 15 graduate credits in their subject area.
- (2) A good attendance record.
- (3) Four years of experience before applying.
- (4) A satisfactory score on a national teacher's test in their subject area.

If they were approved for merit pay they would be called "associate master teachers." They would then get bonuses for 3 years and then be eligible to advance to "master degree" status. In 1984-85, 90% of the teachers who attempted to qualify were not named associate master teachers.

Cameron (1985) pointed out that most schools which used a form of merit pay in the past found that it caused havoc among the teachers because there were no specific guidelines established to decide how merit pay should be awarded.

Lieberman (1985) implied that since performance pay is successful in the private sector, it should also be successful in the educational system. What Lieberman has apparently failed to understand, is that the reason why performance pay works in the business world is because the average salaries are already much higher than teachers', and bonuses given to even moderate performers can be substantial.

English (1984) questioned the whole idea that merit pay used in education would increase productivity of teachers. In Japan, he pointed out, teachers are well-respected, well-paid, and enjoy long vacations. Japanese teachers are given tenure as soon as they are hired and receive salary increases based solely on seniority. Yet Japanese students score very high on international tests in math and science, an interesting commentary on the impact of a system which completely rejects merit pay.

(2) Differentiated Pay

Guthrie and Zusman (1982) pointed out that differentiated pay is based on the principle of varying salary according to the level of job responsibility. The practice is widespread in education, especially in administrative positions in schools. There is no

distinguishable salary differentiation within the teaching profession itself, however, unless one takes into consideration the role of department chairperson, which in some schools means a slight increase in salary or release time.

Rhone (1982) proposed that school districts should use the same method to pay teachers that industry and commercial businesses use, that being position classification. Position classification involves gathering accurate information about the responsibilities of each job, selecting a process for determining similarities and differences among the described jobs, determining the equity of existing salaries paid in relation to job differences, and devising a salary schedule which permits competitive hiring rates, fairness in awarding salary increases, and clarity in defining promotional opportunity.

Rhone suggested that school districts begin by using a two-step approach. The first step is implementing job descriptions, which involves answering the following questions: What are the primary duties of the teacher filling the position? What are the secondary duties? What educational requirements and experience are necessary to do the job?

The second step has to do with job evaluation. Rhone suggested setting up a point system based on the importance of one teaching job versus another within the same school district. Examples of factors to be evaluated includes skills required, subjects taught, experience, number of students supervised, other responsibilities,

and other variables related to each job. The completed evaluations could then be used to establish salary ranges based on the final numerical value assigned to each job.

It may be that Rhone's approach would cause hard feelings among the staff and result in low morale for most teachers primarily because each teacher has an important role in educating students regardless of what subject he or she teaches. Not all students can become engineers and scientists. The American schools were designed to be comprehensive in nature and meet the needs of all students.

Edelfelt (1985) reminded us that "career ladders" are merely an extension of the differentiated staffing movement which tried to get off the ground approximately 15 years ago. Edelfelt believed that the movement failed primarily because of the recessionary times and lack of political support.

The state of Tennessee was one of the most recent to implement a "Career Ladder" program. In December 1982, the General Assembly's Comprehensive Education Study recommended that Tennessee find a way to reward outstanding teaching and that the state consider the "master teacher" concept.

Furtwengler (1985) pointed out that the program in Tennessee has been somewhat successful. One of the major reasons for the success was the financial backing given to the program.

In March 1983, Tennessee Governor Alexander recommended legislation and a tax increase that would pay for the \$210 million "Better Schools Program." In addition, the legislature proposed a 20% across-the-board increase for all public school teachers and administrators over a 3½ year period beginning January 1, 1984. This increase averaged approximately \$3400 per teacher, and did not include whatever additional raises local governments might provide.

Furtwengler pointed out that the Career Ladder Program was designed to attract quality teachers, retain them once they were there, and to reward them for outstanding performance in the classroom.

The program uses a five-step ladder which was optional for teachers who were already certified and teaching in Tennessee before July 1, 1984.

The first step on the ladder for beginning teachers is a "probationary certificate" which is good for one year and is nonrenewable. In order to obtain this certificate, a teacher must complete an approved training program and receive a minimum qualifying score on the National Teacher Examination. During the first year the new teacher is supervised by two tenured teachers from his or her own school. The teacher is then evaluated by the local school system and recommended for an apprentice certificate.

The "apprentice certificate" is valid for three years and is nonrenewable. During those three years, the teacher is evaluated by local school officials. Before the teacher can be approved to receive a "Career Level I" certificate, the state department of education must review the teacher's evaluation with the building principal and interview the teacher. If a disagreement exists, the state department of education will assign a state-evaluation team to conduct a full investigation.

