

TRANSCRIPT

EDUCATION WEEK

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Teacher-Pay Incentives: Do They Work?

Oct. 25, 2006

Guests: **Tricia Coulter**, director of the Teaching Quality and Leadership Institute; **Sabrina W.M. Laine**, director of the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality; and **Ben Schaefer**, program manager of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

Kevin Bushweller (Moderator):

Welcome to today's online chat to discuss the effectiveness of teacher-pay incentives.

Much has been written about this topic over the years, but a lack of research on such incentives remains a problem. Still, districts are moving ahead with programs that reward teachers with bonuses or other perks if those educators can show they are having a positive impact on student learning. Such performance incentives are commonplace in the private sector, but have proven divisive when put into place in education.

Our three guests today will address many questions related to this issue.

Let's get the discussion started.

Question from **Javier Melendez, Senior Director, Recruitment, Orange County Public Schools, Orlando, Florida:**

According to my experience, "star candidates" make employment decisions based on factors such as: excellence of the work environment and administrative support, almost never on an isolated bonus or incentive. Demographically speaking, who are mostly attracted by incentives? Novice teachers? Minority candidates? Do we really know that incentives are the determining factor in accepting the offer?

Ben Schaefer:

Targeted incentives can be effective in filling specific needs or in attracting minority candidates. But many high-quality candidates will choose not to apply, or will leave in the first few years, if they are not provided with the supportive working environment they need to be successful. Until we broaden our discussion of incentives to include administrative support, opportunities for professional growth, and time for collaboration, we will not attract and retain the quality teachers that our schools need.

Question from **Jan Rotella, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, Wareham Public Schools, MA:**

Massachusetts school districts are just beginning to explore and experiment with pay incentives. One concern, rising from our school board, is how to implement any incentive that will not result in harming collegiality among teachers. Can pay incentives be incorporated while building professional learning communities?

Tricia Coulter:

Absolutely they can. Diversified compensation programs should never be “stand alone” strategies. They should be part of a larger system aimed at improving teacher retention and student achievement. The creation of learning communities, implementing a teacher mentor program, using teacher evaluations for diagnostic purposes to inform the type and content of professional development needed should all be part of any learning community. The pay incentive component is an additional motivational tool and a way of overtly rewarding or encouraging continuous improvement in a teacher’s ability to impact student learning.

School-based pay or group-based pay looked at as a way to increase collaboration and a “community” feel. In these systems student achievement is aggregated to the school level. When targets are met, all eligible employees (sometimes extending to non-instructional staff, as well) receive some type of bonus. While this is a popular system, there aren’t data indicating that it is a more effective strategy for encouraging collegiality than individual-based pay.

Comment from **Peter Huertas, ESL Teacher, McNair 6th Grade, Southwest Independent School District:**

These pay incentives really work for the most part for those that actually get them. They do not really make a great deal of difference in the lives of the students. For the professional it is just another dog and pony show but for the students they are actually a side issue.

Question from **Diana Boles, administrative intern, Ysleta ISD:**

1. Is a merit pay program or stipend being considered to encourage veteran teachers to accept difficult assignments?

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

There are several examples of merit pay plans or other financial incentives specifically targeted toward recruiting experienced teachers into hard-to-staff schools or subject areas. In addition, there are some examples of initiatives aimed at recruiting retired teachers back into the classroom to address hard-to-staff areas of need. Here are a few instances:

1. A recent Wisconsin initiative seeks to provide an additional \$5,000 for nine years as an incentive for teaching by nationally board certified and master educators in high-needs schools. 2. Teachers in Springfield, MA recently approved a contract that includes merit pay. Experienced teachers with at least a master's degree, seven years of teaching experience, and a 97 percent attendance rate at work will be eligible to apply for two positions that fall under the merit pay system. This system includes higher pay and includes the requirement that teachers accept difficult assignments in struggling schools and mentor less-experienced teachers. 3. Retired teachers in South Carolina may participate in the Teacher and Employee Retention program. This program allows a teacher to work for up to five years as a retiree, while accumulating a retirement annuity and drawing salary as a full-time employee. These teachers are channeled to critical need areas.

Question from **Cindi Karras, teacher, Hanshaw Middle School:**

In California, there has been talk of teachers in Title 1 schools receiving incentives (combat pay). However, talk at our school revolves around elective teachers and P.E. teachers not having the workload of the core academic teachers-similar argument, but what is your opinion on core vs. non-academic teachers and the pay schedule?

Ben Schaefer:

At the heart of your question is the issue of fairness. I think the answer will differ depending upon the school district. To deal with the issue that you raise, school leaders must include teachers at the table when shaping incentive systems. ProComp in Denver is a good example of teachers working with the school district to deal with issues of fairness. Personally,

I do not think it is fair for all similarly-experienced teachers to be paid the same with no regard to impact on student growth and school success.

Question from **John Stallcup Co Founder APREMAT/USA:**

Can the program be targeted to a subject matter (math) and a very specific geography (Zip +4) or even a classroom? Are the benefits tax exempt/free? What is the total number of teachers impacted by the program and the total number of students benefiting from the program?

Tricia Coulter:

There are a variety of incentive programs in existence. The term "incentive" versus pay-for-performance as related to compensation, usually refers to some type of financial bonus tied to a locality or subject matter. The high-need subject areas of math, science and special education are often specified in incentive programs.

As to locality, the programs are usually targeted at schools that are identified as being at-risk, usually based on poverty indicators. This is handled on a school-by-school basis rather than a zip code or other designation.

I can't speak to the tax status of these benefits.

I am not aware of counts of teachers or students benefiting from the program as those data are maintained by the schools or districts responsible for keeping track of the number of teachers receiving incentives and number of students in their classes.

Question from **Hayes Mizell, Distinguished Senior Fellow, National Staff Development Council:**

In many parts of the rural South, there are school districts that are low-performing, low-wealth, and have majority African-American student enrollments. In most such communities there is also a paucity of cultural activities and quality housing. Consequently, these school systems find it almost impossible to attract and retain high-performing teachers. Can you cite concrete examples of distressed school districts that have developed effective teacher pay or other incentives that attract and retain high performing teachers?

Ben Schaefer:

Unfortunately, teacher shortages and turnover in rural districts do not receive enough attention. As a former teacher in a rural Southern school district, I witnessed the difficulties rural districts have in attracting and retaining teachers. The retention policy in my school was marriage: if you could get a new teacher to marry a local, there was a better chance of that teacher staying. In terms of incentive programs, four school districts come to mind: Mobile County, AL; Hamilton County, TN; and Franklin County and Caroline County, VA.

