

# Revisiting Teacher Salary Schedules

*Is it time to review and re-think your teacher compensation plan?*

By Martha Gutierrez, PHR



**S**ignificant dollars are tied up in salary schedules that have not changed much through the years—not because districts are disinterested in change, but because it’s a tough task to take on, especially in a unionized environment. However, districts need to make teacher salary schedules a priority to remain competitive in retaining and rewarding a talented workforce who can help them reach the goal of improved student achievement.

A typical salary structure, illustrated in Figure 1, has steps that

represent years of teaching experience/longevity and levels that represent educational credits and degrees achieved. As teachers move horizontally through the salary schedule based on additional educational credits or degrees, and move vertically through the steps based on years of service, they have the potential to receive salary increases—in this example, ranging from 7% to 10%.

Some districts use salary schedules that focus on educational credits and degrees achieved rather than longevity. Teachers are frozen at a step until they achieve more education

experience (see Figure 2). This structure encourages teachers to take responsibility for their own professional development. Teachers who don’t obtain additional academic credits or degrees can still move through the schedule based on credits receive through district-sponsored professional development opportunities that are focused on district initiatives.

Allan Odden and Marc Wallace, in “Redesigning Teacher Salary Structures: A Handbook for State and Local Policy Makers,” suggest that most districts have maintained these traditional schedules because they are easy to administer and equalize pay for all teachers, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or grade level ([http://washingtonlearns.wa.gov/materials/060323\\_k12\\_handbook.pdf](http://washingtonlearns.wa.gov/materials/060323_k12_handbook.pdf)). More important, they are objective systems rather than subjective systems based on administrative impulse.

## Why Change?

Districts that use traditional salary structures may have difficulty attracting highly qualified candidates due in part to salaries. To remain competitive, districts need to take a good look at the salary schedules and determine how they can effectively allocate funds to recognize teacher performance, educational credits, and longevity, while ensuring funds are available to promote student achievement.

In their white paper, Odden and Wallace address what other districts have done related to bonuses

STEP	LEVEL								
	BA	BA+10	BA+20	MA	MA+10	MA+20	MA+30	MA+40	MA+50
0	\$34,663	\$35,345	\$36,363	\$38,158	\$39,372	\$40,393	\$41,418	\$43,070	\$44,108
1	\$35,975	\$36,662	\$37,680	\$39,477	\$40,694	\$41,717	\$43,184	\$44,629	\$45,673
2	\$37,283	\$37,979	\$38,996	\$40,792	\$42,018	\$43,254	\$44,500	\$46,049	\$47,707
3	\$38,595	\$39,296	\$40,314	\$42,109	\$43,771	\$44,804	\$45,837	\$48,249	\$49,780
4	\$40,105	\$40,813	\$41,832	\$43,427	\$45,548	\$46,593	\$48,098	\$50,333	\$52,135
5	\$41,421	\$41,930	\$42,947	\$44,744	\$47,355	\$48,408	\$50,412	\$52,456	\$54,293
6	\$42,739	\$43,247	\$44,265	\$46,747	\$48,718	\$50,489	\$52,778	\$54,820	\$56,747
7	\$44,720	\$45,141	\$46,166	\$48,823	\$50,777	\$52,808	\$54,921	\$57,117	\$59,401
8	\$46,493	\$47,405	\$48,301	\$51,273	\$53,326	\$55,457	\$57,676	\$59,981	\$62,380
9	\$48,596	\$49,539	\$51,519	\$53,862	\$55,725	\$57,954	\$60,271	\$62,882	\$65,189
10	\$50,772	\$51,788	\$53,838	\$55,991	\$58,231	\$60,560	\$62,984	\$65,504	\$68,124
11	\$53,057	\$54,066	\$56,261	\$58,512	\$60,852	\$63,287	\$65,817	\$68,450	\$71,187
12	\$55,445	\$56,532	\$58,794	\$61,144	\$63,589	\$66,134	\$68,780	\$71,531	\$74,392
13	\$57,939	\$59,076	\$61,440	\$63,895	\$66,451	\$69,110	\$71,874	\$74,746	\$77,741
14	\$60,549	\$61,734	\$64,204	\$66,771	\$69,443	\$72,221	\$75,109	\$78,113	\$81,237
15	\$63,272	\$64,512	\$67,093	\$69,777	\$72,568	\$75,471	\$78,488	\$81,627	\$84,893
16	\$66,119	\$67,415	\$70,113	\$72,918	\$75,833	\$78,866	\$82,021	\$85,301	\$88,712

Figure 1. Salary Schedule Rewarding Longevity and Educational Achievement

STEP	LEVEL								
	BA	BA+10	BA+20	MA	MA+10	MA+20	MA+30	MA+40	MA+50
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Figure 2. Salary Schedule Rewarding Longevity after Educational Achievement

for student achievement, salary structures that reward knowledge and skills (professional practice), designing and implementing pay changes, and measuring teacher performance. They found that districts that changed salary structures made changes based on strategic initiatives of the educational system and linked teacher pay changes to core educational goals.

