

Promoting Quality Teaching: New Approaches to Compensation and Career Pathways

September 2012

About this Brief

This report is the second in a series by the Accomplished California Teachers (ACT), a group of distinguished teacher leaders from around the state focused on improving the quality of teaching in California. ACT was formed in 2008 by the National Board Resource Center at Stanford University.

The first report, *A Quality Teacher in Every Classroom: Creating a Teacher Evaluation System That Works for California*, lays out a vision for fair and effective evaluations. This report builds on that notion, proposing a vision for teacher compensation and career pathways.

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California and the United States face a variety of challenges and opportunities to address major education policy shifts in coming years. While policymakers attempt to balance budgets under distressed economic conditions, it's vital to raise, rather than lower, the expectations for continual improvement for the public education system. At the time of publication, a number of initiatives are being considered that would transform curriculum and assessment and push to bring schools and students more completely into the 21st century.

At the center of the work, as always, California's public school teachers are the contact point—translating policies and initiatives into student learning. To effectively meet the needs of every California public school student, teachers must be experts in their craft. A modernized conception of the workplace and the roles of teachers is necessary to stabilize and strengthen the teaching force, helping schools to thrive in pursuit of their vital mission to educate California's children.

Most critical to the process of professionalizing the teaching force is the creation of a higher-tier teacher license. Currently, a California teacher can clear a credential and achieve permanent status in a district, but from there, career pathways are limited. Some teachers take on additional work and responsibilities, but too often this work is done on top of a regular teaching load, with insufficient time and money dedicated to the new work. Teachers who seek more sustainable leadership opportunities are too often drawn completely out of the classroom, exacerbating the problem of retaining effective teachers.

If improved evaluation practices are implemented as we proposed in our last report (*A Quality Teacher in Every Classroom: Creating a Teacher Evaluation System that Works for California*), the next step will be to identify outstanding teachers and expand their opportunities for professional leadership in schools, districts, and even in regional and state-level roles. A formal system that identifies and promotes highly accomplished teachers will provide educators the opportunity to lead and remain in the classroom. The quality of education leadership will benefit from the influx of teacher influence and perspective still grounded in regular practice while students and schools will continue to benefit from having the best teachers remain in their classrooms.

To the extent that policy makers agree higher levels of compensation are important for attracting and retaining talented teachers, we propose that

professional compensation ought to increase with professional roles and responsibilities. This approach aligns with a large body of research regarding motivation and performance in the workplace (see the full report for details).

Guiding Principles to Reform Teacher Compensation and Career Pathways

Teacher engagement in policymaking is vital to ensure quality and consensus in all education policies relating to teaching.

Effective policy depends on including the perspectives and garnering the support of those directly affected by policy changes—if teachers aren't active and equal partners in crafting policy, the policies are less likely to be aligned with real-life considerations and to work as intended. Reform plans that have been successfully enacted and continue to thrive have been designed with teachers and their associations participating as full partners with policy makers and other stakeholders.

Evaluation reform should precede compensation reform.

In order for compensation and career advancement reforms to improve education, we must develop and identify truly accomplished teachers: a stronger evaluation system will provide the basis for differentiated pay and professional roles. It must establish its value in promoting improved learning for students and improved performance by teachers, and open doors for these teachers to contribute to their schools, districts, and the profession. Our recommendations for a robust, growth-oriented model of professional evaluation can be found in our prior report.

Individual and collective teacher growth must be the goal of evaluation and compensation policy.

If money alone is the reward for good teaching, a new system will only encourage teachers to game the system or leave the profession. Research shows that collaboration, mentorship, and growth

opportunities lead to high-quality instruction. Abundant models of these practices are in place nationally and internationally, and can be drawn upon to develop a comprehensive system that offers teachers opportunities to improve every facet of their own professional practice and that of their entire teaching community.

Compensation systems should promote equitable access to quality teaching for all students.

Teacher pay in California varies widely across districts and that variation exacerbates inequities by making it harder for high-needs districts to attract and retain teachers. If a new system does nothing to address these inequities, existing patterns of school performance will continue—clusters of struggling schools in low-income areas and thriving schools in more affluent communities.

Compensation systems should be designed to support and recognize all categories of teachers.

Student learning is vital in every academic discipline, grade level, and school setting. An effective system of professional advancement and compensation must be structured to support the growth of teachers in every classroom, lab, theater, gymnasium, studio, clinic, or correctional facility. Such a system will recognize and reward the contributions to student and collegial learning from teachers across the complete range of content areas, rather than delivering bonuses to teachers in only a few subjects.

