



Surveys Show Teacher Support for Compensation Reform

Less Experienced Teachers Are More Supportive of Differentiated Compensation

Robin Chait | November 2009

Policymakers have grappled in recent years with strategies for improving the effectiveness of the teaching workforce, particularly that segment serving students in poverty. There is a growing consensus that state and district systems for attracting, evaluating, developing, compensating, and retaining effective teachers are in need of a major overhaul. Three polls find that inexperienced teachers are open to reforms to one of these systems—compensation systems.

A number of promising compensation reform programs have shown that changes in payment structures often include upgrades to other systems as well, such as those needed for evaluating and developing teachers. It is unclear whether inexperienced teachers will continue to support differentiated compensation as they become more experienced, but these findings indicate that the time is ripe for targeting differentiated compensation to new teachers at the federal, state, and district level.

Targeting these new teachers is critical. Reforming the profession in ways that appeal to them could help increase the retention rates of the effective teachers in this group. Several forms of differentiated compensation reward the most effective teachers, hopefully increasing the proportion of highly effective teachers in the profession. And it is likely that these teachers will be more supportive of differentiated compensation as veterans if they have a positive experience with it early on in their career. If districts want to reform compensation systems more broadly, it is important that they eventually have veterans on board with these reforms.

This article examines findings from three polls—two are nationally representative surveys of K-12 public school teachers, and one is a survey of teachers in Washington State.

Public Agenda and Learning Point Associates conducted a nationally representative survey of K-12 public school teachers in the spring of 2009 on a range of issues, including their views of the profession, why they entered teaching, and their views on reforms. They then conducted special analyses to distinguish the views of Generation Y teachers³/₄those born between 1977 and 1995⁵/₄and older teachers.

FDR Group and Education Sector also conducted a nationally representative survey of K-12 public school teachers in 2008 about their views on teaching, unions, and a variety of reforms. They then analyzed some of the findings comparing teachers with less than five years of experience to teachers with more than five years of experience.

And the Center on Reinventing Public Education surveyed a random sample of teachers in Washington State in 2006 on their attitudes toward different types of pay reforms. They also conducted some analyses looking at factors influencing teachers' attitudes about compensation reform, including years of teaching experience.

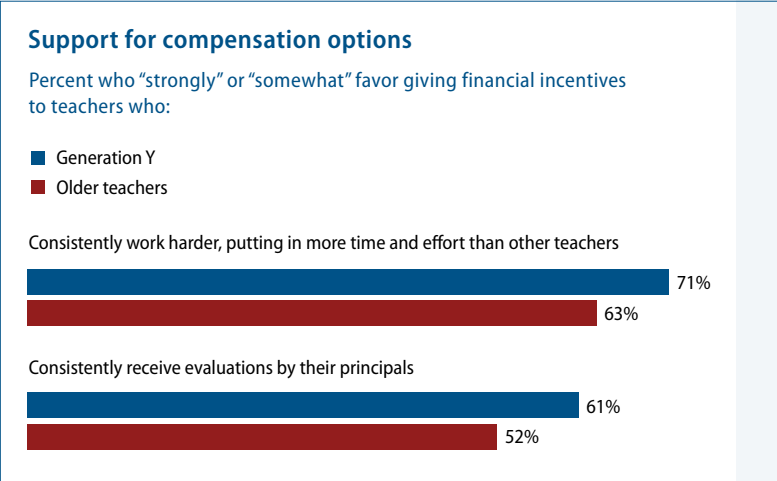
Some common findings emerge across these surveys.

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Inexperienced teachers are more supportive of pay for performance

Generation Y teachers were more supportive than older teachers of financial incentives for teachers who consistently work harder (71 percent compared to 63 percent) and incentives for teachers who consistently receive excellent evaluations by their principals (61 percent compared to 52 percent). In addition, 49 percent of Generation Y teachers say tying teacher rewards to their students' performance is a somewhat or very effective way to improve teacher effectiveness compared to 32 percent of Generation X teachers and 27 percent of Boomers.¹ All teachers were skeptical of financial incentives that are based solely on standardized test scores—only 40 percent of Generation Y teachers favor this policy compared to 52 percent of Generation X and 44 percent of Boomers. But they are more supportive if the awards are schoolwide—56 percent of both groups somewhat or strongly favor this option.

