



ECI Monthly

Publication of the Educator Compensation Institute
www.edcomp.org

June 2007

Career Scaffolds

Building Systems that Provide Professional Options and Encourage Professional Fluidity

Having spent my entire professional career either as a teacher or an advocate, I've learned that teaching is a far more difficult job than many realize. With a changing society and new professional requirements and obligations, it gets even more difficult each year. In part because of this, many young teachers leave the profession within the first five years and some veterans find it challenging to remain fresh and optimistic.

In an attempt to mitigate the difficulty of the job and reduce attrition, many different approaches have been explored and implemented. With some, professional development and teacher training systems have been crafted to keep teachers current and fresh. Others have attempted to tackle these issues with compensation systems designed to encourage professional vitality and new learning. Still others have implemented career ladders, built to provide professional options.

While all of these approaches may have the potential to be effective, many teachers continue to feel they have few professional choices during the course of a career - choices that could keep them in the business and energized. For those who wish to remain in teaching but not in the classroom, some view educational administration as the only alternative. A handful, like me, turn to advocacy work. Many of these teachers, however, would prefer not to pursue administration or advocacy. For them, the options are limited.

As noted above, career ladders have been designed in some states and districts to provide such career options. As an expansion of that notion, I propose the examination of a career scaffold. Unlike a ladder that only permits mobility in one direction, a scaffold accepts movement up, down, and over.

Over the next three issues of *ECI Monthly*, the concept of a career scaffold will be explained and examined. Included will be some of the ideas and

concepts from the work of Dr. Jack Dale¹, Superintendent of the Fairfax County School System, and others from ECI Contributing Editors.

The career scaffold concept is designed to provide professional options for teachers that are fluid (Teachers may move in and out of different positions.) The options are designed to permit teachers to assume a variety of leadership and professional positions at different points during a career. Most of these options will share a similar framework containing four main components.

1. Length of Work Year Options
 - a. School year employee
 - b. Twelve month employee
 - c. Part-time employee
2. Classroom Time Options
 - a. Full-time with students
 - b. Majority of time with students, minority of time in leadership roles
 - c. Minority of time with students, majority of time in leadership roles
3. Salary
 - a. School year v. twelve month contract
 - b. Some leadership positions paid at the same rate, others at a greater rate
4. Qualifications and Training

¹ In part, Dr. Jack Dale calls for teacher leaders in five distinct areas, all in addition to an educator's traditional role.

1. **School Improvement** Teacher Leader – 11 months of work that includes the normal teaching duties plus additional school leadership responsibilities that are shared with the principal.
2. **Feeder/Cluster Improvement** Teacher Leader – 11 months of work that includes the normal teaching assignment focused on connections and collaboration with schools within a K-12 cluster that students would attend during their school years.
3. **New Teacher Trainer/Mentor** – 11 months of work that includes the normal teaching assignment plus a focus on training new teachers prior to the start of school, and mentoring the new staff during the school year.
4. **Extended Student Learning** – 11 months of work that includes the normal teaching assignment plus a focus on tutoring and nurturing students performing below grade level. Such work would be done after school, during school breaks, etc. as needed to leave no child behind.
5. **Student Transition Leadership** – 11 months of work that includes the normal teaching assignment plus a focus on analysis of individual student's academic and social progress and coordination of support services for children needing added social/transition skills.

As noted above, the scaffold is intended to provide fluid options for teachers. During the course of a career, a typical person may move from a school year classroom teacher position, to a part-time position, to a higher paid leadership position, back to a classroom teacher, and finally completing a career as the highest paid leadership position.

Because of the potential complexities created by this professional fluidity, certain structural considerations and accommodations will be examined. Among those considerations and accommodations:

- ✧ Making certain retirement pensions are not negatively impacted by professional fluidity
- ✧ Maintenance of seniority
- ✧ Maintenance of Association membership

Starting with the July issue of *ECI Monthly*, this concept will be examined and ideas shared. The content of the subsequent three issues will be as follows:

July	Structure and components of a Career Scaffold
August	Examples and explanations of various teacher leadership role options
September	Structural considerations and other thoughts

While the coming issues of *ECI Monthly* will be devoted to the concept of a career scaffold, the issues should not be considered a blueprint for the implementation of such a system. Since every school and every state is different, the best final decisions are always made closest to home.

I hope that you will find the next three issues interesting and valuable. And as always, please send your ideas and thoughts to Carlson@edcomp.org. They may well be used in *ECI Monthly*.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Carlson
ECI President
carlson@edcomp.org