



The Uniform

SALARY SCHEDULE

A Progressive Leader Proposes Differential Pay

For at least two and a half decades, political leaders and opinion makers have been telling teachers and union leaders like me that it is high

time to move away from the single salary schedule. For a long time it was easy for us to dismiss those calls for change. This was partly because as a profession we are more remote from the policy debate than we should be, but it is also because we believed that many of those engaging in the debate were ax grinders, more interested in dismantling public education as an enterprise than improving it.

Recently, though, with more voices joining the choir calling for change, it has become difficult to write off the differentiated pay advocates. The 1996 report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "What Matters Most," was a

wake-up call. Here was a report that placed the highest value on the teacher, even as it recommended "develop[ing] a career continuum and compensation systems that reward knowledge and skill." Since then, other important pro-teacher groups, like the Progressive Policy Institute, Public Agenda, and the Teaching Commission, have taken even stronger positions. In his paper "Better Pay for Better Teaching," Bryan Hassel, who is a researcher for the Progressive Policy Institute, raises the stakes by saying, "In addition to better pay, we must move toward a better pay system. We should reward teachers not just for experience, but for their skills, knowledge and, ultimately, the performance they bring into their classrooms."

Less obvious was the pressure from within the ranks of our profession. With the exception of Public Agenda's report, "Stand by Me," I have found little research on teachers' perceptions of alternative compensation. In Denver, however, my union, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, which represents approximately 4,500 teachers, and independent researchers commissioned jointly by the union and the Denver Public Schools, developed an extensive body of perceptual data that showed teachers as open-minded to changes in the ways they are paid.

BY BRAD JUPP

Surprising Data from Teachers

Though Denver had a typical salary schedule (see Figure 1) our data overthrow many of the preconceived notions held by teacher unions, school administrators, policy leaders, and opinion makers about how teachers perceive compensation systems. Since 1998 our union has asked its members what they thought about incentives for “teaching at schools with the highest percentage of high-need students.” By 2003, when the last available survey was conducted, the number of people favoring these incentives had reached 89 percent. The percentage of teachers who favor incentives for “teaching in content areas of short supply” is only slightly less, at 82 percent.

The union has also asked its members, “What percentage of your pay should be based on accurately measured student growth data?” Respondents were given multiple-choice options of none, 1 to 5 percent, 5 to 10 percent, 10 to 25 percent, and 25 to 50 percent. In 2002 and 2003 no single choice received more than half of the responses, but the fact that fewer than half of the teachers surveyed selected the first choice, none, is remarkable; it means that for two years’ running more than half of the union members surveyed believe that some portion of their pay should be based on accurately measured student growth.

In fact, Denver teachers have shown surprising open-mindedness about merit pay programs. The Denver Public Schools, with the collaboration of the teacher union, launched a Pay for Performance pilot program in 1999 and, when it ended in 2003, started a more comprehensive Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp). Our independent researchers discovered a surprising amount of support for merit pay by teachers in both programs.

The hallmark of the Pay for Performance pilot was paying teachers \$1,500 bonuses for meeting measurable objectives set collaboratively with their principals and based on the academic growth of the students they taught. When asked in the spring of 2003, just as the pilot program was ending, to rate whether setting measurable objectives for bonuses of up to \$1,500 had an impact on “cooperation among teachers,” 53.2 percent of the participating teachers said the impact was positive; only 2 percent said the impact was negative. While this positive response is certainly dependent on the special nature of the objective-setting process in Denver—a process in which teachers collaborated directly with their principals to set goals based on individually measured baselines for the students they taught, in the subject matter they taught—this response still flies in the face of preconceptions that teachers fear pay for performance based on student growth because it will harm collegial relations.

Even more surprising were the results that came from phone polls conducted in January and March of 2003 asking teachers their opinions on ProComp just before the vote to adopt the new program. When we ran demographic cross-tabulations of the results, we found that the teachers most likely to ratify ProComp were male secondary teachers with 13 or more years of service

in Denver Public Schools. Though perhaps influenced by the special circumstances ProComp created—it lifted a cap on annual salary increases that, due to our single salary schedule, became effective following the 13th year of service—the results refuted the stereotype of the change-averse senior teacher.

Puttering toward Reform

The common perception that current salary scales are set in stone also overstates the case—at least with respect to the Denver metro area. The salary scales in each of the nearby districts we examined displayed evidence of gradual tinkering in response to political pressure. I have not found rigorous national research on this subject, but comparisons of metro Denver salary schedules conducted during the development of ProComp found, according to independent researcher Douglas Rose, that all the public school districts routinely “showed strong hints of incremental deci-

Denver’s Salary Schedule (Figure 1)

With relatively low starting salaries and guaranteed raises over time, the current Denver Public Schools salary schedule is typical of compensation schemes for teachers. Each step represents a year of teaching.

