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Build It and They Will Come

While increased compensation will change behavior, make certain the changed behaviors are the desired ones

It's often said and written that people don't teach for the money. While such a statement may be true, pay does matter to teachers.

The literature is full of statistical and anecdotal data about the importance of teacher compensation. Within the context of my own experiences, I've often witnessed and documented the impact of compensation system changes and accelerated levels of pay on teacher actions and behaviors. Two such experiences follow.

In 1999, the Manitowoc, Wisconsin School District and the Manitowoc Education Association, through collective bargaining, entered into a new agreement that changed the focus of its compensation system. Instead of only providing economic rewards for additional years of experience and college credits, the parties agreed to add value to:

- ✧ National Board Certification
- ✧ Professional Development Certificate¹
- ✧ Completion of a Doctoral Degree
- ✧ Credits taken from the Manitowoc Public School District Academy²

The impact of this agreement on teacher behavior has been profound in this district of about 400 teachers. Prior to the implementation of the additional pay tied to the outcomes noted above, Manitowoc educator demographics were as follows:

- ✧ 0 National Board Certified teachers
- ✧ 0 Professional Development Certificate recipients
- ✧ 0 Doctoral degreed teachers
- ✧ 23% of the teachers had earned a Masters Degree

¹ The Professional Development Certificate is a research-based, portfolio driven certification program offered by the Institute for Learning Partnership, hosted by the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay.

² The MPSD Academy was created to provide professional development opportunities to Manitowoc educators that are directly aligned with District goals and specifically relevant to individual classroom application. Most courses are taught by Manitowoc teachers.

In January 2006, I completed an assessment of the change in teacher behavior. The findings were profound. The new agreement resulted in a significant change in professional development behavior:

- ✧ 14 National Board Certified teachers, with an estimated 30 by the end of the 2007-08 school year
- ✧ 24 Professional Development Certificate recipients, with an estimated 40 by the end of the 2007-08 school year
- ✧ There is now one teacher with a Doctoral Degree
- ✧ About half of the teachers now have a Masters Degree or equivalent³
- ✧ About 20% of the teaching staff take at least one Academy credit every semester

For a comprehensive explanation of the Manitowoc compensation system and a copy of the January 2006 report, go to www.edcomp.org. (Click on "Alternative Compensation Examples," then "Wisconsin," then "Manitowoc.")

The second example comes from Helena, Montana. In 2005, the parties in Helena crafted an entirely new compensation system that rewarded, in part, the completion of a career development plan and fulfillment of a professional service commitment. Additionally, and relevant here, the parties agreed to a drastic increase in beginning teacher pay. This particular change was implemented to expand the District's dwindling pool of teacher candidates. (Again, a complete description is found at www.edcomp.org.)

The impact was profound and immediate. In advertising for vacant 2005-06 teacher positions, the District experienced scores of candidates when in the past there were only a few.

There is no doubt that comparative levels of compensation and compensation systems matter to teachers. Like the rest of working America, compensation is fundamental to a person's decision to work.

Implementing alternative compensation systems in education is typically done to encourage specific behavior. In Manitowoc, for example, advanced and relevant professional development motivated the parties to economically reward specific types of behavior. It was impressively successful. In Helena, they wished to expand the number of teachers applying for vacancies. They, too, were tremendously successful.

When modifying compensation systems to reward specific behavior, however, extreme care must be taken, particularly in a field as complex as education. What may seem as a reward for performance or behavior may indeed result in unintended consequences.

³ Teachers are able to earn Master Degree compensation without earning a Masters Degree. Equivalent compensation may be achieved through the completion of Academy credits.

Without using it as a specific example, a program similar to the Special Teachers Are Rewarded, or STAR, program in Florida provides an excellent opportunity to elucidate the possibility of unintended consequences.

With STAR, and others like it, the “best” teachers are identified and rewarded based on the standardized test scores of the students. (Only a specific number or percentage of teachers, in such a system, is rewarded.) The implementation of such a system will surely result in a bell curve of teacher performance based on such tests. Does this mean the system has identified the “best” teachers?

While acknowledging the national debate over the value of using standardized tests in determining teacher quality (and without entering into that debate here), there are several other reasons to question whether the compensation system example provided immediately above will achieve its desired outcome.

While I have yet to see any compelling data examining the impact of such a system, it would be profoundly interesting to assess the real behaviors of the teachers affected by one.

A series of confidential survey questions for teachers working under such a compensation system, assessing any change in behavior from their earlier pay system, might start out something like this:

- ✧ Do you share strategies or information with colleagues as freely as before?
- ✧ Are you now more likely to manipulate or encourage the placement (or removal) of a specific child from your classroom?
- ✧ Have you examined the specific questions on the standardized tests?
- ✧ Do you now spend more time helping the students memorize specific questions similar to, or exactly like, those found on the tests?
- ✧ Are you now more likely to “assist” students taking a standardized test?

(If anyone reading this newsletter knows of an opportunity to implement a comprehensive survey of this nature, please let me know. We’d need a willing and cooperative district and teacher association.)

Using the same measurements, other similar compensation systems are designed to reward all teachers who raise standardized test scores. While largely mixed or contested, there are several studies that have assessed the impact of such systems on test scores. There are none, however, (as far as I am aware) that attempt to assess any other impact such systems may have on behaviors and outcomes.

In addition to the questions cited above, it would be interesting to survey teachers and administrators with some like the following:

- ✧ Has the curriculum narrowed, expanded, or remained the same?

- ✧ Has the amount of time your students spend with art, music, and other specials increased, decreased, or remained the same?
- ✧ Do you now spend less, more, or about the same amount of time on facilitating leadership skills with your students?

(Please note: I am not discounting the appropriate use and value of standardized test score data with these proposed questions. The use of standardized test scores is a subject for another [ECI Monthly](#).)

While I don't know the answers these questions would produce, it would be interesting to explore. Again, if any reader knows of a likely subject for such a study, email me at carlson@edcomp.org. And, I'm certain the readers of this newsletter have specific, similar questions they would want included in such a survey. Email those to me as well.

There is little doubt that appropriately crafted compensation systems will change employee behavior. There may be doubt, however, over which behaviors are changed. It's like they (whoever "they" are) always say, "Be careful for that which you wish. You may just get it."

Respectfully submitted,

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