Through the Alabama Incentive Program, highly qualified teachers can earn up to \$40,000 (and at least \$20,000) in bonuses over five years by working at one of five low-performing schools in Mobile County. Principals can earn up to \$60,000 extra at the selected schools. The schools were chosen based on low SAT scores. If test scores improve, employees can get more bonuses at the end of the year.

In Hamilton County, a community effort brings together multiple financial incentives that have been provided to attract high-performing teachers to a focus group of nine low-performing schools. Eligible teachers who move to the "Benwood schools" can receive pro bono legal services and multiple housing incentives – low-interest loans, a gift of up to \$10,000 in equity, and a special variance allowing the qualifying teachers to forgo any down payment.

Through a state pilot program, Franklin County and Caroline County provide a one-time hiring incentive of \$15,000 to teachers who meet the highly qualified criteria and agree to move to a hard-to-staff middle or high school. Relocating teachers must agree to teach in the hard-to-staff school for at least three years and to participate in training (during the first year of the program) and a formal support network (during year two).

Of these, Hamilton County's program has been around the longest and has shown strong results in student achievement and teacher retention. I would also encourage anyone interested in learning more about teacher incentives to look at the initiatives that Clark County, Nevada has put in place to attract and retain teachers. While by no means a rural school district, Clark County has taken a multi-faceted approach that includes housing incentives, career ladder advancement, and professional development.

Question from **Paul J. Smith, Ed.D., Facilitator, Accelerated Learning Center, Little Rock School District:**

If a school board is contemplating initiating a merit pay system, they would be wise to involve the teachers in the planning, would they not?

Ben Schaefer:

Yes. Teacher involvement is essential to the development of fair and effective merit pay systems. ProComp in Denver is a good example of how a district can engage teachers in altering the pay system.

Question from **Joe Petrosino, Mid Career Student , Penn:**

In an effort for anything to move forward in a school, a community of trust must be established. How can that community be established and measured between the teachers and the administrative team? Will teacher incentives assist in increasing the levels of trust?

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

Several sources have noted that for a compensation system that is based on merit or performance to be successful, there must be a solid level of trust between teachers and managers (Siegall & Worth, 2001; Ellis, 1984; House Research Organization/Texas House of Reps). Milanowski notes that in instances where union and management relations are good, teacher compensation innovation can be successfully initiated.

In a 1984 ERIC Digest piece, Ellis states that the best way to build that trust is to involve teachers in all phases of the program development, particularly in putting together criteria for evaluations. Shapiro and Laine (2005) note that teachers often do not trust school leaders in general, and fear that assessments of the quality of their work will be politically motivated or otherwise biased. Ellis uses the example of a "quality circle," in which four to eight teachers with the school principal work as a liaison to the teaching staff and the pay development group. This way, teachers are able to provide feedback from other staff members and provide ongoing recommendations.

One other suggestion would be to carefully weigh the decision to publicize names of those receiving merit pay. Publicizing recipients' names may cause embarrassment for those who do not make the list, animosity between teachers, or response from parents demanding that their children are in classrooms with the teachers who received the higher pay. Ellis notes that strict confidentiality, however, can lead to rumors of favoritism.

In WestEd's recent piece "Reforming Teacher Pay: The Search for a Workable Goal-Driven Compensation System," they stress the importance of "clear and consistent communication" about any changes in a teachers pay system, particularly for a pay-for-performance system.

In Denver, where the district has recently implemented the ProComp program, teachers said that in deciding whether to sign up for the program they did not want to get their information from the district by email or by newsletter. They wanted a trusted individual to visit their school, explain the program, and answer the questions.

Question from **George Peternel, Coordinator, Project EXCITE (Northwestern University)**:

Why would anyone expect teacher incentive programs that pay "peanuts" (as compared to incentives/bonuses given in other fields) to produce more than marginal effects?

Tricia Coulter:

In many programs incentives are calculated as a percent of base salary so whether the amount would be considered "peanuts" is relative. The absolute amount may be smaller than in other fields (I don't track the data on that so can't speak to the veracity of the claim) but the percentage of base salary may be similar.

Whether the incentive would have an effect is informed by this issue. In the Denver ProComp system, for example, a teacher can earn specified percentage bonuses in each of multiple categories, which can add up to a large overall percentage of base pay.

It is important to note, also, that pay should be only one part of a larger system designed to improve teacher retention and student learning.

Question from **Rolland Janairo, Manager, Pearson Teacher Fellowship**:

Has there been any formal incentive movements in the preschool sector? With universal pre-K programs emerging across the country, how are we ensuring we are attracting and retaining high quality teachers in preschool settings? What incentives are being provided by the federal government (ex. loan forgiveness, increased salaries) and state governments to ensure our youngest are being taught by high quality, satisfied teachers?

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

While I'm not aware of the use of financial incentives to recruit and retain high quality pre-school teachers, there are a number of studies that point to the greater use of merit pay and other financial incentives in private schools. As most pre-K programs are private, even when they receive government subsidies, this literature base might be instructive in answering your questions. For example, a recent study by Michael Podursky (2006) examines data from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Surveys, and finds significantly higher use of performance-based pay bonuses by private and charter schools.

Question from **Veena Villivalam, Gimbel Foundation**:

In addition to using teacher-pay incentives in staffing schools in remote or challenging schools, policymakers have also been linking teacher bonuses to test scores. The underlying assumption here is that teachers are almost exclusively responsible for raising student scores. On what basis has this rewards system been developed?

Tricia Coulter:

The use of student achievement data is possibly the most contentious issue in this area for the very reason you cite. The linking of financial rewards to student achievement is the attempt to make overt the ultimate goal of any teacher – improving student learning. The challenge lies in how this is assessed and there are many options.

Many programs use some type of state academic assessment. Concerns there include whether assessments are available for all subjects (e.g. are art or music teachers automatically ineligible for incentive pay?) and, as you mention, how much of a student's score is due to teaching variables versus variables or factors external to the teacher. Value-added assessment systems whereby a student's achievement is projected statistically and compared with actual improvement is seen as a viable alternative by some but concerns over effects external to the teacher are still an issue.

Another method in use is to set learning objectives. These can be created and approved in collaboration with other teachers and/or the principal of the school. Denver's ProComp (<http://denverprocomp.org/>) system uses this as a student growth component.

Concerns over the various factors affecting student achievement is one of the strongest arguments for having a compensation program that contains multiple elements – not just student achievement. Other elements include knowledge and skills gained by a teacher through coursework or professional development and teacher evaluation via peer observation or portfolio review.

Question from **Tanya Judd Pucella, Director of Civic Engagement, Marietta College:**

Do you think NBPTS pay incentives have been effective in retaining quality teachers in our classrooms? Have you heard of backlash from the movement of NBCTs into hard to staff schools from the current staff?

