



TO IMPROVE EDUCATION, START WITH HOW TEACHERS ARE PAID

Study proposes broad pay and career restructuring to inspire and reward excellence; Plan comes in context of changes already underway in some school districts

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The long-established structure that determines how teachers are paid, as a growing number of educational leaders are concluding, needs an overhaul to enable it to meet the challenges of a 21st century education. That pay structure, which dates back to the 1920s, is based on a single salary system in which teachers with the same “paper” credentials and years of service receive the same compensation. Originally created to prevent favoritism, this pay system has become increasingly out of sync with current research, trends, and goals in education, according to a new study published by the Economic Policy Institute, and should be replaced. The question for schools then becomes: With what?

In [*Redesigning Teacher Pay: A System for the Next Generation of Educators*](#), Harvard experts Susan Moore Johnson and John P. Papay offer an answer. The authors make the case for a new pay structure designed to both reward and foster leadership and excellence in the teaching profession. This proposed new structure is carefully built to align teacher pay with broader educational goals such as improving educational outcomes and enabling school districts to attract and retain high-quality teachers. The structure also provides a way for schools to leverage the skills of the most gifted and accomplished teachers by enlisting them as trainers and mentors in efforts to raise the quality of teaching school-wide.

The study recognizes that efforts to create pay-for-performance structures have met with largely unsuccessful results. The authors built their plan on an examination of those previous and current results, positive and negative, to learn from and avoid the pitfalls of changing from a familiar system to an unknown one that poses such daunting challenges as deciding how to measure teacher performance.

The system Johnson and Papay propose has two interrelated parts. The “tiered pay-and-career structure” is a four-level system of increasing responsibility, professional skill, and pay, and through which teachers can advance as they develop and exhibit leadership skills. The second part is the “learning and development fund” for investing in the ongoing development of skills that advance the school’s core goals of promoting excellence in teaching and learning.

Among the school districts with pay-for-performance plans described by the authors as case studies are: **Houston, TX; Hillsborough County (Tampa), FL; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC; and Minneapolis, MN.** The authors also cite as examples of schools that have been experimenting in this area: **Denver and Douglas County, CO; Toledo, OH; Rochester, NY; Boston, MA; Cincinnati, OH; Montgomery County, MD; New**

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York City; and in the states of Alaska, Iowa, North Carolina, Missouri, and Kentucky.

About the authors:

Susan Moore Johnson is the Pforzheimer Professor of Teaching and Learning at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she directs the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, and formerly served as the academic dean (1993-1999).

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About the Series:

Redesigning Teacher Pay is the second volume in an ongoing series by the Economic Policy Institute on alternative teacher compensation systems. Editors for the series are Sean P. Corcoran, Assistant Professor of Education Economics at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, and Joydeep Roy, economist, Economic Policy Institute. In the first volume, *Teachers, Performance Pay, and Accountability* (May 2009) authors Scott J. Adams, John S. Heywood, and Richard Rothstein examined the popular idea that schools can improve performance by becoming more like businesses and instituting mechanistic merit pay systems. Not only would such a system not produce the desired results in schools, the authors showed, this approach has been largely abandoned by businesses as well.

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