



Strategic Compensation in Education Reflections and Results

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Strategic Compensation in Education

Reflections and Results



The Eastern States Consortium for Learning & School System Excellence is a forum for school system leaders to address important issues related to student achievement and the preparation of students with 21st-century skills. The Consortium is one of several consortiums developed by the AASA Center for System Leadership.

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In most schools, 70–80 percent of expenditures are spent, in some way, on personnel costs. Salary, benefits, retirement funding, supplemental pay, sometimes even annual bonuses—all make up the total compensation packages that school employees receive. How these monies are allocated and spent shapes schools and their ability to achieve their goals of great teaching and learning. Using compensation “strategically” means aligning the finite resources a school organization has with its desired goals.

Strategic compensation asks us to think about how we can use pay (in all its forms) to help our organizations achieve their mission and goals, rather than simply seeing it as a cost to be minimized. We can start to consider why we are spending money the way we are, and what this expenditure gets us in return.

School organizations have a number of choices in how they can adjust their total compensation systems to match the strategic outcomes the organization wants and to meet specific needs. They also have options in deciding to what degree they want to change their compensation systems—everything from minor changes designed to meet specific needs to dramatic changes that fundamentally alter the compensation systems.

Why Strategic Compensation?

Most school systems would agree that the ultimate goals of maximizing achievement for all students and promoting and supporting effective teachers are part of their core beliefs. However, these intended goals and how schools actually spend their money are often disconnected.

Changes to the global economy call for a more competitive, better prepared and more creative workforce. Organizations are being structured differently with more matrix and team environments, offering less hierarchy and bureaucracy. Employees need multi-faceted skills to be highly-valued members of cross-functional projects. The country looks to our schools to provide students with the experiences, learning and skills to meet the needs of this new global economy.

Simultaneously with these new global pressures on schools is a stagnation, or even reduction, in base school funding. School organizations are now facing years of cuts in spending and will be forced to find ways to improve efficiencies and “do more with less.” With this, the focus has shifted to performance accountability, data-driven decision making, transparency and continuous improvement of organizations, processes, products and people.

Who we recruit into teaching and *how we retain* the best teachers are important. According to a recently released study published by McKinsey and Company in September 2010, only 23 percent of new teachers in the United States come from the top third of their college classes, only 14 percent of new teachers in high-poverty schools come from the top third of their classes, and 47 percent of new teachers come from the lowest third.ⁱ We also know that the teacher attrition rate for those early in their career is appallingly high. Recruiting and retaining the best and brightest is critical to maximizing student growth and achievement.

...it takes time, patience and dedication to continuous improvement.

In our current state of accountability and equity for all students, along with the demands that will be made upon our students in order for them to be productive and successful citizens, we must take a critical look at how all systems in our schools operate with an eye toward improvement. While strategic compensation alone is not some magical approach that will, by itself, fix education—when aligned as part of a comprehensive instructional and educator support system and executed correctly, strategic compensation does have the ability to:

- Increase student outcomes
- Reward or incent individual performance, input and actions
- Reward or incent team performance, input and actions
- Increase professional growth through teamwork
- Allow individuals to control their own reward or pay
- Link individuals to the goals, mission and strategy of the organization
- Assist in retaining high performers
- Assist in recruiting high performers
- Deter risk-averse people from entering the system
- Inform specific professional development programs
- Provide data to be used in evaluation and improvement efforts

Strategic compensation programs that look at change holistically have realized results similar to these. But, it takes time, patience and dedication to continuous improvement, reflection and learning along with a significant change to the compensation system for these results to occur.

Opposition to Strategic Compensation in Education

The term "strategic compensation" refers to the alignment of compensation with desired organizational outcomes. While this is a relatively new concept for educational organizations, some aspects of strategic compensation have been attempted before. "Merit pay" or "performance pay" are not new ideas and do not have a particularly good track record of success in the United States. In the 1970's and 1980's, the federal government and several school districts experimented with performance-based compensation approaches. Many of these systems featured small rewards and poor measurement systems, and were fraught with supervisor abuses where the compensation system was used as a retaliatory or control device on employees. Strategic compensation is different than these previous approaches in that it calls on organizations to align compensation with organizational goals and also provide supports and quality measurement systems to support the achievement of those goals.