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

Yes, overall state and local incentives that support teachers who pursue NBPTS certification have provided teachers with an opportunity to advance on the pay scale, improve their practice, and stay in the classroom. However, the overwhelming majority of teachers who pursue NBPTS certification are not found in hard-to-staff schools, and while some states such as South Carolina have legislation that ties financial support for pursuing NBPTS certification to a commitment from the teacher to work in a high need school, there is no evidence that this is an effective strategy. There is also little evidence that there is an exodus of NBPTS-certified teachers from low poverty schools to take advantage of financial incentives to recruit them to high poverty schools. More often, districts such as Miami and Chicago are focusing on providing incentives for current teachers in hard-to-staff schools, and to increase the overall quality and retention of the existing teaching staff. See NBPTS Online News 4(3), <http://www.nbpts.org/news/200503news.cfm>.

Comment from **Charlotte Danielson, author and consultant:**

The question as posed seems to be inquiring about the consequences of paying bonuses to teachers who are willing to teach in those schools other teachers shun - no word on why that is the case, although most experience cites high-need or high-poverty areas. Another common practice is to pay bonuses to teachers in scarcity areas, such as secondary math and science.

However, it's interesting that a number of the comments and questions have moved directly to the issue of "merit pay," that is, the idea that teachers are paid differently based on their performance, or that of their students. My experience suggests that it is challenging to assess teacher performance with sufficient rigor to use it as the basis of a high-stakes decision, such as pay. For professional conversations, yes, but it's a doubtful practice, in part because of its impact on teacher collegiality.

A better approach, in my view, if one wants to implement a differentiated pay structure as a long-term recruitment and retention strategy, is to make the decisions based on enhancing the intellectual capital of the school, such as recognizing National Board certification, action research, or informal teacher leadership. The Arlington Public Schools, in Virginia, has embarked on just such an approach.

Question from **Davy McClay, NBCT, Ph.D., Instructor (Elementary Education), Utah State University (starting January, 2007):**

I just left F.T. classroom employment in June, 2006 in Los Angeles. But I'm a teacher for life! I'm all for pay incentives. We are certainly underpaid and underappreciated. We could use some tangible "appreciation." But why not reward us for things for which we are truly accountable? Yes, we teachers do have an impact on student receptivity and test scores, but so do parents (including parental pre-wiring of the brain), moods, hunger, etc. How can you separate and quantify the effects? How about holding us accountable for our actual classroom delivery strategies? (I hope you saw this teacher's articles in Edweek 3/14/01 and 7/10/02 and in the SF Chronicle 2/13/05.)

Ben Schaefer:

Researchers are currently working to isolate the impact of an individual teacher on the learning of an individual student. I do not think it is possible. I also do not think it is a healthy way for us to measure the performance of a teacher. Student growth, taking into account mitigating factors to the extent that we can, should play a role in teacher accountability. So too should a teacher's roles and responsibilities, professional growth, and the classroom delivery strategies that you mention. The Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) takes this approach. Teachers are given opportunities to improve their instruction and are then evaluated based on demonstrated teaching practice. Along with these evaluations, student academic growth and a teacher's roles and responsibilities factor into teacher compensation.

Question from **Karen Fernandez, Teacher, Denver Public Schools:**

My district offers about \$1000 per year to teachers who agree to serve in hard-to-staff schools--however, with over 60% of the district's students living in poverty and very low scores on standardized academic tests in all but a few schools, many teachers feel that hard-to-staff is the district norm. Under our current pay-for-performance plan only a handful of schools receive the hard-to-staff designation. This situation has had a number of effects, none of which was intended by the adoption of the pay incentives: lowered morale, a sense of competing for scraps, and teacher attrition. How are other districts handling the "competition" to be eligible for incentives, particularly those with chronic financial woes?

Tricia Coulter:

To be honest, I haven't heard of this issue before and it's a challenging one. My response would be one not based in compensation but in larger working and learning conditions. One of the primary reasons for teacher attritions is not compensation – it's working conditions. Do the schools in the district have strong leadership who are well trained and supported and, in turn, supportive of the teachers? Are there learning communities, systems of mentoring and embedded professional development and non-instructional planning time part of the system in place? Implementing these types of elements may help attenuate some of the morale and attrition issues.

Question from **Fran Bollinger, Teacher, Cobb County Georgia:**

How would merit pay for inclusion teachers work? They certainly aren't going to have impressive test scores with Special Ed kids in their rooms, even if they are dynamic teachers.

Ben Schaefer:

First, merit pay for all teachers should take into account student growth as opposed to overall student performance. Second, merit pay systems should not base compensation on a single test. The success of a student is not due to one teacher. Groups of teachers influence a student's growth, especially in schools where teachers collaborate. Measures of student growth should be one component of merit pay, along with roles and responsibilities, professional growth, etc.

Question from **Bill Ferriter, Consulting Teacher, TeacherSolutions:**

As a member of TeacherSolutions, a group of 17 accomplished educators from across America that just finished a comprehensive six month study about alternative compensation plans for teachers, I think what I've learned is that most merit pay plans fail because they are built on premises that overlook the real complexity of the work that teachers do each day-- especially in high needs communities.

Do you know of any efforts to truly engage teachers in the development of merit pay plans? Is there a difference in the success of plans developed with significant teacher input and those that are not?

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

First, let me start by congratulating you on being part of such an important national effort to ensure that more teacher voices are part of state and local policy conversations to improve education.

You are right in stating that most financial incentive strategies are successful to the extent that they attract highly qualified teachers into high need schools, or to fill hard-to-staff subject areas such as math, science and special education, but there is not much evidence that they successfully retain teachers. Retention strategies are often not paired appropriately with recruitment strategies, and teachers who leave high need schools cite the lack of supportive leadership as their number 1 reason for their decision. Overall working conditions, a supportive mentor and school leader, inadequate preparation for the challenges posed by different learning styles are all issues that need to be addressed in high need schools if financial incentives are to have the desired effect on recruitment AND retention.

While I am not aware of many efforts that engage teachers in the development of financial incentive strategies, most of the pay-for-performance initiatives that have been developed recently entail significant teacher participation in the conceptualization and successful implementation of the plan. See for example the Denver Pro-Comp model or the Q-Comp program in Minnesota. Also, see the TQ Source Tips and Tools on Quality Teaching in At-Risk Schools (www.TQSource.org) where one of the key strategies highlighted in the section on the successful development of financial incentives is to talk directly to experienced and aspiring teachers about their ideas for creating incentives that will attract and retain teachers in at-risk schools.