The FDR/Education Sector survey found that new teachers were more supportive than veteran teachers of incentives for teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations by their principals



Source: Jane G. Coggshall and others, "Supporting Teacher Effectiveness: The View from Generation Y" (Naperville and New York: Learning Point and Public Agenda, 2009).

(68 percent versus 52 percent) and teachers whose kids routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests (40 percent versus 28 percent). Interestingly, new teachers in this survey also expressed greater support for rewarding outstanding teachers in general (58 percent compared to 39 percent), even though the question did not specify whether the rewards would be financial.

The Washington State survey similarly found that less experienced teachers were more supportive of merit pay.²

Inexperienced teachers are more supportive of recruitment incentives and pay for subject shortage areas

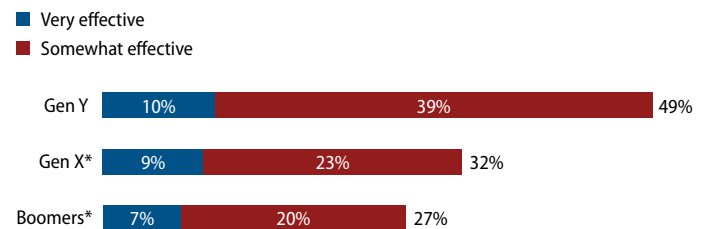
New teachers in the FDR Group/Education Sector study were more supportive of signing bonuses than more experienced teachers (65 percent compared 37 percent), and were also more supportive of pay for teachers who specialize in hard to fill subjects such as science or math (63 percent versus 50 percent).³ The Washington State teacher survey also found that less experienced teachers were more supportive of pay for specific subject areas.⁴

Most teachers are supportive of pay for teachers who are teaching in tough neighborhoods or low-performing schools

High numbers of all teachers were supportive of financial incentives for teachers teaching in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools (68 percent of Generation Y teachers and 73 percent of older teachers).⁵ The FDR Group/Education Sector poll found that new teachers were slightly more supportive of incentives for teachers who work in tough neighborhoods with low-performing schools than more experienced teachers (86 percent versus 79 percent).

Opinion on whether compensation reforms would improve teaching

Percent who say tying teacher rewards to their students' performance would be effective in terms of improving teaching:



Source: Jane G. Coggshall and others, "Supporting Teacher Effectiveness: The View from Generation Y" (Naperville and New York: Learning Point and Public Agenda, 2009).

* Gen X teachers are defined as those teachers between the ages of 33 and 44. Baby Boomers are those teachers aged 45 to 63.

Teaching in tough neighborhoods and low-performing schools

Percent who "strongly" or "somewhat" favor giving financial incentives to:



Source: Ann Duffett and others, "Waiting to Be Won Over: Teachers Speak on the Profession, Unions, and Reform" (Washington: Education Sector, 2008).

Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

Teachers believe improving working conditions is important to improving teaching effectiveness, but financial incentives and salary are still important

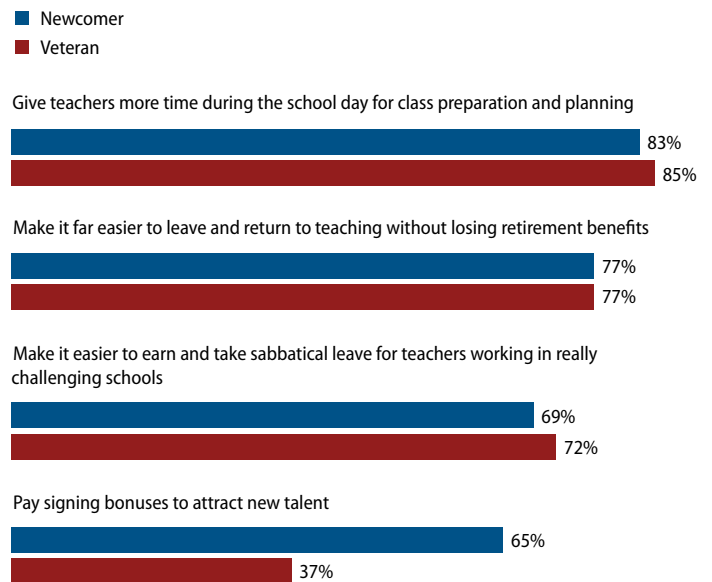
There's no doubt that working conditions are important to teachers. Most surveys of teachers find that working conditions are important to them and affect their decisions about whether to stay or leave a school. For example, the top three reforms for attracting and retaining high-quality teachers in the FDR Group/Education Sector poll were: giving teachers more time during the school day for preparation and planning (83 percent of new teachers versus 85 percent of veterans), making it easier to leave and return to teaching without losing retirement benefits (77 percent of both groups), and making it easier to earn and take sabbatical leave for teachers working in really challenging schools (69 percent of new teachers versus 72 percent of veterans). Yet teacher pay was also high on this list for new teachers. They cited signing bonuses to attract new teacher talent almost as frequently (65 percent of new teachers versus 37 percent of veterans).