We also know that pure "cash for test scores" schemes are likely to be ineffective. These approaches rely on a purely behaviorist framework of teacher motivation which would have us believe that teachers are capable of providing better instruction for students, but have been waiting for the right combination of incentives and compensation to motivate them to unleash this great instruction for students. It is more likely that teachers are already motivated to help students learn and come "hard-wired" with more altruistic motivations. Offering "cash for test scores" is not only likely to be ineffective, but also to be perceived as insulting to educators. In September of 2010, the National Center on Performance Incentives (NCPI) published their findings from the POINT Study. Partnering with RAND Corporation, NCPI conducted an experiment from 2007 to 2009, funded by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), to understand the influence of bonuses on middle school math teachers' performance in Nashville Public Schools in Tennessee. The resulting report noted that, "Rewarding teachers with bonus pay, in the absence of any other support programs, does not raise student test scores." Thus, the POINT Study experiment tested a pure "cash for test scores"ⁱⁱ approach to compensation over a relatively short-term period and found (not surprisingly) that it had little effect on student learning outcomes where no other supports or changes accompanied the compensation program.

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Typically, words like gaming, goal distortion, inappropriately- or poorly-defined measures, bad data, non-motivational, corruption, unfair, long-term and data misattribution are used by those who are opposed to strategic compensation in education. While seemingly negative, these concerns are legitimate and must be considered when building a strategic compensation model or looking deeper into district human capital reform. When poorly designed, executed and communicated, strategic compensation has the ability to:

- Have no effect on student outcomes
- Have a negative effect on culture
- Reward or incent the incorrect individual
- Reward or incent team members who did not perform
- Increase individualism and decrease the desire to grow through teamwork and professional growth
- Measure one thing and reward another
- Deter high performers from entering the system if the system is poorly communicated and goals are unattainable
- Use poor quality data in evaluation and compensation

Strategic compensation programs that assume change is a onetime effort that is not strategically linked or ever evaluated and improved typically yield results similar to these. Those implementing a quality strategic compensation system must be aware of all of these pitfalls and design systems that specifically avoid them. School organizations have seen dramatic successes when using a comprehensive approach to school reform and strategic compensation and when implementing with care and quality execution.

Support for Strategic Compensation in Education

Strategic compensation models are about a great deal more than just how much money an individual receives as a bonus because they performed at a specific level. They are an important reflection of the priorities of the organization—and the performance the group wishes to encourage. Strategic compensation systems take into account market realities in the teacher labor market, such as shortages in special education, math and science. They consider specific localized goals and shape the compensation system as one method of achieving those goals. Quality strategic compensation models vary from organization to organization as their priorities, local context and employees vary.

The building wave of support for strategic compensation systems has come from sources such as federal and state governments, significant levels of foundation funding, changing public opinion in favor of strategic approaches to compensation and success stories of districts who are making a difference in the lives of the children, families and communities they serve.

Government and Foundation Funding

More districts from around the country have become interested in strategic compensation systems linked to student progress and achievement due to Race to the Top, Teacher Incentive Fund discretionary grants and the research/funding being performed by such foundations as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. These groups have brought the conversation of paying individuals for their performance in education to the forefront of taxpayers', foundation supporters', districts' and teachers' conversations.

Race to the Top

On March 29, 2010 the USDOE announced that two states, Tennessee and Delaware, were to be the recipients of round one Race to the Top funding. Delaware received approximately \$107 million and Tennessee \$502 million to implement their comprehensive educational reform plans over the next four years.



Through the Race to the Top discretionary grants, states are given the chance to receive funding to reform their current education platform. Race to the Top winners will help trail-blaze effective reforms and provide examples for states and local school districts throughout the country to follow as they too are hard at work on reforms that can transform our schools for decades to come.

In August 2010, the second round of Race to the Top grants was announced, presenting \$3.33 billion in funding to nine states and the District of Columbia. The grant mentions that one of the four categories of reform specifically detail the, “recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining of effective teachers and principals.” The receiving organizations will all be diving into the strategic compensation arena.

Total future funding (rewarded this year for use over next four years): \$4.35 billion

Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF)

On September 1, 2010, the USDOE announced approximately \$437 million in TIF grants to school districts, nonprofit organizations and states who applied for grant monies and are looking specifically to reward teachers, principals and other school personnel who improve student achievement.^{iv} The majority of the districts rewarded were small to mid-sized districts who have committed to using strategic compensation and accountability data.