	B.A.	M.A.	DOCTORATE
New Hire	\$31,320	\$31,779	
Step 1	\$32,971	\$33,454	\$39,169
Step 2	\$33,073	\$33,697	\$40,903
Step 3	\$33,225	\$35,101	\$42,642
Step 4	\$33,480	\$36,503	\$44,377
Step 5	\$33,785	\$38,053	\$46,251
Step 6	\$33,988	\$39,671	\$48,219
Step 7	\$35,421	\$41,337	\$50,290
Step 8	\$36,912	\$43,087	\$52,449
Step 9	\$38,456	\$44,924	\$54,702
Step 10	\$40,092	\$46,860	\$57,057
Step 11	\$41,784	\$48,843	\$59,521
Step 12	\$43,566	\$50,944	\$62,082
Step 13	\$45,546	\$53,401	\$64,919

SOURCE: Denver Public Schools

sionmaking.” When experienced teachers, for instance, want additional salary increases, steps are added at the top. And boards of education want to compete in the marketplace for entry-level teachers, so early sections of the salary schedule are artificially inflated. Lower rates of pay are also established for probationary teachers or teachers with emergency licenses. Some districts in our area have even made nominal efforts at reform. Denver has market incentives for teachers of English Language

Acquisition. Another district, Jefferson County, experimented for a couple of years with a program granting rewards to teachers for completing approved projects.

For all of the changes that have been slapped onto the existing schedules, however, it is safe to say they amount to nothing more than accommodations to internal and external pressures, small alterations that accomplish little or nothing

- A “menu” of extra earning opportunities, available to the entire work force, is spelled out, as are bonuses available to specific job categories;
- Teachers are eligible for every incentive earned—there is no cap on such earnings. A special-education teacher, for instance, teaching in an English Language Acquisition assignment and working in a school with the highest level of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch, would receive three bonuses, one for each of three eligible areas.

Merit and Battle Pay in Denver (Figure 2)

Denver teachers hired before 2006 have a choice between the traditional salary schedule and this four-dimensional merit pay system. Teachers hired after January 1, 2006, will automatically enter the new system.

Learning Gains

- Teachers who exceed expectations for student growth as measured by a statewide Colorado test will receive a sustainable 3% raise.
- All teachers will set two student growth objectives with the help of their supervisors. Teachers who meet both objectives will receive a 1% raise; those who meet one objective receive a 1% bonus.
- Teachers at schools identified as distinguished will receive a 2% bonus.

Evaluation

- Teachers found to be unsatisfactory will have their salary increase delayed for a minimum of one year.
- Probationary teachers will be evaluated every year in their first three years of service and will receive a 1% raise if they are judged to be satisfactory.
- Non-probationary teachers will be evaluated every three years, and will receive a raise of 3% if they are deemed satisfactory.

Battle Pay

- Teachers working in assignments identified as hard-to-staff and in schools termed hard-to-serve will receive a 3% bonus.

Credentials

- Teachers with active licenses from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) will be awarded a salary increase of 9%.
- Teachers who complete one Professional Development Unit (PDU) in their concentration will receive a 2% raise.
- Teachers who complete an advanced degree relevant to their assignment will receive a 9% raise.

SOURCES: Denver Public Schools and Denver Classroom Teachers Association

in the work lives of teachers or the learning of students. These are not the radical new systems called for by the National Commission for Teaching, the Teaching Commission, Public Agenda, or the Progressive Policy Institute.

What the Mile-High City Did

In Denver, we developed ProComp to take our teachers further down the road toward a new form of thinking about compensation (see Figure 2). Compared to the system that it replaces, ProComp is a comprehensive approach to merit pay:

- It ties teachers’ pay directly to professional accomplishments, including demonstrated knowledge and skills, as well as to student academic growth;
- Salary incentives are also provided for work in hard-to-staff assignments and hard-to-serve schools;

We also designed the system so it could be sustained across education careers. Using a financial analyst, we developed a 50-year model so that teachers could count on career earning expectations and not just pick up an extra bonus or two now and then. At the same time we built a system around a commitment to change. ProComp is grounded in a nine-year collective bargaining agreement, instead of the normal one- to three-year cycle. This should ensure that it is not a policy du jour, but lasts long enough to establish and prove itself. And we tied the system to larger district goals in order to provide clear educational incentives while keeping pressure on the bureaucracy to both perform and improve.

ProComp has its limits—it is rooted in compromise; the timeline for implementation is slowed by the need to build district financial and instructional capacity; it does not raise entry pay and provides relatively slow growth in annual earnings; many incentives are too small to really meet demands of the market—but I believe it points in some important new directions.

For people impatient to see the single salary schedule get out of the way, ProComp is not ambitious enough. In the final analysis, I think they are correct. ProComp is not an educational “silver bullet” or even

a comprehensive solution to the unsolved problem of how to build a new form of teachers’ pay.

We recognize, however, that we are in an exceptional moment, one where the single salary schedule can no longer support the pressures placed on it by the expectations of a 21st-century public education system. Fortunately, Denver teachers recognized those new realities. On March 19, 2004, the proposal was ratified by a decisive margin (59 percent to 41 percent) of union members, with 2,700 of the union’s 3,200 voters—well over half of the district’s 4,500 teachers—casting votes.

We look forward now to testing what we have developed. We want to use the momentum for change to improve both the teaching profession and the schools where our teachers work.

Brad Jupp is a member of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association and the Teacher/Coordinator of the ProComp Project.