“The teacher has to have the energy of the hottest volcano, the memory of an elephant and the diplomacy of an ambassador...a teacher has to have love and knowledge and use this combined passion to be able to accomplish something.”

JAIME ESCALANTE, Los Angeles Teacher
ExEcuTivE Summary

THE PROBLEM WITH TEACHER COMPENSATION

To meet the highest bar for their students, teachers must innovate, create and grow throughout their careers. Yet this is not how we currently incentivize and compensate excellent teachers. If our students wanted to become teachers (and own a home in Los Angeles), there would be three ways they could earn more money. They could stay in the system for many years; they could complete graduate credits; or they could take on additional duties, which may or may not appeal to their interests or even be available to teachers without seniority. All of these options are time dependent, and none communicate the goal-oriented, collaboration-focused, ambitious and creative work teaching requires.

As teachers from across Los Angeles, we came together with the mindset that, while money alone will not solve the issues of our education system, compensation can and should be used as one important lever for encouraging, recognizing and inspiring best practices such as collaboration, the use of robust data and constant professional growth.

DIGGING INTO ROOT CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

In the spring of 2014, 13 educators from every corner of Los Angeles came together to understand the history and potential future of teacher compensation. We recognized that the political backdrop for this issue was polarizing—even toxic at times. We knew critics railed against compensation reform, arguing that the art of teaching can never be quantified into test scores or dollar signs or that attempts to reward individual teacher impact would inspire rugged individualism instead of collaboration. We heard the staunch supporters insisting that compensation reform is the magic tonic for attracting and retaining top talent to teach.

In the end, we respectfully reject both of these extreme ideologies. We believe there is a rational middle ground—one that recognizes that money, alone, will not solve the problems of public education but can be used as one of many levers to incentivize the kind of teaching beliefs and behaviors that correlate with improved student outcomes. We want to see compensation systems evolve in a way that recognizes the needs of our current and changing generation of teachers. We used research, in addition to our own classroom experiences, and polled hundreds of our colleagues for their views on how compensation can elevate student achievement and the teaching profession. Where there was less than 75% teacher support for our initial policy ideas, our Teacher Policy Team reexamined and reworked our recommendations to address key concerns. We recommend a rational approach, one that neither perpetuates an archaic structure nor overhauls a system that in many ways has provided clarity and consistency for the teaching profession through many waves of reform.

Specifically, our rational plan includes the following recommendations designed to get great teachers into the doors of our classrooms, incentivize professional growth and keep great teachers for the long term.
Solutions to Get Great Teachers in the Door

Incentives for Hard-to-Staff Positions

There is an impending overall teacher shortage, but certain subject areas fare worse than others. These include math, science, special education and bilingual education, for which schools have a harder time finding qualified candidates. The district should offer incentives for highly qualified candidates for hard-to-staff positions.

The incentive should be given in two parts. The first should address the challenge of teacher recruitment. An upfront signing bonus may help put the teaching pay scale on an equal level with other career choices available to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) majors or to reflect the amount of training necessary for special education or bilingual educators. The second allocation should address root causes for attrition. A separate pool of money should be earmarked specifically for the mentorship, professional development and support of these teachers.

Ultimately, the work of teachers is to meet students where they are and grow them to where they need to be. However, the education debate is often stalled in defining how this growth should be measured. Our district should develop a clear, consistent, high-quality library of assessments to define student mastery and growth for all grade levels and subject areas, including state assessments where appropriate, aligned and available. The district could then use these growth goals to offer bonuses to teachers who meet and exceed them.

Instead of an immediate full rollout, this should be a multiphase project. First, the district must invest in the underlying infrastructure for such a system. They should then select teachers from across all subject areas and across the district to develop high-quality end-of-course assessments. Only once this infrastructure is in place can the district begin using these measures for incentives.