Total future funding (rewarded this year for use over next five years): \$437 million

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation plans to spend approximately \$3 billion in the next five to seven years on education in the United States. The Gates Foundation is dedicated to the education foundation belief that a “teacher’s effectiveness has more impact on student learning than any other factor under the control of school systems, including class size, school size and the quality of after-school programs.”^v

Specifically, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation partners with districts and nonprofit organizations who work to make advancements in school-based human resource systems and strategies. Of the foundation’s five categories of focus, one focuses specifically on teacher rewards. This focus is to “work with districts to dramatically improve teacher effectiveness providing increased pay and greater roles and responsibilities for teachers who earn tenure.”^v Likewise, in a *BusinessWeek* article published July 17, 2010, Bill Gates discussed current education centered foundation projects that are geared towards rewarding teachers. “The aim is to spur teachers to adopt best practices and learn from colleagues who are more effective in handling disruptions or instilling particular concepts. It’s an incentive to identify the exemplars,” he says.^{vi}

Total future funding (rewarded over the next 5–7 years): \$3 billion

State-Level Awards Programs

A variety of states currently have or are working to implement their own grant programs open to schools and nonprofits that are looking to reward teachers based on data. For example, in 2006 Texas passed House Bill 1, which included two teacher performance award programs, District Awards for Teaching Excellence (D.A.T.E) Grants and the Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG). D.A.T.E. began implementation in the 2008–2009 school year and has been reauthorized for the 2009–2010 and 2010–2011 school years. It makes funding available to all districts in the state who implement a pay-for-performance system district-wide or on selected campuses. D.A.T.E. was funded by the State of Texas at the level of \$147.5 million for the 2008–2009 school year and \$397 million has been appropriated for the following two years of the program.^{vii} TEEG, on the other hand, provides approximately \$100 million annually to the state’s most economically-disadvantaged campuses which demonstrate the highest levels of student achievement or improvement to be used to reward teachers or build programs for teachers.^{viii}

Total future funding (rewarded over the next two years): \$597 million

As funding that puts emphasis on rewarding teachers for progress and achievement increases, the traditional function and structure of pay will change and the new focus will be on integrated strategic compensation systems that attract, retain and motivate or reward the best of the best.

Public Attitudes and Beliefs

Proponents of performance pay in teaching frequently point to the private sector as a model. For example, speaking recently about teacher compensation, philanthropist Eli Broad noted, "I can't think of any other profession that doesn't have any rewards for excellence."^{ix}

While Broad has been noted with this comment, many public attitude surveys have found similar results. According to the *2010 42nd annual PDK/Gallup Poll*^x of the public's attitudes toward the public schools, urgency is emerging concerning changing the step-and-level single salary schedule for teachers. Findings show that:

- Three out of four Americans believe quality of work and not a standard scale should determine teacher pay. Parents also highly supported this notion.
- Three out of four Americans believe teacher pay should be very closely or somewhat closely tied to student academic achievement. This statistic has dramatically increased since the 2000 poll.
- More than two out of three Americans support paying higher salaries to teachers as an incentive to teach in high-need schools.
- Americans identified that they felt the foremost reason for evaluating teachers was to help teachers improve and get better.

"I can't think of any other profession that doesn't have any rewards for excellence."

The *Time Magazine 2010 poll on Americans' Views on Teacher Tenure, Merit Pay and Other Education Reforms*^{xi} concurs:

- 61 percent of those polled believe that teachers are underpaid given their level of training and importance to society.
- 66 percent of those polled oppose tenure for teachers.
- 71 percent of those polled support paying teachers according to their effectiveness.
- 76 percent of those polled somewhat or strongly agree that many of the smartest people do not go into teaching because teaching does not pay enough.

As more studies are released and more members of the public begin to put emphasis on teacher compensation and accountability, expectations for districts will begin to shift towards strategic performance-based compensation systems.

Real Results to Date

While the government and foundations are funding programs and the public is talking about change, real results yield the most compelling stories for change. Many districts are executing their strategic compensation programs as part of a comprehensive human capital strategy. A comprehensive human capital strategy involves understanding that organizational strategies and human resources strategies should be aligned. It is about using all means to support and improve the people working in schools. It is about aligning the work done in areas such as recruiting, hiring, on-boarding, evaluation, professional development, compensation, employee engagement and satisfaction and training with the district's goals and mission.

