

# Compensation and Collaboration: A Comprehensive Approach to Improving Teaching Effectiveness

Jonathan Eckert

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*Developing effective teachers requires school-level structures that support and encourage both individual teacher quality and collective teaching quality for the whole school.*

Last year, I left teaching in the public school classroom after twelve years. Not wanting to go into administration, I did not have options to grow professionally, increase responsibilities, receive increased compensation, and continue teaching. Had I been in a system that truly recognized and rewarded teacher excellence, I might still be in the classroom, teaching seventh-grade students and growing with my colleagues.

My experiences are not unique; many other career educators have had similar frustrations. But better alternatives to traditional teacher human capital policies are now available. In this article, I will describe one of them.

After teaching in Illinois for eight years and Tennessee for four years and spending a year at the U.S. Department of Education, I learned that research, teacher intuition, and student intuition do not always align. However, on two foundational issues, they could not be more aligned: teachers matter, and teachers are not interchangeable parts or widgets. Repeatedly, studies have shown that the individual teacher in the classroom is the single greatest

school-based influence on student learning (Hanushek 1992; Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain 2005; Sanders & Rivers 1996). *The Widget Effect*, a report released by the New Teacher Project, affirmed what many teachers, researchers, and policy-makers already knew: we treat teachers as interchangeable parts, scoring them nearly identically on evaluations – even though we know different teachers add different knowledge, skills, and value to a given context (Weisberg et al. 2009).

Nearly all students or former students can point to teachers who positively impacted their learning and life trajectory. Conversely, nearly every student could identify the few teachers who should no longer be teaching or should never have entered the profession. These teachers have lost – or never had – the ability to connect with students in a way that results in positive student outcomes.

We need policy that is aligned with what research, teachers, and students tell us. We must align our education system to best serve the needs of all of our students. To do this, we need to create structures that support and encourage the development of effective teachers. Due to the unique skills, contexts, and

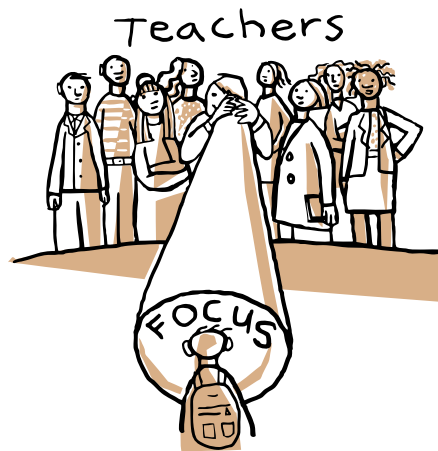
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needs of teachers, support cannot be at the “macro-teacher” level: the focus must be on the individual teacher.

### ***The Need for a Comprehensive, Differentiated Approach***

For too long, both in policy and practice, professional development, evaluation, and compensation have treated teachers as an amorphous entity and applied one-size-fits-all solutions. I experienced this as a middle school science teacher in Tennessee. My district’s central office determined that every teacher in the district needed three years of professional development on differentiated instruction. Ironically, the instruction on differentiated instruction was not differentiated in any way for readiness, expertise, knowledge, or even subjects taught by teachers. For example, middle school science teachers, gym teachers, band directors, and kindergarten teachers all sat in the same sessions. Not only was this ineffective, it also bred cynicism and disillusionment among teachers, who felt that central office administrators were failing to recognize the individual needs of teachers.

In my time at the U.S. Department of Education, I became aware of a comprehensive approach to improving schools based on the idea that effective teachers could be the catalysts for increasing student learning. Time and again, I returned to this model – TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement – as an example of how systems could attain better results for their students. After my time at the Department of Education was over, I began working as a consultant to TAP. The system is designed to attract, retain,



and develop teachers and school leaders to increase the effectiveness of instruction and raise student achievement. The TAP system was developed by Lowell Milken and colleagues at the Milken Family Foundation and was first implemented in the 2000–2001 school year. It is now promoted and coordinated by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET). Impacting more than 7,500 teachers and 85,000 students across the country, TAP engages schools by supporting teachers both in teams and as individuals.<sup>1</sup>

TAP aligns professional development, multiple measures of teaching effectiveness, compensation, and teacher advancement to support student learning. This alignment was especially

<sup>1</sup> In the 2009–2010 school year, TAP was in operation in 227 schools in thirteen states – Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas – and the District of Columbia.

important as states vied for \$4.35 billion in Race to the Top funds from the U.S. Department of Education, as this issue of *Voices in Urban Education* went to press. In the rush to prepare bids, states were looking to address teacher evaluation and compensation, often in isolation.

Without a comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of the whole teacher that includes evaluation, support, and compensation, well-intentioned policy changes will, at best, lead to marginal improvement in student test scores. At worst, they will result in unintended consequences such as the disillusionment of many effective educators and, in turn, decreased student learning.

This article will address two inter-related policy questions:

- Should we provide additional compensation to teachers based on the performance of the whole school or on the individual teacher's performance?
- Why address compensation, professional development, multiple measures of teaching effectiveness, and teacher advancement at the same time?

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The first question leads to many other questions and, sometimes, to heated disagreements. How do we determine effectiveness? Who determines effectiveness? Do we measure inputs or outputs? Do we measure teacher and/or student performance? Without addressing each of these individual questions, this article will attempt to use research and practice to inform the discussion.