Question from **Dr. B. Lentine, Educator, RTSD:**

I think rewarding teachers with 'bonuses' for effective and passionate teaching (and student learning) is commendable however, rather than rewarding teachers to teach in districts that can't hold on to teachers, we should focus on identifying the issues within the school and ameliorating the problems. This costly move is only buying time until no one wants to show up at all. How can we take the same commitment, passion, and time that we put into rewarding teachers for working in these schools to erase the problem. Why is more \$\$\$ a solution to keep teachers?

Ben Schaefer:

Incentives are a popular policy response because offering a bonus is much easier than trying to fix the underlying issues of hard-to-staff schools. To truly be effective, these incentives must be part of a comprehensive approach that provides teachers in hard-to-staff schools with the support, resources, and opportunities for growth that they need to be successful. In order to see the same investments in the working conditions of hard-to-staff schools, we must be committed and passionate in our demands for: 1) teacher retention as part of the measure of the effectiveness of an incentive program, and 2) incentive programs that are part of a comprehensive investment in the improvement of hard-to-staff schools.

Question from **Bill Ferriter, Consulting Teacher, TeacherSolutions:**

As a member of a group of accomplished educators that recently studied professional compensation plans for teachers over the last eighteen months, we had the opportunity to hear from Dan Goldhaber. He encouraged us to avoid letting perfection stifle innovation. As teachers, we cannot wait for the perfect pro-comp model before we begin moving forward.

But so many of the plans proposed lack insight and understanding of practicing educators. How can we do a better job elevating teacher voice into conversations about compensation?

Denver's plan has been a success because it was built with teacher voice. Minneapolis's work is built on an understanding of teaching.

Few others seem to share these essential traits.

Tricia Coulter:

This is a fabulous point! The importance of having the teachers' voice represented in compensation programs - from inception, through creation, into implementation, assessment and revision - cannot be overstated. As a member of a policy organization the onus is on us (me) to ensure that all our products, discussions, forums, etc include teachers. Hopefully, this practice will raise awareness as to its importance.

Question from **Margaret Gray, Parent:**

Do too many of the incentives focus on recruitment? Many teachers retire as soon as they can. Wouldn't it be better to retain experienced teachers who are willing to do a good job?

Tricia Coulter:

It is hard to disentangle recruitment and retention. The hope is that incentive pay will serve to both recruit teachers into hard-to-staff schools and subjects and keep them there.

It absolutely should be a goal to keep experienced, effective teachers in the classroom. It is also important to try to encourage these teachers to teach in at-risk schools to ensure that these teachers are equitably distributed to all schools.

Combining elements of pay-for-performance and incentive pay models is one method in use to respond to this need. Under pay-for-performance models, teachers are eligible for financial rewards based on their effectiveness. The incentive element would influence their choice of teaching assignment.

Specific to recruitment, any diversified pay system whereby financial incentives are given as salary increases, rather than one-time bonuses, may act to encourage retention as those funds translate into higher cumulative salaries and higher retirement.

Question from **Yvonne Coates, retired assistant principal, DC Public Schools:**

What has been the impact of incentive pay/merit pay programs and flexible career path opportunities for teachers as a means of retaining a teacher cadre?

Tricia Coulter:

Most of the programs currently in place have not reported on teacher retention. Part of the reason for this is the relative "youth" of many programs in relation to the definition of teacher retention - is a teacher retained if still in the same school for 3 years? 5 years? Still in the profession even if in a different school after a designated number of years?

A few programs have reported positive results for incentive pay on student performance (e.g. Arizona Career Ladder Program and Benwood Initiative in Tennessee).

Question from **Paul J. Smith, Ed.D., Facilitator, Accelerated Learning Center, Little Rock School District:**

How wise do you think it is for public school boards to accept private funding for teacher merit pay experiments? Many times this is for a private company merit pay scheme concocted without teacher input.

Tricia Coulter:

I feel it is always dangerous not to include the teachers' voice in program design. Important information will be unavailable and buy-in will likely be more difficult to achieve.

With that said, private money can be useful to establish a pilot program whereby an incentive program can be tested out, revised as necessary and assessed prior to securing funding through more far reaching methods (e.g. reallocation of education dollars, tax increases). The Benwood Initiative in Chattanooga, TN is an example of this method. It would be best, obviously, to engage all stakeholders in the creation of the program, regardless of funding source.

Question from **Marty Crawford, teacher, Maryknoll School, Honolulu:**

With all the move to merit pay and teacher incentives, how will the salary "pie" be affected? In short, who loses money to fund these innovations?

Tricia Coulter:

The funding of these programs is an ongoing question. If the programs work, a larger number of teachers making more money based on their effectiveness will stay for a longer period of time. While that has some real cost consequences, concern over this has to be balanced against the very high cost of teacher turnover – and these costs should be considered in both fiscal terms and in terms of lost student learning.

Options for program funding include reallocation of dollars in current salary structure and/or a tax increase. Often programs will implement a pilot project (Denver ProComp and the Benwood Initiative in Tennessee, for example) to test out a program, revise it as necessary and attempt to demonstrate efficacy prior to securing more permanent funding structures. The Benwood Initiative was initially funded through grants.

Since this is part of a state's education budget, generalities can't be made as to whether or from where funds are reduced to cover costs of these programs.

Question from **Maureen, Arts Education Coordinator, The Leonardo:**

It seems reasonable to offer incentives to attract and to retain teachers at schools that find it difficult to hire teachers. I am more interested in the question of paying teachers incentives based on performance. How do we define performance based standards that do not weigh heavily on student assessment scores since we know that those tests are limited in the capacity to reflect the range of student knowledge and ability?

Tricia Coulter:

Many programs also use teacher evaluation. Options for this include observation by peers and portfolio assessment. To ensure fair evaluation multiple raters should be used and a good system of training for the raters is required. These systems also require rubric for behavior with well-defined elements and examples of types of behavior by which ratings are established. The best know of this type of system is Charlotte Danielson's system (available online).

As additional information, an option for a student achievement component not based on a standardized test is for teachers to establish learning objectives. These can be approved created and approved in collaboration with other teachers and/or the principal of the school. Denver's ProComp (<http://denverprocomp.org/>) system uses this as a student growth component.

Question from **A Senate Staffer:**

what, in your mind, are realistic policy solutions/initiatives that should be pursued on the federal level. What is the "take away" that you think national politicians should have?

Tricia Coulter:

Quality policy serves two primary purposes. First, it focuses effort and resources to respond to identified goals. Second, it identifies and provides parameters for efforts and authority. Also, quality policy should empower, rather than inhibit, the systems it governs. Therefore, it should not be overly prescriptive as these systems are functioning in differing contexts with different challenges and advantages.