Recommendations for a New System of Teacher Compensation

Before designing a new professional compensation system for teachers or reforming other significant education policies, stakeholders must be clear about the vision we share for California's education system. We believe that the California school system must be robust enough to meet the needs of a state that prizes cutting-edge design and innovation. It must subscribe to the belief in collaborative work and the power of diversity and

diverse ideas. It must promote opportunity for all its children by preparing them to make the most of their talents and dispositions. Finally, it must produce informed citizens who are prepared to participate in our economy and our democracy. The teachers who worked on this report offer the following recommendations to revitalize the teaching force in California and support an educational system that offers high-quality learning to all students.

1. Create a Career Ladder that Defines and Compensates Tiered Levels of Teaching Expertise

Replace the current system with its flat career horizon with a career ladder based on advancing levels of expertise within the profession. Use evaluation to identify and drive improved practice and accomplishment. Instead of raising salaries based primarily on years of service, base compensation on a balance of experience, continuing learning, attainment of higher levels of practice and responsibility, and contributions to student and collegial learning.

2. Expand Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities

Define specific new and expanded roles for teachers with opportunities for advancement and growing responsibility as they gain expertise. Create a teaching continuum to include new, varied, flexible professional roles that will allow teachers to grow, spread their expertise, advance the profession, and improve student learning. Teachers cannot adequately prepare students for a 21st century workplace if the one we work in is stuck in the 20th century, with responsibilities for curriculum, instruction, analysis of student learning, and teacher evaluation too concentrated in the hands of non-practitioners. (Some possible roles are detailed in the full report and existing examples can be found on our web site).

3. Develop a Well-Funded System Fostering Equity and Quality

Any policy addressing teacher pay must also address the very real inequities in school funding and teacher compensation in the state. Currently teachers in low-income districts, where the bulk of high-needs schools are found, are generally paid less than those in higher-income school districts. Policymakers must change school funding formulas so that schools with the greatest challenges have adequate resources to recruit, retain, and continue the development of the highly skilled teachers they need.

It will not be enough to simply level the field for compensation; teachers who work in the most demanding schools must be paid more. Such schools must also be made attractive to teachers willing to embrace difficult problems of practice and lead the way to solving them. Equalization and weighted-student funding approaches that send money to districts on an equitable basis, tied to pupil needs, can create a foundation for competitive and equitable salaries and improved working conditions.

4. Ensure Steady, Long-Term Funding to Sustain a New Compensation System

Fewer and fewer college graduates are drawn to the teaching profession. This problem can be partially mitigated by creating the right working conditions and professional development opportunities. Likewise, a new system must be fully and reliably funded in order to stabilize the profession and improve the state's teaching force. Teachers will not put their full faith and effort into a system that is not sustainable, nor would most stakeholders embrace a plan that would set off new battles over scarce funding.

5. Provide Supports to Bring High-Quality Teachers to High-Needs Schools

Offer teachers willing to work in the most challenging schools paid opportunities to

develop the unique skills and problem-solving abilities needed in those settings.

While it may be tempting to suppose that paying teachers more to work in high-needs schools might attract accomplished teachers, the reality is that teachers want to be successful as much as they want to be compensated for taking on large challenges. They require, as do all professionals, high degrees of autonomy, mastery and purpose. To be successful in a very challenging environment often requires skills and knowledge that are complex and constantly changing. For that reason, we suggest that a salary package for teachers in schools identified as the most needy should include release time and additional stipends earmarked for ongoing professional development related to the needs of the student population.

6. Take Time for Deliberation and Collaboration.

Take time to engage all stakeholders in the design of a new system and pilot it carefully. Be willing to adapt it. Make it

flexible enough to work in the full variety of conditions and needs across the state. Avoid one-dimensional, quick-fix approaches that fail to recognize the complexity of good professional practice.

As vitally linked as teachers are to student success, new education policies must effectively address teacher evaluation, compensation, and career pathways. These recommendations, from those who understand quality teaching from the inside out, offer a powerful starting point for developing a system that fosters excellent teaching and gives California its best promise for providing all students with a high quality education.

About Accomplished California Teachers

Accomplished California Teachers (ACT), formed in 2008, brings together the perspectives of teacher leaders from a variety of regions and teaching contexts. Two years ago, ACT published policy recommendations for the reform of teacher evaluations. This report takes the next step, proposing significant changes to the compensation system and career pathways for California's teachers.



About the full report: This project is supported by a generous grant from the Stuart Foundation. This is the second report in a series. The first is, *A Quality Teacher in Every Classroom: Creating a Teacher Evaluation System that Works for California*. Both reports can be downloaded from: <http://acteachers.org>.

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