A "Career Level I" certificate is good for five years and is renewable. The teacher is assigned a ten-month contract and receives an annual supplement of \$1,000. The state government pays the supplement for 87% of those eligible at this level. During the five-year period, local officials evaluate the teacher twice. During the fifth year the state department of education must again review the teacher's evaluation with the principal and interview the teacher.

The next step is a "Career Level II" certificate, which is again valid for five years and is renewable. Once a teacher has reached this level, the teacher may choose a ten-month contract which carries an annual supplement of \$2,000 or an eleven-month contract which carries an annual supplement of \$4,000. The state government pays the supplement for 25% of those eligible at this level. At this time a comprehensive evaluation is completed by the state using a state-board-approved evaluation system. The teacher is also evaluated twice during this five-year period.

The last step is a "Career Level III" certificate, which is a renewable certificate valid for five years. Once the teacher reaches this level, the teacher may choose a ten-month contract which carries an annual supplement of \$3,000, an eleven-month contract which carries an annual supplement of \$5,000, or a twelve-month contract which carries an annual supplement of \$7,000. The state pays the supplements for 15% of those eligible at this level. Another comprehensive state evaluation is required at this level, as well as two evaluations throughout the five-year period.

Teachers are evaluated on the following criteria: (1) knowledge of subject matter, (2) pupil performance, (3) interviews, and (4) record of professional development activities.

Hanes and Mitchell (1985) noted that Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina has implemented a program similar to Tennessee's[†], except it is called a "Career Development Plan." The major differences in the two programs are that North Carolina uses four steps instead of five, and North Carolina designates qualified teachers as "mentors" instead of "master teachers."

One of the concerns with "career ladders" or "career development plans" is the evaluation system used to evaluate teachers, Tennessee has obviously tried to make the system fair; however, some people strongly oppose teachers evaluating teachers.

Though Lieberman (1985) is opposed to "career ladders", he has suggested that evaluation of teachers should come from outside the school system. Lieberman believes that "national educational specialty boards" should be established which would be similar in nature to the medical, accounting, and legal boards set up to administer admission to those particular fields. His proposal is somewhat similar to the role of the state education department which evaluates teachers in Tennessee.

Shanker (1985), who opposes most of Lieberman's ideas concerning merit pay, noted that Lieberman's proposal of educational specialty boards deserves some consideration. Shanker explained that the idea of educational specialty boards is new and different. He further suggested that this might be the best way to satisfy the concerns of the public and teachers when it comes to rewarding outstanding performance in the classroom. He emphasized that establishing national educational specialty boards would eliminate the problems of favoritism and local politics which have destroyed many merit pay and career ladder projects.

Shannon (1985) disagreed with Lieberman and asserted that educational specialty boards would further erode the power of the principal, who is primarily responsible for the school's instructional program.

Cameron (1985) also disagreed with the idea of establishing educational specialty boards, pointing out that they would do

little to attract qualified teachers. Cameron suggested that the public is over-reacting to the alleged inadequacy of teacher performance in the classroom. He also did not agree fully with the idea that paying some teachers more than others will be an incentive for all teachers to improve.

The second problem which confronts "career ladders" is providing the funds necessary to make the program work. The Tennessee program was estimated to cost \$110 million per year when fully implemented in 1986-1987. This did not include the \$100 million cost of the rest of the "Better Schools Program", which required money for equipment, supplies, and instructional material. The entire cost was paid by new state taxes.

Miller (1985) mentioned that before the problem of teacher productivity could be discussed, teachers and administrators must be made aware of where the funds would come from to finance these rewards. He worried that the funds would come from the pockets of those teachers not designated as "superior" or "master teachers", even though those teachers were doing an excellent job. Miller proposed that the state government accept the responsibility to change the state funding formulas to increase teacher salaries without depriving one teacher to reward another.

(3) Market-Sensitive Pay

English (1984) believed that of all the potential programs to improve teachers' salaries, market-sensitive pay was the best solution to both entry-level and retention problems. He pointed out that it was the approach long used to determine faculty salaries at many colleges and universities.

Lieberman (1985) emphasized that the longer schools continue to use the typical salary schedule which pays all teachers on the same traditional criteria, market-sensitive pay will not be accepted and education will continue to lose quality teachers to other professions.

English and Lieberman both contended that math and science teachers should be paid higher salaries than teachers in other fields, not because they are better teachers, but because quality candidates in math and science are more difficult to attract due to outside competition.

