



ECI Monthly

Publication of the Educator Compensation Institute
www.edcomp.org

October 2007

Career Scaffolds, Part IV ***Loose Ends***

Over the last three months, the concept of career scaffolds has been examined by ECI Monthly. Career scaffolds, like ladders, are created to provide teachers with professional mobility, flexibility, and options. The structural qualities of scaffolds are designed to permit teachers the ability to assume a variety of leadership and professional positions at different points during a career. This issue of ECI Monthly shall conclude the four part series by pulling together a few loose ends.

Since the centerpiece of a scaffold system is to provide professional fluidity designed to keep teachers fresh and motivated to stay in the profession, it's critical that impediments to such fluidity are removed. It's equally critical that new mechanisms are constructed to encourage and facilitate this approach to the teaching profession.

Certain accommodations are necessitated by the nature of a system that marks a significant departure from most current structures. Unlike most schools today, a scaffold may result in changes in the definition of the school year, the length and parameters of a school day, and the variety of the number of days worked by individual teachers. (See June and July issues of ECI Monthly.)

For alternative systems to function effectively, certain departures from the status quo are likely to be embraced. These new approaches are most effective when collaboratively implemented by management and labor. To follow is a look at four suggestions:

- ✧ Flexibility in the design of the school year.
- ✧ Flexibility in the parameters and length of the school day.
- ✧ Part-time, full-time, and twelve month employment.
- ✧ Avoiding unintended negative impact on retirement benefits.

Flexibility in the Design of the School Year

The previous three issues of ECI Monthly examined a variety of professional leadership options for teachers. A few of these options, like those involved

with transitioning students, may necessitate a change in the idea that all teachers must begin the school year on the same date and end at the same time.

The parties to an agreed upon career scaffold may need to examine the possibility that there may be two or more defined school years for one district, depending on the role of the individual teacher. For example, a teacher leader engaged with student transition from high school to the workforce may need to work through June, July, or August. It's possible that same employee may not begin the contracted year until December.

While such a change may seem inconsequential, it marks a significant departure from how we have long conducted business. As with all matters involving change, careful deliberations should be conducted to make certain the changes are understood, agreed upon, and mutually endorsed.

Flexibility in the Parameters and Length of the School Day

With the variety of leadership positions examined in earlier issues of ECI Monthly, a change in the rigidity of the school day may become necessary. It's very likely that some teachers may need to start the day much later, working into the evening. Others may start earlier than the normal school day, completing their daily work in advance of most.

This type of flexibility will be a product of work assignments and leadership positions. It may be useful to negotiate structural flexibility into some positions, recognizing that an individual teacher's day may not always be the same. Some days may begin at 8 a.m. while other days begin at 9.

It's important to keep in mind that this type of flexibility is designed to encourage mobility and options for teachers that best serve kids. Thus, a flexible day may not be appropriate for some teachers. Some may need to be able to plan each day using consistent parameters. For this reason, it is important that the workday parameters for each leadership position and teacher role are clearly understood, agreed upon, and mutually endorsed.

Part-Time, Full-Time, and Twelve Month Employment

In earlier installments of ECI Monthly, the concept of part-time, school year full-time, and twelve month contracts were examined. Flexible options like these help meet the needs of individual teachers at varying times during a career while providing needed services to the district.

Important here is fluidity. Teachers must feel assured that movement between part-time, school year full-time, and twelve month contracts will be guaranteed by the collective bargaining agreement, assuming position availability. For example, a teacher selecting part-time employment for family rearing purposes, must know that full-time employment will be

available in the future upon request, assuming proper credentials and a vacancy in a full-time position.

Avoiding Unintended Negative Impact on Post Employment Benefits

Most states provide post employment benefits for retiring teachers. The amount of benefit in many of these plans is a product of the final years teaching or the highest years of salary earned.

Since the leadership positions and contract length options built into a career scaffold may result in a teacher's salary going up or down from one year to the next, retirement systems must utilize formulas that will not penalize such fluidity.

An individual teacher's decision to work part-time or full-time, or work in a leadership position, should be made based upon the teacher's interests, skills, and needs, not on the potential impact on post employment benefits.

Summary

I hope that you have found the past four issues interesting and valuable. And as always, please send your ideas and thoughts to Carlson@edcomp.org.

The next issue of ECI Monthly will be released the first week of November.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Carlson
ECI President
carlson@edcomp.org