I think any policy should reflect these purposes. It should define a challenge and goal, make resources (funding) available to respond to these goals. It should establish parameters of acceptability (e.g. set out elements that should be included in a program and requirements for accountability). It should not be too prescriptive in order to empower systems to tailor responses to their specific contexts. It should be based on quality research and promising practice to increase likelihood of success. Finally, quality policy should have a means by which its effectiveness is assessed after a designated period of time and options for revision based on that assessment.

Question from **Alan Miller, School Counselor, Coquille, Oregon:**

One of the great things about teaching is that the professionals who pursue a career in education are motivated by their own intrinsic rewards. We do not choose education for the financial rewards or any other external "glory" that comes from the job. Do you think that such external reinforcement might draw a different pool of professionals to a career in education?

Ben Schaefer:

While I agree that intrinsic rewards are extremely important to teachers, salary and incentives do impact decisions on whether and where to teach. Teachers can love children and still want to make a living wage, or want to be paid for their effort and effectiveness. I hope that higher salaries and incentives for effective teaching draw even more dedicated, high-quality people into the profession. I am not overly worried about higher pay and incentives attracting uncaring people focused on making money. I personally do not think that a teacher can be very effective if he/she does not also care about the intrinsic rewards that you mention.

Question from **Bob Frangione, Teacher/Parent:**

What evidence is required to determine the effectiveness of teacher-incentives? What are the variables that must be considered?

Tricia Coulter:

This is an excellent question. Many incentive programs are created and implemented without consideration of – or planning for – the types of data that should be gathered to determine effectiveness. Basically, the data should inform the goals of the program. If the primary purpose of an incentive program is to increase teacher retention in hard-to-staff schools, for example, historical data should first be gathered to make available a good picture

of retention prior to the incentive program. A good definition for what is meant by “retention” needs to be determined – is it 3 years? 5 years? Then data need to be gathered on those teachers under the incentive structure to track their retention levels.

This example is for an incentive program that targets a high-need area and focuses on retention in that area. The issue becomes much more complex if the stated goal is to increase student achievement. In this case, the compensation system must be part of a larger learning-focused structure in which teacher evaluation would be used diagnostically to inform content or pedagogical challenges, for example, that could be improved through targeted professional development or mentoring.

The evidence would need to be teacher evaluation and student achievement. These are also complex areas. Some promising teacher evaluation systems use peer observation or assessment of portfolios. To ensure fair evaluation multiple raters should be used and a good system of training for the raters is required.

The use of student achievement data is possibly the most contentious issue in this area. While state assessments are often used, concerns there include whether assessments are available for all subjects (e.g. are art or music teachers automatically ineligible for incentive pay?) and how much of a student’s score is due to teaching variables versus variables or factors external to the teacher. Value-added assessment systems whereby a student’s achievement is projected statistically and compared with actual improvement is seen as a viable alternative by some but concerns over effects external to the teacher are still an issue.

The most important thing to consider in determining what variables to consider or data to gather to determine the effectiveness of teacher incentives is to be very clear on what the incentives are intended to effect. Choose data appropriate to the assessment of that factor and ensure the data systems available are adequate to gather those data.

Question from **David L. Hanna, Principal, Manheim Township High School, Neffsville, PA.:**

Here is THE way to tie performance to pay: First you have to have end of year exams for students like the REGENTS exams in N.Y. state. Then you give a bonus to the teacher for EVERY student that passes the exam (you could set a percentage minimum and reward for above that #). This will result in teachers wanting to have LARGER class sizes, and trying to KEEP students in their classes instead of trying to dump them to others. PLUS, the teachers will GO OUT OF THEIR way to help students to pass. Obviously oversimplified for space. What do you think?

Ben Schaefer:

My concern is that tying teacher pay to a test score creates a zero sum game among teachers. If we want schools that successfully prepare students for the 21st century, we want teachers working collaboratively to improve instruction, not fighting over the highest-achieving students. Teacher performance should be tied to teacher pay, but using a single test score to determine teacher performance will not work.

Question from :

I find it hard to believe that financial perks would not work to lure teachers into schools that other teachers want to leave. Is the problem in the amount of perks being offered--too little?

Brian Phillips Assistant Principal Saydel High School Des Moines, Iowa

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

Thanks for this question as it is a common misconception that financial incentives are not successful in recruiting teachers to high need schools when in fact, the research evidence is

clear that signing bonuses, housing assistance, tuition reimbursement, etc. successfully attract teachers. One persistent problem with implementation is that states and/or districts need to communicate/advertise the program and be clear about the eligibility requirements.

However, what is not as well documented is how successfully those same strategies work to retain teachers for more than 2-3 years. As I described in response to an earlier question, there are two factors that must be in place for a financial incentive strategy to work to its fullest potential: 1) The amount of the incentive has to be high enough to matter OR it has to be in the right form for the population it is intended to serve – loan forgiveness; signing bonus; housing assistance; or higher pay; and 2) The financial incentive should not be offered in isolation. In other words, rarely will a financial incentive recruit and retain quality teachers for hard to staff schools and subject areas if an associated supportive structure is not in place - a structure that includes mentoring, professional development, and effective leadership.

Question from **S.H., Sped teacher, Region One:**

Let's face it, most teachers aren't in it for the money. It seems to me that the money would be better spent on the supports that needy schools lack. Coordination, communication and family support will improve a school, not an extra whatever amount per paycheck for the teachers. It's not money that breeds success, it's experience, dedication, accountability (of students and parents as well as teachers and administration) and ingenuity. So...is there actual data that suggests that financial incentives work?

Ben Schaefer:

To varying degrees, financial incentives do attract greater numbers of applicants. There is actual data that shows this. Some would say this proves that financial incentives "work". I would argue that to breed school success, incentives must attract and retain high quality teachers. Without the teacher support and development that you mention, teacher incentives will not work for the good of our students.

Question from **Jim Bistodeau, MS Teacher, Custer County MS:**

I teach in a school that teachers want to teach in. However, like many places salaries are not keeping up with inflation. It has been discussed that to attract and maintain quality teachers in the field that a sizable sum of money be put into an account (through philanthropic means) and that the interest made be doled out to staff as a bonus stipend yearly. This is being presented as strings attached proposition. The money would be given out if state test scores showed noticeable improvement or maintained a certain level-call it what you will-it's merit pay. Do you believe that this would produce a "world-class" school system and take care of the teaching staff in a way that was more positive than negative?

Tricia Coulter:

Based on your description, this program shares components with other pay-for-performance systems (attachment of funds to student test scores). You don't mention if the bonus would be for individual teachers based on the scores of their own students or to all eligible employees in a given school based on school-wide performance so it's difficult to comment on bonus effects related to that.