English (1984) explained that the situation in math and science is going to get worse since, by the 1990's, there will be an increase in secondary enrollment and a corresponding increase in the number of teachers retiring. It is estimated that 40% of this country's math and science teachers will be retiring by 1995.

Guthrie and Zusman (1982) also supported English's belief that quality teachers are fleeing the field of education in

pursuit of higher salaries in the private sector. They believed that it is the younger teachers who are leaving education, which has had and will continue to have a long-range detrimental affect on our schools.

(However, Wilkins and Korschgen (1985) pointed out that teachers in Wisconsin are not leaving in significant numbers, which raises the question, at least in their minds, if teachers really are exiting the field of education in large numbers. They admitted though, that those who were leaving were judged to be average or above-average teachers. But they further insisted that teachers were leaving at such low rates that ample time is available to remedy the situation.)

Administrators and teachers have been very reluctant to agree to pay one category of teachers more than another. Who is to make the determination that teaching math and science is more important than teaching English, history, or a foreign language? If teachers in all subject areas were compensated on the basis of supply and demand, it would be difficult politically and financially, and some teaching fields would still not be competitive with the private sectors of our economy.

Guthrie and Zusman (1982) documented that with an example from the Houston Independent School District. Since 1979 the Houston schools have operated a program which has paid math and science teachers more. Since then, the number of vacancies for

science teachers has decreased; however, the number of vacancies for math teachers has increased.

School administrators thought this increase was due both to the increased demand for math teachers, brought about by a new competency testing program, and the fact that these teachers were only paid an additional \$800 per year for the first two years. Therefore in the 1982-83 school year, the supplement for both math and science teachers rose to \$2,000 per year. Since beginning teachers in the Houston schools received a base salary of \$16,000 and could receive an additional \$2,000 for teaching in an inner-city school, a beginning math or science teacher could have started at \$20,000. It will be interesting to see what will happen now that additional dollars have been put into the "market" approach to teacher supply in Houston.

Throughout this experiment the teacher union in Houston has been opposed to "market-sensitive pay", which is probably the way it would be in most states.

If states wanted to adopt this program, implementation would have to be the responsibility of the state legislature because it would be almost impossible for teachers and school boards to negotiate in each of the state's school districts. It seems probable that if higher salaries for teachers are to attract quality college graduates, the salaries will have to be raised substantially--perhaps as high as \$5,000 or more in most school districts.

Banner (1985) expressed the viewpoint that none of the three previously mentioned programs is the answer to the problems facing our schools today. Banner pointed out that if teachers were simply paid higher salaries, this would in turn free their summers so they could go back to school and do what they like to do best, learn new things. In return, teachers would be more motivated to teach their students what they had learned. Banner seems persuasive when he points out that if teachers are expected to work ten, eleven, or twelve months each year, the time available to enhance their own knowledge is diminished, a fact which will be detrimental to their students as well.

Conclusion

Designing a system to attract, reward, and keep quality teachers in the classroom requires three major sets of decisions. Federal and state educational leaders will have to decide:

(1) Which teacher characteristics and/or behaviors will be considered "outstanding", as well as what standards will be used to identify outstanding performance. At first, this may seem simple, but it will challenge even the most experienced policy makers. Questions that may need to be answered revolve around the following problems:

(A) Does one reward teachers solely for classroom performance, or does one take into account their ability to relate to students, parents, and other members in the community?

(B) If one focuses only on classroom performance, what are the standards of good performance? Might they be tied to lesson plans, instructional effectiveness, classroom management, attention to academic learning time, or any of countless other considerations?

(2) How should teachers' performances be evaluated? Should formal or informal observations be made? How often should evaluations be made? Who should make the evaluations? Does informal testing really measure any of the skills identified in the performance standards? Should the evaluation instrument be diagnostic as well as evaluative?

(3) How should outstanding teachers be rewarded? Should awards be given to individuals or to groups of teachers? What form should the awards take? Should the rewards be additional salary, additional classroom resources, or both? How large should the awards be? And how shall all this be funded?

Compensation systems can help meet a variety of state and local objectives. Policy makers must decide whether the compensation system should be aimed primarily at recruiting new teachers or retaining experienced teachers. A higher beginning salary could recruit new teachers; inservice training and higher salaries for experienced teachers could encourage quality teachers to stay in the classroom. Each state will have to decide what proportion of new dollars will be spent to meet these two objectives.

Most important, local school districts will need state help, and possibly federal help, to finance any of the three programs previously mentioned. Will most state governments and the federal government be willing to carry their share of the burden? That question remains to be answered.

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