Districts like Houston Independent School District (HISD) in Houston, Texas use their ASPIRE Award Program to align employee's individual goals with that of the district as part of their larger ASPIRE (Accelerating Student Progress. Increasing Results & Expectations) educational-improvement and performance-management model. Through the 2008–2009 ASPIRE Award Program, HISD distributed \$40.5 million across 15,704 campus-based staff members whose work led to increased student academic achievement and progress levels during the 2008–2009 school year.



HISD launched this program in 2007 as a way to identify and reward teachers for success and as a tool for recruiting and retaining the best teachers. Since then, the district has awarded more than \$113 million in ASPIRE Awards making this performance-pay program one of the largest in the country. Following is an excerpt from an external analysis of the impact of the ASPIRE Award Program:

Both 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 are significant increases over 2006–2007. In other words, after the implementation of the current pay-for-performance program and the availability of value-added analysis, HISD was able to show a significant increase from where it originally was prior to implementing this program.

The magnitude of the positive cumulative effect of improvement relative to the state's distribution is quite impressive, especially for a district of the size of HISD (p. 8). Since implementing its pay-for-performance program, HISD has had a positive impact on both student-level achievement gains as well as overall achievement. The regression discontinuity analysis showed that when a teacher receives an award, there is a positive impact on that teacher's future student-level gains. In other words, if a teacher receives an award in one year based on individual value-added assessments, then he/she is likely to perform better in terms of value-added influence on students in the following year (pp. 8–9). Furthermore, the analysis shows that the rate of change in achievement level of students from year-to-year in HISD has significantly increased since the implementation of the pay-for-performance and value-added analyses. These findings lead the authors of this study to conclude that the impact of the pay-for-performance program has been positive on the educational experience for students in HISD. Given the evidence in this study, such an impact will likely persist into the future by continuing to use the pay-for-performance program based on teacher-level value-added data.^{xii}

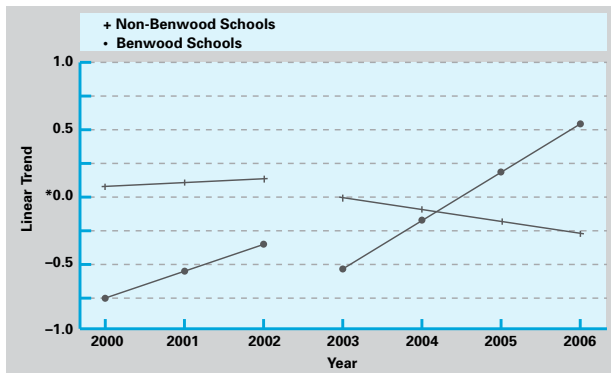
The Mission Possible program in Guilford County Schools, North Carolina has also made great gains due to their involvement with the System for Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) and strategic compensation. In 2005 the district started their alternate compensation program in 22 of their schools. The program rewards teachers and principals for meeting multiple measures including Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In 2007–2008 Guilford County had 99 percent of their classes taught by Highly Qualified Teachers. From 2006–2008, the district noted no principal turnover. Since the beginning of their program in 2005, teacher attrition has fallen from 29 percent to 11.7 percent, and the graduation rate at Mission Possible schools has increased by 3.9 percent. Guilford also surveys teachers, students and parents as part of Mission Possible to ensure that the district is meeting the need and addresses concerns.^{xiii}

Other districts across the country such as the Amphitheater Unified School District #10 in Arizona have experienced positive change through strategic compensation. While the district has dabbled in strategic compensation for more than 20 years, after receiving a TIF grant in 2007, they started Project EXCELL! in all of their schools.^{xiv} Thus far, all positions the district used to view as hard-to-staff have been filled with highly qualified teachers. Additionally, all 20 schools have seen statistically significant increases in reading and math scores.^{xv}

In 1997, Chattanooga City Schools, a predominantly urban, low-income, African-American district, merged with the suburban, middle class Hamilton County School system. Then in 2001, teachers in the Chattanooga system began to ask questions pertaining to the placement of teachers in schools throughout the district. They were concerned with equity of great teachers in schools that served the urban children versus suburban children. From these concerns, conversations started to occur around the district that change was needed. Between 2001 and 2007, the district, community supporters and the Chattanooga-headquartered Benwood Foundation worked to implement various educational reforms to ensure teacher placement equity.