The other concern I would have is the amount of money available. Much opposition to new diversified compensation systems is the result of experience with old merit pay systems in which a single pot of money was handed to a school and doled out based, usually, on principal evaluation. When the money was gone, bonuses stopped. This led to increased competition and ill-will among teachers as it was a zero-sum game. Is the interest generated enough to ensure that all eligible personnel or schools meeting a given benchmark will get a bonus? Also, I hope there is a quantitative definition for improvement levels that are published so there's no confusion as to what those levels might be.

Finally, compensation systems are only one possible element in the creation and maintenance of a “work-class” school system. Other elements include quality induction programs, being part of a collaborative environment, having non-instructional release time for planning and/or embedded professional development, etc.

Question from **Ann Williamson-Heath, Research Analyst, PAR of Louisiana:**

I'm new to this area. I am looking for quality reports on effects of teacher incentives. If the general concensus is that incentives aren't effective, are there also reports out there that offer alternative suggestions as to WHAT does attract teachers?

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

The varying effects of teacher incentives, in part, have to do with the degree to which teachers are involved in the discussion of shaping the teacher incentives for their school and/or district, implementing an inflexible incentive program, and implementing the incentive program in isolation. About a year ago, my colleague Susan Shapiro and I conducted a study (Adding the Critical Voice: A Dialogue with Practicing Teachers on Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Hard-to-Staff Schools), to find out what it would take to recruit and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. Through a series of focus groups in the Midwest, we found that teachers know very little about pay-for-performance, but if given the opportunity to voice what incentives are most attractive to them and would keep them at a school, what we found is that the voices are one of a unison choir. What incentives attract and retain teachers, we found, depended on the stage of life you are in and your personal circumstances. They indicated new teachers would select very different incentives than veteran teachers because of personal circumstances and classroom experience. For this reason, it is important to include teachers in the development of an incentive program. One approach is conducting state networking groups to develop a menu of financial incentives and pay-for-performance measures that would serve as a common basis for the conversation among and between groups. The intended result would be to increase understanding of various approaches to flexible teacher compensation by participants, and to assess where opportunities for change are most likely in states and local communities.

There is a difference between what attracts teachers and what retains teachers. We know that there are a group of teachers that are attracted to teach in at-risk schools and sometimes within this group, there are teachers who are educationally and/or professionally prepared to teach hard-to-staff areas in these at-risk schools. As mentioned by Jessica Levin and Meredith Quinn in Missed Opportunities: How We Keep High-Quality Teachers Out of Urban Classrooms, the current hiring and recruitment policies and procedures cause at-risk schools to lose highly qualified teachers. Teachers today have a greater sense of what they are looking for within a school community. For these teachers, professional development, school leadership support, and other support structures like mentoring and induction programs, and opportunities for leadership roles play a factor.

Question from **Geraldine Dahlquist, English Teacher, Lanier High School:**

1. Are the pay for performance programs being used to replace overall teacher raises? 2. Even though pay for performance is used in the business sector (i.e., sales) what is the rationale for applying it to a process driven arena like teaching?

Tricia Coulter:

1. Districts using pay-for-performance plans still have overall raises to base pay as part of their compensation systems. Pay-for-performance bonuses or incentives are often a percentage of base salary. They are also incorporated into the structure of advancement through teacher levels or tiers. 2. The rational for linking financial rewards to student achievement is the attempt to make overt the ultimate goal of any teacher – improving student learning. This is why pay-for-performance plans include some outcome measure of

student learning or achievement. While a complex area to assess, it is considered one "product" of teaching.

Question from **M Sorensen; PhD Student, Walden University:**

While the lead-in suggests that there is not much known about the effectiveness of programs that reward teachers for taking on challenging situations, I believe that Chattanooga TN has several year in a pilot there. Could you comment on this--as well as some of the uniquenesses of Tennessee's Ed system (County-wide systems which encompass both urban and suburban systems--pioneering efforts in Value-Added system which allows for the identification of successful teachers). Might these things be necessary precursors to successful programs to incentivize meaningful movement?

Ben Schaefer:

The program in Chattanooga, TN (Hamilton County) has been around for five years and has shown impressive student achievement results. The program is a comprehensive school improvement initiative that attempts to improve student achievement with strong teaching in the county's eight most challenged elementary schools. Teacher incentives, such as individual and school-wide performance bonuses, housing incentives, and free master's degree tuition, are a part of the initiative.

From your question, it seems that you could tell me more about the uniqueness of Tennessee's system than I can tell you. In addition to the unique factors you mentioned, Hamilton County also has tremendous support from the community and from the Benwood Foundation. I do not think that these factors are necessary precursors, although all are helpful to the success of the program. The major difference I see between the efforts in Chattanooga and other failed incentive programs is that Chattanooga does not focus solely on recruitment. The initiative does attract teachers, but it also supports these teachers to the point that the hard-to-staff schools are no longer hard-to-staff.

Question from **Melissa Eiler White, Senior Policy Analyst, WestEd:**

It seems like few (if any) examples of differential pay for hard to staff subjects or schools come in the form of increases to base salary--as opposed to bonuses, loans, or loan forgiveness. Are you aware of any states or districts that offer salary increases to attract teachers into certain schools or subjects?

Ben Schaefer:

In Clark County, Nevada several years ago, 13 schools had an average teacher tenure under 2 years. In order to attract teachers to these schools, the district offered an induction program during the summer. New teachers who participated in the program began their teaching careers one step higher on the salary scale.

Question from **Roger Whaley, Teacher:**

How would you structure incentive programs so that young teacher mentoring and school improvement efforts are not hindered? It seems to me that if you reward top performing teachers, they will be reluctant to share an of their experience and "tricks of the trade."

Ben Schaefer:

Teacher collaboration is important to improving instruction. Creating an incentive program that pits teacher against teacher will not work for students. If I were designing an incentive program, I would reward teachers for their performance. Performance would include professional growth, student growth, and taking on roles and responsibilities such as mentoring and school improvement.

Question from **Kathleen P. Milliner:**

I changed my major from Elementary Education to become a teacher for students with visual impairments because it paid for my last two years in college in 1967. Any additional training such as my Master's and my National Board Certification was completed because I got paid more. Most incentive programs are recent and have yet to be established for a sufficient time to collect data. What proof is there that financial incentives don't work? I even left the district I had been teaching in for 15 years to improve my income and increase my retirement benefit.

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

Thank you for submitting a question – it's exciting to read someone's story in which financial incentives positively impacted movement to a school where kids need you most. Additionally, the incentives enticed you to progress along the teacher career ladder!

