



SOLVING THE TEACHER PAY RIDDLE

A Charter School's experiment makes sense, but does it work?

Among the stickiest of issues in education today is the subject of teacher compensation. Nearly everyone agrees there's something wrong with the current model, in which every teacher is given a small raise at the end of the year, no matter what kind of job they do.

But how can we change it? Some balk at performance-based pay scales, considering the evaluation process too subjective. How do you tell if a teacher is doing a good job? What if the principal likes to play favorites? Basing the evaluation on student test scores simply intensifies the already strong pressure on teachers to "teach to the test."

Regardless, the challenge of developing a fair system is no excuse for maintaining an unsatisfactory status quo. At least, that's what the founders of City Charter High School reckoned when they developed a comprehensive method to tie teacher salary to proficiency at the craft of teaching.

"Isn't this how the rest of the world works?" says Richard Wertheimer, the school's cofounder, principal, and CEO. "Employers work very hard to define the specifics of what it means to do quality work and then pay accordingly."

Teachers at City High are given a set of standards in areas such as lesson planning, unit planning, instructional methodology, mentoring students, communicating with parents, etc. Once the teacher has demonstrated proficiency in each of 15 areas, the principal signs off on beginning the promotion process and assigns a mentor. The mentor provides guidance as the teacher creates their portfolio which is submitted to the school's leadership team (administrators and master teachers). The team reviews the portfolio and

observes the teacher in class. The leadership team then meets, reviews the teacher's performance and votes on promotion.

There are four levels of teacher at City High – Apprentice, Journeyman, Expert and Master Teacher. Pay raises between levels range from 20 to 36 percent. Wertheimer says the impact on City High's teachers has been amazing: "We tend to attract people who are talented, interested in educational innovation and believe that all students can succeed... and want to be well paid."

By all measures, the plan is working. City High was named as one of the country's top 6 charter high schools by a national consortium, and as one of the country's best high schools by *U.S. News & World Report*. Importantly, teacher turnover rates are in the single digits.

The school has worked hard to ensure that advancement standards are fair and transparent—teachers know exactly what they have to do to earn a promotion.

Because City High is a charter school—an autonomous public school run by its own board of directors rather than by a local school board—the school has been free to implement its compensation plan without having to wade through bureaucratic red tape. This has allowed the school to do what charters do best—innovate.

"We believe the success of our organization is based upon the quality of our teachers," says Wertheimer. "So we want to put our money where our mouth is."

This series is brought to you by a consortium of Allegheny County charter schools.



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