This project became known as the Benwood Initiative, with the purpose of helping teachers improve the quality of instruction. The Initiative was a strategic human capital project that provided mentors to teachers, bonuses for performance, curriculum and instruction support and district leadership programs. The strategic compensation model the Benwood Initiative used is based partially on value-added score. Teachers have the ability to be rewarded with a performance-pay bonuses up to \$5,000 if they have gains beyond expected outcomes. Additionally, individual teachers can earn an additional \$2,000 if the schools value-added results show above expected gains.

Figure 1. Value-Added Trends of Fourth- and Fifth-Grade Math Teachers in Hamilton County, 2000–2006



Source: Special analysis conducted by William Sanders and Paul Wright, SAS Institute, Inc.
*Zero represents the average performance for Hamilton County teachers.

In Figure 1, you will see how the Benwood Schools dramatically increased their value-added scores between 2000 and 2006 in 4th and 5th grade math, surpassing the non-Benwood schools after 2004. The district attributes these huge gains to the Initiative and its human capital reform efforts. “As the Benwood Initiative demonstrates, individual teacher effectiveness is not a fixed trait. School systems can take many steps, as Hamilton County has, to improve teachers’ work in classrooms.”^{xvi}

TAP is a program that helps districts look to attract, retain, develop and motivate teachers. The TAP program is run by the nonprofit National Institute for Excellence in Teaching. Through TAP, schools have seen increases in student achievement and more talented teachers recruited to high-poverty and high-need schools. In the state of South Carolina, TAP districts have seen turnover rates above 30 percent decrease in a year to less than 10 percent.^{xvii}

Through a TIF grant, Texas TAP has seen great results due to strategic compensation and human capital reformation. Texas TAP serves 45 schools (urban, rural and charter) across 16 districts. “The most compelling impact of TAP in Texas is in the student achievement results at these schools. The Texas results from the 2009–2010 school-level value-added calculations showed that 22 of the 31 campuses in Texas received the highest possible value-added score of “5,” meaning students performed significantly higher than their peers and made much more than one year’s growth in terms of individual achievement.”^{xviii}

Another well-known human capital reform initiative was rolled out district wide by Denver Public Schools in 2005.^{xix} The Denver ProComp system has two main goals, to attract and retain high-quality teachers and increase student achievement. Originally, teachers have the ability to opt-in or opt-out of the incentive-pay program. When a teacher opted-out, they stayed in the traditional step-and-level pay system. Opting-in allowed teachers to walk away from the step-and-level system and provided them with the opportunity to receive compensation based on their knowledge and skills, their market value (if they work in a hard-to-staff or hard-to-serve position or school), student growth and their performance evaluation. Now, new teachers to the district are all part of the ProComp system. This initiative is seen as one of the most comprehensive performance-pay programs in the country due to its change from traditional methods of pay to performance-based pay. This program has seen district-wide student achievement results, including increases in student achievement in math and reading as well as increased teacher retention. In a district-wide perception survey, a majority of ProComp participants indicated that they believed the ProComp program could motivate teachers to improve instructional practices, with positive respondents outnumbering negative responses by a 3 to 1 margin.^{xx}

As the global economy changes, so do the ideas of individuals in all sectors around performance pay as well as the funding for such programs. As we can see from the multiple examples above, when planned, executed and communicated correctly, in collaboration with a comprehensive human capital strategy, strategic compensation can be used to attract, retain and motivate talented employees.

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About Battelle for Kids

Battelle for Kids is a national, not-for-profit organization that provides strategic counsel and innovative solutions for today's complex educational-improvement challenges. Our mission-driven team of education, technology, communications and business professionals specializes in creating strategies that advance the development of human capital, the use of strategic measures, and the implementation of effective practices in schools. We partner with state departments of education, school districts and education-focused organizations to advance these strategies with the shared goals of: improving teaching effectiveness and student progress; informing instructional practice in real time; recognizing and rewarding teaching excellence; and aligning goals and maximizing impact in schools.

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