I don't think there is any proof regarding the overall success or failure of financial incentives. There are certainly some triumphs and of course other instances where a financial incentive program did not yield the intended results. Charlotte-Mecklenburg recently eliminated funds for bonuses to teach in high-poverty schools because the program failed to lure teachers to these schools. The district has since announced sweeping changes in staffing to improve leadership, teaching, and achievement in the district's lowest performing high schools. As I stated earlier, the situation really varies based on time and context. That is why it is so important for incentive programs to be data-driven and targeted to specific areas of need. Furthermore, financial incentives can potentially affect teacher recruitment differently than teacher retention. For example, a one-time signing bonus that induces a high quality teacher to move to a hard to staff school will mean nothing in a year or two if that school does not have efforts in place to also retain the incentivized teacher.

I think we can safely say that two factors must be in place for a financial incentive strategy to achieve its intended outcome: 1) The amount of the incentive has to be high enough to matter OR it has to be in the right form for the population it is intended to serve – loan forgiveness; signing bonus; housing assistance; or higher pay; and 2) The financial incentive should not be offered in isolation. In other words, rarely will a financial incentive strategy successfully recruit and retain quality teachers for hard-to-staff schools and subject areas if the working environment is problematic - a highly effective working environment includes quality mentoring, professional development, and effective leadership.

Question from **Rebecca R. Herring, Chair Department of Fine and Performing Arts, EEWaddell High School, Charlotte NC:**

Is there empirical data gathering happening to prove or disprove effectiveness of financial incentives? If so, what is the status of the project; if not, why has this not happened?

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

There isn't a great deal of empirical data available on the relative effects of financial incentives. While there is some research that shows the impact incentives may have on teacher retention, there is a dearth of research regarding the impact they may have on student learning (see earlier response). Most research is done on a case-by-case basis. Having said that, here are a few examples:

- A recent Ed Week article ("[Teacher Pay Incentives: Popular But Unproven](#)") mentioned a data-collection effort underway in Virginia. They are documenting the effectiveness of an incentive program that awarded bonuses to teachers who went to work in Caroline county and the city of Franklin. - Researchers Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin have done several worthwhile empirical pieces on this topic using data from Texas. - Charles Clotfelter, Elizabeth Glennie, Helen Ladd, and Jacob Vigdor did a piece called "Would Higher Salaries Keep Teachers in High-Poverty Schools" and found that the program did reduce teacher turnover (of the targeted teachers). - Although results were not altogether positive, data were gathered and analyzed to assess the effectiveness of the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program.

Question from **Nancy Flanagan, doctoral candidate in Education Policy, Michigan State University:**

I recently retired, after 30 years in the classroom. I became a teacher--and happily remained in the classroom--because of the intangible rewards, the important challenge of working with kids. We know (from Richard Ingersoll and work done by the Teacher Solutions project) that teachers leave the classroom more often when they feel they do not have control over important issues in their professional lives. What suggestions can the panelists make for substantive non-monetary incentives that give teachers a greater voice in policy issues affecting their daily work?

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

Hi Nancy – great to hear from you and I was happy to see your name on the list of participants in the Teacher Solutions project. Your question is a good one and unfortunately there aren't any research-based answers that I'm aware of and can share with you. However, the emerging discussion in the education community about the need for more career advancement opportunities for teachers is one place to influence this discussion. Similarly, there is limited research about distributive leadership practices in schools and its effect on teacher retention, but that might be another place to look.

Question from **Jennifer Henderson, Teacher, Boston Public Schools:**

The student loan forgiveness is the best incentive, in my opinion. As a career changer, I'd like to know why graduate loans (Stafford) are only forgiven up to a value of \$5000, and Perkins undergraduate loans are forgiven completely.

Another great incentive would be severely reduced graduate costs, as they are required for recertification, and largely out of the teacher's pocket!

Tricia Coulter:

Certain levels of forgiveness are possible for both Perkins and Stafford loans if teachers teach in a qualified at-risk school for a specified period of time (usually 5 years). Perkins loans can be forgiven completely because they are available only to students demonstrating high financial need whereas Stafford loans do not hold the same eligibility requirements. However, Stafford loans can be forgiven up to \$17,500 for teaching math, science or special ed in a qualifying at-risk school (see [http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/cancelstaff.jsp?tab=repaying for more information](http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/cancelstaff.jsp?tab=repaying%20for%20more%20information)).

As to reduction of school costs, many states don't require graduate credits for recertification. For advancement to the next tier of licensure some type of professional development and/or school credits are often required but the specifics of that vary by state. (go to <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=1195> for a table of all state level policy governing requirements for recertification). Often options exist in any given state of which teachers are unaware. You should check with your state department of education to investigate this possibility.

Question from **Marilyn McDonnell, Assistant Principal, Riverside Elementary:**

Do any of these financial incentives lure new teachers to the typically hard to staff schools? If so, which ones prove the most effective? And, what is the turnover rate among those teachers once they have fulfilled the requirements attached to receiving the incentives?

Ben Schaefer:

In general, financial incentives can attract new teachers to hard-to-staff schools. However, these teachers do not stay, and hard-to-staff schools do not improve, unless teachers are given the support they need to be successful. In 1998, Massachusetts implemented the Signing Bonus Program for New Teachers. The program offered new teachers a \$20,000 bonus

over four years. This incentive attracted a large number of applicants, but the turnover rate for these teachers was high: 46% of the first cohort had left after three years (prior to fulfilling the requirements attached to the incentive). The most effective incentives focus on teacher retention and performance in addition to recruitment. In Hamilton County, Tennessee, financial incentives are part of a comprehensive approach to school improvement that includes teacher support and development. Teacher retention and student achievement have risen in Hamilton County, and the district has seen a reverse flow of teachers into hard-to-staff schools.

Question from **Cheryl Jaffe, Radar Engineer, Math Teacher, Mother:**

I taught middle/high school math during the 2003 school year. When I started teaching, my net salary was about the same as I had been getting on unemployment, only as a teacher I had to pay for daycare - I was financially better off on unemployment. When I left teaching, I went to an engineering job at more than double my teacher salary, and better benefits. My test scores characterize me as "highly qualified" in my field (perfect score on Praxis I math, 750 on GRE math, 710 on GRE analytical, etc), and I learned a great deal about pedagogy from my amazing colleagues. I feel it is fair to say that teachers are grossly underpaid, and that it DOES affect who can afford to teach. How common is my experience?

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

Currently the three areas that suffer from the highest rates of teacher shortages (due to a combination of teacher supply and teacher attrition) are mathematics, science, and special education. The National Center for Education Statistics' SASS data and Teacher Follow-Up Survey are great data-driven resources for unpacking this kind of trend. For example, in the 1994-1995 Teacher Follow-Up Survey, when teachers were asked what steps schools could take to encourage teachers in math and science to remain, teachers responded with salary, better discipline, more faculty authority, and smaller class sizes, in that order. Further, Richard Ingersoll's analysis of SASS data show that of math and science teachers that left their school, more than half cited poor salary or benefits as a reason for leaving. Salary is often an important driving factor for the recruitment and retention of all teachers, but certainly not the only factor. It may be the case, however, that salary is a more powerful indicator for the mobility of science and math teachers due to the option that some of those teachers have to leave the profession and make a, sometimes, significantly higher salary. This is not necessarily the case for teachers in all content areas.