The Public Agenda/Learning Point survey also found that teachers' top rated reforms for improving teacher effectiveness included preparing teachers to adapt or vary their instruction to meet the needs of a diverse classroom, reducing class size by approximately five students, and ensuring that students who have severe discipline problems are removed from the classrooms. Yet increasing teachers' salaries to levels similar to other professional jobs such as lawyers and doctors was still reported by many teachers as a very effective reform (47 percent of Generation Y teachers and 50 percent of older teachers).

Interestingly, when the Washington State teacher survey gave teachers a choice between three separate changes to working conditions and a \$5,000 salary increase, most chose the money. The changes included two fewer students in their classes, a new full-time teacher's aide who splits time between their class and four other teachers at their school, and 3.5 extra hours of time to prepare each week. Although it may be that these were not the right working conditions or that they didn't go far enough—two fewer students might not make enough of a difference to be worth \$5,000, for example, but seven fewer might.

Attracting and retaining high-quality teachers

Percent who rate each idea as "excellent" or "good" for attracting and retaining high-quality teachers to the teaching profession:



Source: Ann Duffett and others, "Waiting to Be Won Over: Teachers Speak on the Profession, Unions, and Reform" (Washington: Education Sector, 2008).

Note: Newcomer=less than five years; Veteran=more than 20 years.

Conclusions

These findings indicate that new teachers are likely to support a variety of new forms of teacher pay. They also support a number of policy implications.

- **Policymakers should consider targeting compensation reforms to teachers in their first few years of teaching.** Since teachers' support is critical to reforms to teacher related policies, policymakers might want to consider designing compensation reforms targeted to teachers in their first few years on the job and allowing veteran teachers to choose whether to participate in these new systems or keep their existing compensation packages.
- **All states and districts should consider providing financial incentives to effective teachers to teach in high-poverty schools.** This strategy is universally popular among teachers of all levels of experience and is critical to attracting and retaining effective teachers in the schools that need them the most. It is surprising that this strategy isn't used more widely.
- **Pay for performance programs should reward teachers based on a variety of measures, including standardized test scores and principal evaluations.** The polling data are clear that teachers are not likely to support pay-for-performance programs that reward teachers solely on the basis of standardized test scores.
- **New teachers seem to be more open to differentiating pay for teachers who take on additional responsibilities.** One of the surveys found that new teachers were open to rewarding teachers who work harder, and another found that new teachers were supportive of rewarding outstanding teachers in general. These findings suggest support for creating teacher leadership roles, such as master and mentor teachers, and paying teachers more for taking on these roles.
- **Policymakers should experiment with differentiated compensation, but continue to work to improve working conditions.** It's clear that teachers care a lot about working conditions, and while some working conditions are difficult to change with policy, others are more feasible. For instance, school districts could make changes to give teachers more time for planning and collaboration and help schools find better ways to deal with students who present severe discipline problems.

Endnotes

- 1 Jane G. Coggshall, Amber Ott, Ellen Behrstock, and Molly Lasagna, "Supporting Teacher Effectiveness: The View from Generation Y" (Naperville and New York: Learning Point and Public Agenda, 2009).
- 2 Dan Goldhaber, Michael DeArmond, and Scott DeBurgomaster, "Teacher Attitudes About Compensation Reform: Implications for Reform Implementation." Working Paper 20 (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2007).
- 3 Ann Duffett, Steve Farkas, Andrew J. Rotherham, and Elena Silva, "Waiting to Be Won Over: Teachers Speak on the Profession, Unions, and Reform" (Washington: Education Sector, 2008).
- 4 Goldhaber, DeArmond, and DeBurgomaster, "Teacher Attitudes About Compensation Reform: Implications for Reform Implementation."
- 5 Coggshall, Ott, Behrstock, and Lasagna, "Supporting Teacher Effectiveness: The View from Generation Y."