Better Pay for New Teachers

Just as we in Denver successfully completed 10 months of tough negotiations with our teachers union, the issue of Education Next with Jacob Vigdor’s article (“Scrap the Sacrosanct Salary Schedule,” features, Fall 2008) dropped into my mailbox. After all the cross-table arguing, I found it a relief to read someone who got it. He offered the basic policy rationale for what we had spent the last 10 months working on.

Vigdor’s case is as elegant as algebra: Raise entry pay. Decrease the size of salary increases teachers earn in the latter half of their careers. Change the way you manage the workforce. Start salaries high enough to attract the highest performers and reduce rewards for experience and for additional degrees and licenses, which have little demonstrable value on teacher effectiveness. How hard can it be?

Teacher leader Greg Ahrnsbrak, who helped organize Denver Teachers for Change, made an astute observation, “As a union, we’ve wanted to pay more teachers more money earlier in their career for as long as I can remember. We call it schedule compression. But we haven’t learned the obvious. You can’t front-load and back-load at the same time.”

The trade-off is easier when, as Vigdor points out, you take defined benefit pensions into account. In the last 10 years of their career, teachers earn as much per year in accrued pension benefits as they do in salary. Pension works as an extraordinary incentive to stay on during these years. Any late-career teacher has a gut sense for what each year is worth.

Vigdor may be a little too quick to press the easy button when he imagines making a rational pay system a reality. You need the revenue. Fortunately, in Denver voters have approved the money needed to cover the cost of ProComp. You need union leaders who acknowledge the long-term value of making a tough choice. In Denver, union members supported the trade-off that union leaders were resisting. And there are tough policy issues—teacher turnover, measurement of teacher effectiveness, varying teacher career paths, variable pay and incentives—that must be addressed in a comprehensive compensation package. Had we neglected these issues, the successful revision of ProComp would have been much harder to achieve.

Vigdor’s recommendations come as a breath of fresh air, even if it is after the fact to all of us in Denver. He points to a reasonable compromise that, with will, revenue, and a sense of opportunity, can be accomplished.

BRAD JUPP
Senior Academic Policy Advisor
Denver Public Schools

Students Incentives Work

We read with great interest your legal beat article on the California home-schooling case (“Home Schoolers Strike Back,” Fall 2008). After the article was published, the California Court of Appeal for the Second Appellate District reversed its earlier ruling, which said that parents must be certified teachers before they can educate their own children at home, and recognized home schooling as a legal “species” of private school education. This is one of the most significant rulings in the history of the home-school movement. If the court had upheld its previous ruling, it would have effectively banned home schooling in California and overruled the clear intent of the California legislature.

We hope that this decision will encourage home schools across the country. Relatively few states have restrictive home-schooling laws, and hopefully this decision, and the attention it brought to home schooling, will prove to be a significant step toward home-schooling freedom for everyone.

JAMES R. MASON III
Senior Counsel
Home School Legal Defense Association

California Home Schooling

We read with great interest your legal beat article on the California home-schooling case (“Home Schoolers Strike Back,” Fall 2008). After the article was published, the California Court of Appeal for the Second Appellate District reversed its earlier ruling, which said that parents must be certified teachers before they can educate their own children at home, and recognized home schooling as a legal “species” of private school education. This is one of the most significant rulings in the history of the
with students, teachers, and college admission officers revealed high regard for the program.

Using a much larger sample and sophisticated statistical methods, Professor Jackson substantially extends these findings and shows higher SAT and ACT scores and percentages of students going to college as a result of the program. He points out that at least nine western states have implemented similar incentive programs.

Incentives appear to work in schools as they do in other aspects of life. The lack of incentives in school seems an important reason students find academics so boring and sports so exciting. Though not all incentives are monetary, rational people require reasons to work hard.

**Herbert J. Walberg**
**Distinguished Visiting Fellow**
**Hoover Institution**
**Stanford University**

### The Value of Discipline

I commend David Whitman for his article (“An Appeal to Authority,” features, Fall 2008) calling attention to an intriguing, comparatively new genre of public schools that are registering impressive academic gains with inner-city, mostly minority students. The schools he writes about set high expectations, demand much of their students academically, and maintain tight order so that the atmosphere does not careen out of control. In my mind, what is truly distinctive about these schools is how deeply invested they are in fostering the social development of their students, many of whom are reared in homes and communities that are dysfunctional and unsupportive in ways that undermine the youngsters’ ability to function well in school, much less in life.

For more than three decades I have been fascinated by the lessons that can be drawn from the military to strengthen the academic and, yes, social skills of youngsters who are struggling in school and in life. When I served as vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation in the late 1980s, I proposed to the head of the National Guard that the Guard establish a quasi-military youth corps for high school dropouts. The Guard enthusiastically embraced the concept and in 1992 launched what is now known as the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program. Since its inception, more than 80,000 youngsters have completed the 5 1/2-month residential phase of the program, registering average gains of 1.5 grades in reading and 2.2 grades in math.

My main quarrel with Whitman concerns nomenclature. Just as I often labor to explain that “military” means far more than discipline, so the term “paternalism” obscures the robust commitment the schools Whitman touts have to the academic and social development of their students. The ChalleNGe Program addresses the needs of the whole adolescent, as evidenced by its eight core components: leadership/followership; academic excellence (i.e., high school diplomas or GED certificates); responsible citizenship; service to the community; life coping skills; physical fitness; health and hygiene; and job skills.

I have one final quibble. Whitman focuses, for perfectly legitimate reasons, on the benefits of so-called paternalistic schools for urban, minority students. The fact that nearly half of the former high school dropouts who join ChalleNGe are white shows that a broad swath of America’s teenagers would profit from a healthy dose of academic and social development.

**Hugh B. Price**
**Visiting Professor**
**Woodrow Wilson School**
**Princeton University**

### Classrooms for the Future

In painting all initiatives that include mass distribution of computers in schools with the same broad brush stroke, Clayton Christensen and Michael Horn (“How Do We Transform Our Schools?” features, Summer 2008) risk dismissing the kind of true innovations that are occurring in Pennsylvania’s classrooms.

Over the last two years, Pennsylvania’s Classrooms for the Future program has put 100,000 laptops on student desks in high school English, math, science, and social studies classrooms. But Classrooms for the Future is not a technology initiative; it is a strategy to transform classroom instruction.

Professional development, not the technology itself, is the key to success for the Classrooms for the Future program. Teachers receive two days of hands-on training and then participate in a minimum of 30 hours of additional professional development on mandated content each year. Training is conducted onsite via a teacher coach, online in facilitated courses, and in regional meetings of participating districts. The role of the coach is to support teachers to effectively integrate the laptops and other equipment into their daily lessons.

Only because we have focused so heavily on improving instruction is Classrooms for the Future working. An independent evaluation of the program’s first few months found that teachers spent significantly less time simply lecturing and more time working with small groups of students and interacting with individual students, and that there was significant change in the nature of assignments given to students toward “real-world, hands-on projects.”

The students in America’s classrooms are members of the Technology Generation, and either we will find ways to teach them on their terms, or we could lose them altogether. In Pennsylvania, we are seizing the opportunity of introducing new technology to transform classroom instruction. The two must go hand in hand if we are going to have an impact on the one thing that matters: increasing student achievement.

**Gerald L. Zahorchak**
**Secretary of Education**
**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**
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