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) hosted an Issue Forum last year entitled Addressing Personnel Shortages and the Recruitment of Special Education, Mathematics, and Science Teachers in At-Risk Schools. You may go to NCCTQ's web site (www.ncctq.org) and find several useful resources as well as copies of presenter presentations on issues pertaining to recruiting teachers for math, science, and special education.

Last, there are a variety of programs at the federal level seeking to address this issue. The Adjunct Teacher Corps component of the American Competitiveness Initiative seeks to encourage qualified math and science professionals to become adjunct high school teachers. In addition, the Higher Education Reconciliation Act of 2005 authorized up to \$17,500 in student loan forgiveness for certain full-time secondary school teachers of math or science.

Question from **Richard Tangye, Executive Director, Council of International Schools, London.:**

This was discussed at an international schools conference last week. There is evidence that incentives improve retention rates, but is there any evidence that they improve student learning?

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

There is little solid evidence that financial incentives, in and of themselves, improve student

learning. The connection that is more commonly made is that financial incentives can positively impact the recruitment and retention of quality teachers (which we have some data for and is a somewhat easier empirical question to answer), particularly in hard to staff or at-risk schools. To make that sort of conclusion, comparison data on the growth or impact on student outcomes would need to be gathered on groups of teachers receiving financial incentives as well as groups who are not receiving an incentive. A lot of these data are not available either because incentive programs have not developed a mechanism to track this information or because most incentive programs are still too new. One program that has been tracking student outcomes is the Benwood Initiative in Hamilton County, TN. A combination of financial incentives to both recruit and retain highly qualified teachers has been in place since 2001, and based on recent evaluation results, average student reading scores in the district rose from 77% in 2003 to 89% in 2005. To read more about this initiative, see the Chattanooga Tennessee Public Education Foundation report, Lesson learned, A Report on the Benwood Initiative.

Question from **Concerned citizen, Tallahassee, FL:**

How do you respond to the arguments that pay performance will create animosity amongst teachers and that it's not fair to hold teachers accountable for factors they cannot control such as lack of parental involvement?

Tricia Coulter:

I feel the first part of the argument is the result of experience with old merit pay systems in which a single pot of money was handed to a school and doled out based, usually, on principal evaluation. When the money was gone, bonuses stopped. This led to increased competition and ill-will among teachers as it was a zero-sum game. Establishing a system whereby any eligible teacher who meets an established, clearly defined target assessed through objective means will receive money does not lead to inter-teacher animosity.

The second part of your question touches on probably the most contentious issue in diversified compensation systems – rating teachers on student achievement which is affected by numerous variables outside the teacher's control.

Student achievement is an expected outcome of teaching and should be assessed in some manner (there are many methods by which to do so). However, concerns over the various factors affecting student achievement is one of the strongest arguments for having a compensation program that contains multiple elements – not just student achievement. Other elements include knowledge and skills gained by a teacher through coursework or professional development and teacher evaluation via peer observation or portfolio review.

Question from **Janice Zmrazek, Program Coordinator, state of Wisconsin:**

Will teachers ever get the respect as a profession, and the pay deserved for individuals doing such important work, as long as teaching can continue to be viewed by critics as seasonal employment - entered into primarily because the practitioners want their summers off?

Ben Schaefer:

No (although I'd like these critics to spend a few days as a teacher of record!). Prestige is an important issue. There is not a single answer, but compensation systems can play a role. When teachers are compensated for their effort and effectiveness, they will receive more of the respect that they deserve. Right now there is a sense that anyone can be a teacher. There is an important distinction. Anyone can be an ineffective teacher, but it takes intelligence and skill and effort and training and commitment to be an effective teacher. Compensation systems that award effective teaching is one step toward bolstering the respect for the teaching profession.

Question from **Diana Scalera, Assistant Media Coordinator, Region 5 NYCDOE:**

If financial incentives do not work, it would seem that they are not addressing the underlying causes for high teacher turnover in some areas. Some school systems receive hundreds of applications for jobs while others are "hard to staff". What are the underlying causes that leave some schools without qualified teachers?

Sabrina W.M. Laine:

Hard-to-staff schools are usually low-performing schools in urban areas or isolated rural areas. There are also hard-to-staff subject areas such as math, science, and special education. Reasons for not wanting to teach in a certain school, or for teaching at a school and then leaving vary widely. Research has been able to isolate a few of the leading factors for why some schools are not able to recruit and/or retain high quality teachers for their students. They include but are not limited to:

- Jessica Levin and Meredith Quinn showed in *Missed Opportunities: How We Keep High-Quality Teachers Out of Urban Classrooms* that high-needs urban schools and districts are often left without high quality teachers because of late hiring (and thus losing high-quality, prospective teachers to other schools/districts, often suburban). Similarly, some schools, particularly those that are hard to staff do not engage in targeted screening and hiring which can help build a faculty that is a good fit for the schools. The New Teacher Project has developed a program that the Chicago Public Schools will use to provide extensive training and interviewing techniques to principals in order to develop new techniques to identify and place teachers who are more likely to persist and succeed at their schools.

- Several researchers, including Richard Ingersoll, Eric Hirsch, and a recent paper out of Duke University which was presented at the 2006 AERA meeting have expressed the importance of an effective and supportive school leader in retaining teachers. For example, Duke University researchers Susan Wynn, Lisa Wilson Carboni, and Erika Patall show that teachers are more likely to stay in a school when they feel satisfied with their principal's leadership and with the school climate. This can be especially important for new teachers and for teachers in hard to staff schools where support is key. Effective and supportive school leadership can sometimes be the most important factor in retaining teachers.

- A third quite prominent cause can best be described as general working conditions. Teachers, just as any other professional, want to work in a setting that is clean, safe, and provides adequate resources to get work done. It does not seem as though we are able to isolate one specific working condition as the most important one necessary to get and keep a teacher in a hard to staff school, but rather teachers desire a setting that is relatively clean, safe, provides enough time for instruction as well as collaboration with colleagues, facilitates the ability to feel effective with the students, and provides adequate resources.

Kevin Bushweller (Moderator):

Thank you for joining us for this informative chat. And a special thanks to our guests for taking time out of their busy days to address your questions.

A transcript of the discussion is posted at www.edweek.org.

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