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Building Career Scaffolds

Building Systems the Provide Professional Options and Encourage Professional Fluidity - Second in a Four Part Series

Much of the recent data on teacher attrition is disturbing. Some studies estimate that as many as 50% of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years. While some of those who stay ultimately move into administration, most of those who stay in education typically remain as classroom teachers for the duration of a career. The career scaffold is designed to give new teachers potential options and veteran teachers alternatives to administration.

Recognizing the value of professional options and change, the career scaffold concept provides teachers choices and new challenges. Career scaffolds also embrace the understanding that professional fluidity can be a valuable partner to the changing phases of one's personal life. And finally, career options offer teachers opportunities to utilize skills and strengths and pursue professional interests while advancing the mission and goals of the school district employer.

Professional options present new challenges that often prove to be revitalizing. I experienced this when I moved from teaching to advocacy. While some teachers prefer to spend an entire career in the classroom, others would prefer to remain in education but with less time in the classroom. Career scaffolds permit such movement and can institutionalize the type of mobility within a profession that keeps people fresh.

Career scaffolds also recognize and accommodate the changing phases in a teacher's life over the course of a long career. There are periods of time during an individual's career when a position as a full-time classroom teacher is a perfect fit. There are other times when part-time employment better meets a person's individual needs. And there may be yet other times when twelve month employment is the ideal. Career scaffolds permit movement in and out of a variety of options that best fit the needs and wishes of professional educators.

And finally, career scaffolds allow school districts to best utilize the talent it employs. Since highly effective workplace cultures depend on the internal leadership of its staff, scaffolds permit districts to take advantage of teacher leaders in a variety of leadership positions.

This second in a four part series will examine the structural component possibilities for a career scaffold. Specifically, this report will address:

- ✧ Length of work year
- ✧ Classroom time options
- ✧ Salary
- ✧ Qualifications and selection

Length of Work Year

Currently, the vast majority of teachers are contracted to begin the work year a few days before school starts for students in the fall and conclude when school ends in the summer. This “nine month” job, of course, does not include professional improvement obligations and other professional development, curriculum development, and other related activities. For our purposes here, however, these teachers will be considered **School Year Employees**.

The career scaffold advances the concept of adding options beyond school year employment. Three ideas are offered.

- ✧ **Eleven month employees**
- ✧ **Twelve month employees**
- ✧ **Part-time employees** (Although such teachers are common place in many districts, the career scaffold concept expands that notion.)

Eleven month employees would be contracted to work the school year calendar plus a few weeks before school begins and a few after it ends in the summer. These teachers may:

- ✧ Serve as a classroom teacher during the school year and in leadership positions when school is out.
- ✧ Serve as teacher leaders.
- ✧ Any variety of combinations.

Twelve month employees would be contracted to work a full year with vacation and holiday leave consistent with the practices of many private sector employers. Such employees would likely serve in a variety of teacher leadership positions.

While many districts already utilize **part-time employees**, some work place rules make it difficult for individuals to move from full-time employment to part-time employment and, conversely, from part-time to full-time. Career scaffolds are designed to facilitate, and if fact encourage, this type of fluidity.

Classroom Teaching Option

The variety of teacher positions offered within a scaffold approach embraces the notion that some teachers will spend the entire day with students and others only a portion. While teacher leadership roles will require people to be removed from the classroom for part of the day, it seems appropriate and advantageous for each educator to teach at least one class per day, as it may be important to maintain some regular contact with students, regardless of other obligations. The types of leadership positions (that will be addressed in part three of this series) will determine the amount of time spent with students.

Salary

Salary, of course, is a product of two factors; time and duties. The time issue is simple. Eleven month employees will earn more than nine month employees, twelve more than eleven, and so on. Paying for duties is a little more controversial and there are at least three ways of looking at this issue.

The first model is consistent with most existing structures; individuals are paid based on time only. A school-year teacher leader, for example, will earn the same as a school-year classroom teacher.

The second model is more consistent with some private sector workplaces; teacher leaders are paid more than classroom teachers, much like administrators are paid more than teachers.

And yet another approach is possible that we'll call the professional sports model; classroom teachers are paid more than teacher leaders, much like baseball players are paid more than managers and coaches. Interesting debate for another time.

Whatever the approach to salary, fluidity without negative consequences is critical to success. Issues related to pensions, seniority, and job security will be addressed in the final installment of this four part series.

Qualifications and Selection

The necessary qualifications required to serve in leadership positions may depend largely on the type of leadership. Or, it may depend on experience. Or, it may stipulate that certain degrees or accreditations, such as National Board Certification, are required. These decisions will be locally determined and will be further discussed in the next installment of this series when the types of leadership positions will be explored.

As one example now, however, let's look at the Leadership Council in Plymouth, Wisconsin. (See the complete details at www.edcomp.org by clicking on Compensation System Examples.) The Council in this small east-central Wisconsin school district consists of five administrators and five teachers. Their collective job is to implement, facilitate, and monitor all activities related to professional development. The five administrators are

selected by the Superintendent. The five teachers are elected by their peers. In this particular example, qualification is a direct product of interest and selection is a product of the peers' assessment of the candidates. This approach as been in place for several years and has served the district extremely well.

Summary

Whatever the specific structural of a career scaffold, its fundamental purpose is to facilitate professional vitality over time. Teaching is a difficult and challenging profession that can prove to be extremely taxing, particularly when assessed over a long career. Finding ways to mitigate "burnout" by providing professional options may decrease attrition and increase the attraction of new teachers to the profession.

The August issue of ECI Monthly will pull much of this concept together by exploring a variety of examples and explanations of various teacher leadership role options.

Thanks for reading and for your support of the Educator Compensation Institute.

Respectfully submitted,

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