

Career Ladders

There are many lessons the United States can learn from international studies like the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). We need to make a nationwide commitment to early childhood education, address the crushing effects of poverty, ensure every student has access to a well-rounded curriculum, and make sure there is a highly skilled professional teacher in every classroom.

To ensure that all children have access to great instruction, the United States must move away from failed efforts to fire and hire its way to better schools. Instead, we must learn from high-performing school systems around the world, which have policies in place to respect and support their teachers, giving them exposure to best teaching practices and the time and resources they need to develop their lessons. As stated in the AFT's report *Raising the Bar*:

“Professionals in the field must take primary responsibility for designing coherent standards, identifying what teaching practices are essential for beginning teachers, and designing teacher training so that students are given opportunities to experience and learn these practices.”

To create a true teaching profession in the United States, our school systems must provide the supports and structures that allow teachers to assume meaningful leadership roles in the district and the profession as a whole. These roles should provide diverse opportunities and choices for teachers to continuously develop their skills in and out of the classroom. One important way

to help create these opportunities is for teachers and administrators to mutually develop “career ladders” that provide a clear mechanism by which districts can capture the leadership and instructional capacity that already exists within their system.

By working with teachers to develop and implement a career ladder program, a district demonstrates its commitment to enable all staff to achieve their full potential, which in turn increases levels of personal satisfaction and improves job performance. But most importantly, a career ladder program builds the internal capacity of the school district to positively affect student achievement by using its most underutilized resource: its people.

There is no one way to improve and support the professionalism of the teaching staff in every district. Each district should design its career ladder program based on the unique needs of the district, its teaching professionals, and the students they serve.

Baltimore and New Haven present two examples of how this may be accomplished.

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS; BALTIMORE, MD.

The newest teachers' contract in Baltimore, which was ratified by members of the Baltimore Teachers Union in 2007, applies the concept of choice and opportunity by providing teachers with what the district describes as “self-paced earning,” wherein teachers can take control of their professional career through the accrual of “achievement units.” Teachers can earn achievement units in several ways, such as

It's time to reclaim the promise of public education—not as it is today or as it was in the past, but as it can be—to fulfill our collective obligation to help all children succeed. We have a vision that works, but we need everyone's help: educators, parents, students, civic leaders and community members. Only by working together can we reclaim the promise of public education.

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through professional development and annual evaluations. This program provides a structure through which the district can clearly articulate its priorities and incentivize its teachers to move toward those goals.

The system is structured using four career pathways that focus on mastery of instruction: Standard, Professional, Model and Lead. Movement from one pathway to another (for example, from Standard to Professional) is determined by peer reviews that weigh instruction, leadership, continual learning and student growth.

**NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS;
NEW HAVEN, CONN.**

Members of the New Haven Federation of Teachers recently agreed to a new contract that connects monetary consequences to the district’s landmark teacher evaluation system. Automatic raises will no longer be given to

teachers who do not demonstrate effectiveness, but raises could be earned through completed professional development. Those teachers with higher scores on evaluations will be offered teacher leadership positions, with a continued role in the classroom and an additional function of facilitating peer development sessions. Teachers in hard-to-serve schools will be given additional compensation. This differentiated pay system is aimed at retaining teachers and increasing the professionalism of the job.

There are a variety of ways districts can utilize career pathways and differentiated compensation models to build their workforce in new ways that can benefit both teachers and students. All models must consider the needs and resources of the district. Creating supportive, professional pathways are critical to ensuring teachers have the ability to share their expertise, continuously develop throughout their careers, and help each and every child reach their goals.

THE EIGHT ESSENTIALS

COLLABORATION

All stakeholders should be able to find ownership in a new compensation system. When there is ownership, commitment to find solutions to inevitable problems becomes intrinsic.

TRUST IN STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

All members of the school community should agree that the plan was developed based on credible standards of practice. Implementation fidelity throughout the system also builds trust.

SUPPORTS PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Central to a professional compensation system is the growth of the profession. It is not enough to simply design; we must craft structures that promote growth and achievement.

BUILD THE BASE

Successful professional compensation systems afford a competitive starting point in an effort to attract the best teachers available.



NECESSARY SUPPORT

Adopting a professional compensation plan is a statement in priorities. It is important that supports necessary for the plan to succeed are a priority for everyone.

UNIVERSALLY AVAILABLE INCENTIVES

Appropriate incentives should be available to all teachers. Novice and tenured teachers alike must find benefit in the new system.

STABLE AND SUFFICIENT FUNDING

Nothing will knock the wind out of the sails of an effective compensation system faster than unsecured funding. Plans should be funded in a manner that is sufficient, predictable and sustainable.

EASE OF COMPREHENSION

When it comes to change and matters of compensation, it is best that the details are as easily digestible as possible. There should be a clear connection between actions and results to encourage fruitful participation.