### Considering Alternatives

Broadbanded salary structures, popular in non-education settings since the 1990s, offer one alternative to the traditional salary schedule. According to management consulting firm Stern & Associates, broad banding is

“the consolidating of traditional pay structures consisting of many narrow pay ranges into fewer, wider ranges or bands” ([www.hrconsultant.com/articles-whitepapers/broadbanded.html](http://www.hrconsultant.com/articles-whitepapers/broadbanded.html)).

Most broadbanded salary structures are competency-based pay programs that reward performance and longevity and are linked to market-benchmarked jobs (see Figure 3). Each band has a pay range with minimum to maximum points. So unlike traditional salary structures with many grades, a broadbanded pay structure has fewer bands with large pay ranges within each band. These bands might consider new hires who are inexperienced, those who are developing their skill set, those who are experienced, and those who have honed their craft and are leaders and coaches to their peers while taking on higher-level projects outside their regular duties.

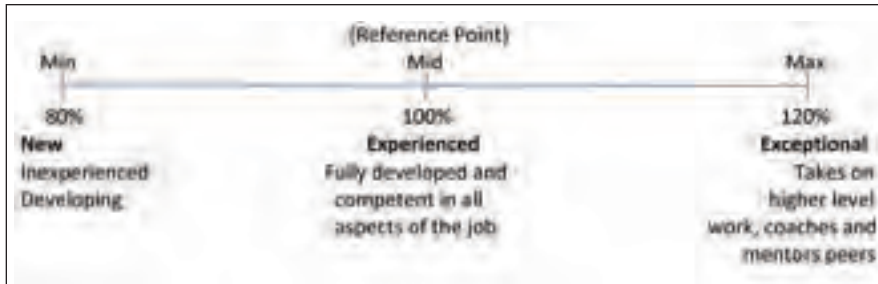
The broadband structure also has a reference point—the market rate for the job—which is equivalent to the mid-point or up to the maximum of the range, depending on the pay progression method. An experienced recruit would begin at a point on the range that mirrors that of existing staff with similar experience. An exceptional, fully competent recruit fulfilling all aspects of the job description would be placed toward the maximum point of the range. The bands would take

into consideration current staff members’ compensation within the newly created structure.

Broadbanding may result in all staff members receiving the same percentage of salary increase. Because the broadbanded salary structure may not include increases for educational credits and degrees obtained, funds earmarked for those increases can instead be allocated for teacher initiatives geared toward improving student achievement, such as professional development, teacher mentoring and teacher leader programs. This type of salary structure would need to be negotiated in a unionized environment.

Other teacher compensation models show innovation and creativity. The U.S. Department of Education





**Figure 3.** Broadbanded Salary Scale

describes several ([www.ed.gov/oii-news/teacher-compensation](http://www.ed.gov/oii-news/teacher-compensation)) including:

- Denver Public Schools and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association designed and implemented ProComp in 2005. The compensation system replaces the single salary schedule with a system of incentives for specific accomplishments, including school- and classroom-wide student growth, working in hard-to-serve schools and hard-to-staff assignments, acquiring and demonstrating skills and knowledge, and earning a satisfactory or better evaluation. (<http://denverprocomp.dpsk12.org/about/>)
- Harrison School District Two in Colorado implemented the Effectiveness and Results plan, which pays teachers based on student achievement data and teacher performance data (primarily teacher observations). To progress from one level to the next, teachers must meet criteria for both performance and student achievement ([www.hsd2.org/departments/rda/pay-performance](http://www.hsd2.org/departments/rda/pay-performance)).
- District of Columbia Public Schools performance-based pay system for teachers, known as IMPACTplus, is designed to reward highly effective teachers with annual bonuses. The plan relies on a teacher evaluation system to identify teachers as highly effective based on value-added data. (<http://dcps>

[dc.gov/DCPS/In+the+Classroom/Ensuring+Teacher+Success/IMPACT+\(Performance+Assessment\)/An+Overview+of+IMPACT](http://dc.gov/DCPS/In+the+Classroom/Ensuring+Teacher+Success/IMPACT+(Performance+Assessment)/An+Overview+of+IMPACT)).

### What's Next?

In a series of papers on teacher compensation published by the University of Wisconsin Consortium for Policy Research in Education, the authors take a detailed look at teacher compensation, including the advantages and disadvantages of changing teacher compensation and how to fund changes (<http://cpre.wceruw.org/tcomp/research/>).

In one of the papers, “How to Fund Teacher Compensation

Changes,” Allan Odden concludes, “Changing teacher compensation structures is an idea whose time has come. The traditional version of the single salary schedule no longer reinforces the goals and strategies of education reform today, nor supports the initiatives education systems must take to boost teacher quality.” He suggests that districts use the current salary budget to fund the new salary structure, and to “put all teachers on a new salary structure as quickly as possible; by transitioning all teachers at current salary levels so no one loses pay in the transition. The new salary structure would set the rules for future salary increases.”

Changing salary structures may not be needed for districts that do not have significant concerns with their budgets, but as public education continues to change, school districts may not have any option but to explore other salary structures.

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