**SOLUTIONS TO INCENTIVIZE ONGOING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**

**INCENTIVES FOR MASTERY-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

In our current system, teachers can accrue "points" toward the next salary step increase by completing professional development (PD) courses. The problem is that professional development opportunities aren't always connected to the growth areas for teachers or the needs of students and schools. As teachers, we often find professional development to be so disconnected from our actual classroom practice that it becomes a new checkbox to be marked rather than a meaningful learning experience.2

Moving the teaching profession into the 21st century

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also means reimaging our professional development system. The district should replace the current system of professional development salary points with a mastery-based system. This system should allow teachers to have PD “focus areas” that align to the eight state education priority areas under the Local Control Funding Formula, which include needs such as Common Core implementation and school climate.\(^3\) The district would develop a rubric for how a teacher could “master” each PD focus area. Teachers would achieve PD mastery by teaching the learned skill to others or providing evidence of impact on students or impact on the community. The district would also establish a range of how many salary points a teacher could earn for each mastered area of focus. The school leadership team would then decide the specific salary point worth for each PD focus area based on the needs of their school site.

**INCENTIVES FOR EXCELLENT IN LEADERSHIP ROLES**

As teachers build more mastery, they will want, need and deserve opportunities to share that expertise with others, whether that’s mentoring new teachers on their campus or serving as a Common Core coach for a group of schools. The district should incentivize teacher leadership positions by offering differentiated pay that rewards the efforts of the teachers in these roles. This will help to ensure teachers receive compensation that matches their workload, while also adding to the prestige and challenge of these important positions. Schools would be able to select from a menu of leadership position options and then adapt the job description to their own needs. The job description would have a matching evaluation with compensation based on those metrics.

**SOLUTIONS TO KEEP GREAT TEACHERS FOR THE LONG HAUL**

**INCENTIVES FOR HARD-TO-STAFF SCHOOLS**

Teaching in the schools that need great teachers the most should be promoted and compensated as an incredible opportunity to take on truly rigorous and impactful work. The district should offer incentives for effective and highly effective teachers to move to or stay in high-turnover schools. This incentive program, parallel to the attraction program for hard-to-staff positions, would come in two pieces. The first piece would be an upfront signing bonus for moving to or staying in a hard-to-staff school. The second piece—to be distributed over the course of the next two to three years—would be put into a pool for ongoing support, funding mentor teachers, teaching assistants, more professional development or even classroom supplies. The district could re-offer this incentive to teachers every three to four years they remain at a hard-to-staff school.

**INCENTIVES FOR TEAM IMPACT ON STUDENT GROWTH**

Building a culture of collaboration can be one of the most effective ways to retain employees,\(^4\) and nothing builds teamwork like sharing in a challenging mission. The district should offer rewards for schoolwide student growth in a variety of both academic and non-academic measures. The district currently sets goals for schools in academic measures and additionally lays out for school leadership what “above and beyond” looks like for each goal. The district should expand those goals to align with LCFF’s eight state priorities by including important nonacademic measures such as attendance, dropout rates, suspension rates and parent engagement measures. Schools would be eligible for the schoolwide bonus when they meet all goals and go above and beyond on the priority goals set by the district.

**CONCLUSION**

Changing compensation structures is often a contentious and difficult endeavor. However, maintaining a system that does not recognize excellence or serve our students is unacceptable; our educators and all of our future voters and citizens demand something better. We ask our colleagues to bring fresh eyes, open ears and a relentless focus on students to this conversation about reimaging a compensation system that enables Los Angeles Unified School District to attract, develop and retain great talent. We ask policy makers to bring a willingness to understand what inspires and sustains talented individuals taking on tough and important work. In doing so, both practitioners and policy makers might see past the polarizing rhetoric on compensation to find the value and promise of this noble profession.

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\(^3\) For a full list, see [http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2013/edu/lcff/lcff-072913.aspx](http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2013/edu/lcff/lcff-072913.aspx).

For far too long, education policy has been created without a critical voice at the table—the voice of classroom teachers.

Educators 4 Excellence (E4E), a teacher-led organization, is changing this dynamic by placing the voices of teachers at the forefront of the conversations that shape our classrooms and careers.

E4E has a quickly growing national network of educators united by our Declaration of Teachers’ Principles and Beliefs. E4E members can learn about education policy and research, network with like-minded peers and policymakers, and take action by advocating for teacher-created policies that lift student achievement and the teaching profession.

Learn more at Educators4Excellence.org.