

EDUCATION DAILY

The education community's independent daily news service

TEACHER QUALITY

Congress backs Duncan on schoolwide performance pay

Education group says making it work requires 'more than money'

By Wangui Njuguna

Congressional appropriators have handed a victory to Education Secretary Arne Duncan and the Education Department in adding language to the FY 2010 appropriations bills that would allow programs that reward teachers, principals and even custodians in high-need schools where students do well academically.

In the past, the Teacher Incentive Fund only backed performance pay for teachers and principals. But while Congress supports TIF, separate FY 2010 appropriations bills approved by the House and Senate before the August recess provide less than the \$487 million annually that the Obama administration requested.

Nonetheless, depending on whether appropriators ultimately side with the Senate or the House funding levels, TIF could see triple or quadruple the \$100 million it received under the Bush administration — on top of the extra \$200 million the program received under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Education groups appreciate the investment but say such differentiated pay is not a panacea for comprehensive teacher compensation and school reform.

The Senate Appropriations Committee's Labor-HHS-Education FY 2010 appropriations bill includes \$300 million for the program; the House's version gets closer to the administration's budget request, allocating \$446 million for the program.

Duncan credits the Bush administration for launching the discretionary program and has expressed his desire to expand it so rewards are distributed not only to the high-performing educators and principals serving children in high-need schools and to teachers of subjects facing shortages, but to everyone in a school building where students are making academic improvements.

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Today's Highlights

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Education Daily® will not publish Monday, Aug. 10 or Tuesday, Aug. 11. The next issue will be Wednesday, Aug. 12.

IDEA IMPLEMENTATION

Group: Baltimore schools discriminated against blind

National Federation of the Blind alleges district is in violation of IDEA

By James Michael Brodie

The National Federation of the Blind filed last week its second complaint against an education system for not meeting the needs of sight-impaired students, targeting the Baltimore City Public School System.

The complaint, filed with the Maryland State Department of Education on July 28, alleged that BCPSS systematically ignored the needs of sight-impaired students in violation of the IDEA and parallel state laws by:

- Failing to provide individualized evaluations.
- Failing to provide appropriate Braille instruction.
- Failing to provide necessary and appropriate assistive technology.
- Failing to provide appropriate orientation and mobility services.

"Because of the dismal performance in our own city, we filed a complaint with the school

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“In Chicago, we rewarded every adult in the building because they are contributing to the culture,” he said.

“The custodian is making sure the building is spotless, the cafeteria workers are feeding the students, and the security guards are making sure kids are going home with their book bags.”

Appropriators on both sides of Capitol Hill agreed. The Senate Appropriations Committee’s bill refers to staff, instead of teachers or principals; language in the House version describes TIF as a program that “reward[s] effective teaching through compensation systems that reward entire high-need schools for raising student achievement.”

One element of reform

While some education groups, such as the Center for American Progress, have expressed support for performance pay as a better gauge of the correlation between teacher and student performance than the existing salary schedule based on years of experience and degrees earned, they add a caveat that successful compensation systems that reward effective teaching require a careful redesign of human resource management and school policies.

Speaking at a recent CAP forum, William J. Slotnik, executive director of the Community Training and Assistance Center, said performance pay can be a catalyst for school reform. However, its long-term effects depend on alignment with schools’ and districts’ strategic priorities for student learning as well as teacher evaluation and professional development.

Merit pay or pay-for-performance was first seen in the 1980s but it did not survive because of a lack of alignment with overall school reforms, Craig Jerald, president of Break the Curve Consulting, explains in his study, *Aligned by Design: How Teacher Compensation Reform Can Support and Reinforce Other Educational Reforms*.

The study identifies lessons learned from past attempts.

For example, school districts should:

- Align teacher compensation and other strategies for recruiting, developing and retaining a high-quality teaching workforce.
- Not pay teachers to develop specific knowledge and skills unless there is district-funded professional development focused on the specific knowledge and skills.

While TIF grantees must address professional development and teacher evaluation

when designing performance-based compensation systems to get funding, Jerald writes that the real question is: “Does TIF encourage actual alignment among compensation, evaluation, and professional development, or does it merely require grantees to include ‘multiple components’ without ensuring that various human resources elements truly support and reinforce one another?”

The author found that the Teacher Advancement Program introduced by the Milken Family Foundation in 1999, a program that several states have received TIF funds to implement, takes the following “highly intentional” comprehensive approach to address teacher development and school reforms:

- Teacher evaluation and professional development help teachers develop a clearly defined repertoire of instructional skills that are rewarded by annual bonuses.
- The school’s improvement planning process and professional development provide teachers with new instructional strategies that have been proven to produce learning gains for students in the school — another factor rewarded by annual bonuses.
- Differentiated pay is used to create a team of teacher-leaders who have the authority, time and expertise to improve teacher evaluations, professional development, and school improvement planning.

Understanding teachers

In his study, *It’s More Than Money: Making Performance-Based Compensation Work*, Slotnik cautions against pay-for-performance that teachers may deem “insulting.”

He explains that in the past, performance-pay initiatives have been crafted with the “belief that that compensation is the primary incentive for teachers to perform at higher levels.”

Focusing on how much money it will take to reward excellence and change teacher behaviors, he argues, has resulted in criticism from teachers who feel their motives are misunderstood.

Thus, Slotnik urges districts to design a compensation system that “goes beyond politics and finances to benefit students,” and is based on input from teachers and sustained by wide support from the school community — an approach echoed by the teacher unions and the Obama administration.

The compensation studies are available at www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/07/aligned_by_design.html and www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/07/more_than_money.html.