The second question addresses the challenge of how to accomplish lasting and measurable improvement in teacher effectiveness – and the importance of aligning the many structures that support teachers and hold them accountable to the goal of sustained student achievement.

### ***Whole-School and Individual Performance Compensation***

*Should we provide additional compensation to teachers based on the performance of the whole school or on the individual teacher's performance?*

The answer is, clearly, *both*. The issue of how we reward teachers for facilitating solid outcomes for students must move beyond the constraints of the traditional salary-schedule-versus-merit-pay debate. The TAP system and districts like Denver and New York City are creatively and collaboratively looking at how to reward and retain the teachers who make the greatest contribution to student learning while also working with less-effective teachers to improve their performance.

TAP bases its performance bonuses on three targeted measures: 50 percent for classroom evaluations, 30 percent for individual class gains, and 20 percent for school-wide gains. The evaluations are based on multiple observations by multiple observers. The gain scores are based on value-added calculations that include

individual classrooms and the school. These multiple measures of effectiveness mitigate the potential for capricious individual measures.<sup>2</sup>

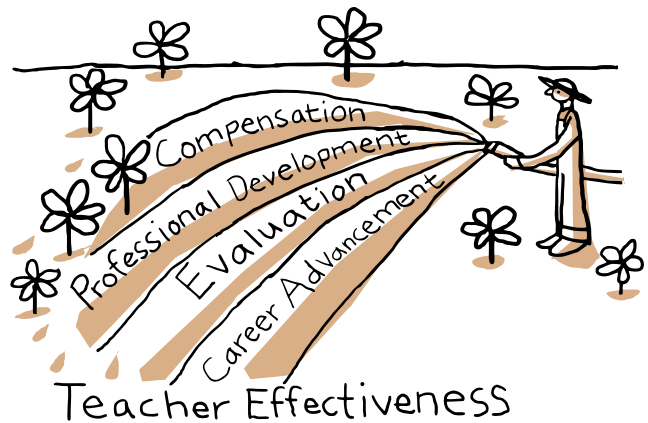
### Rethinking Assumptions about Individual Performance Pay

Teachers unions have expressed some support – albeit often lukewarm – for compensation reform in general. But individual performance pay is almost a non-starter in collective bargaining. Opponents cite numerous reasons why individual performance pay is problematic. For example, in a recent *Education Week* commentary, Kim Marshall (2009) presents a number of these arguments that are based on certain widely held assumptions. For each assumption, I will present a counterargument based on a different set of assumptions and on data from TAP schools.

- *Assumption: Individual performance pay destroys teamwork.*

There is no evidence that this happens. Data from a 2009 TAP national survey shows that TAP, which includes individual incentives, can enhance collegiality: 94 percent of teachers in TAP schools agreed with statements reporting a high level of collegiality in their schools, with 72 percent strongly agreeing. This reported level of collegiality

<sup>2</sup> TAP mainly uses Sanders's EVAAS model – the most common type – for value-added. Chicago TAP uses Rob Meyer's Wisconsin model. In statistical terms, 5 is significantly higher than average at about the 95 percent confidence level, 4 is significantly higher than average at about the 70 percent confidence level, 3 is indistinguishable from the average, 2 is significantly lower than average at about the 70 percent confidence level, and 1 is significantly lower than average at about the 95 percent confidence level.



has grown over the years from already high levels (NIET 2010).

Economic theory suggests that individual incentives should be *combined* with group incentives – not *replaced entirely* by group incentives. A system that recognizes only schoolwide student achievement results fails to provide focus or emphasis on the ways that individual teachers can improve their craft and increase their students' achievement.

The 2009 survey in TAP schools showed that incentives, when combined with a comprehensive approach to teaching effectiveness, can improve – rather than hinder – collaboration among teachers and outcomes for students. Teachers in TAP schools expressed overwhelming support for *both* instructionally focused accountability *and* performance incentives. That support is grow-

ing, with 94 percent of teachers supporting accountability and 75 percent supporting performance incentives (NIET 2010).

- *Assumption: Extra pay will not impact instruction, since teachers are already doing all they can.*

For teachers who are already performing beyond expectations in all respects, extra pay serves as a reward and a precaution against the resentment that can come when such performance goes unrewarded. Opportunities for additional pay also attract talented people into the teaching profession who might have chosen other careers.

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## It is both possible and desirable to combine group incentives, individual performance pay, and differentiated pay for special responsibilities.

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But for many teachers, improving effectiveness is less about working harder in the classroom than about committing to ongoing, collaborative improvement based on formative feedback about performance. And for teachers who either cannot or will not become effective educators, a pay system in which they do not get the bonuses that others get may create an incentive to seek other

occupations, thus improving the educational outcomes of future students.

When teachers in the TAP system talk about why TAP works, they emphasize that the bonuses are not their main focus, but rather a tangible benefit for the outstanding work of the group and the individual signifying the tremendous value added by each member of the team (Van Hook, Lee & Ferguson 2010).

- *Assumption: Standardized tests measure family advantages or disadvantages rather than the teacher's input.*

Standardized tests are impacted by both the family's background and the teacher's input. Value-added methods, coupled with rigorous and repeated observation and evaluation, filter out a student's family advantages and disadvantages so that the teacher's contribution to student learning over the course of the year can be measured. To argue otherwise is to throw out the very substantial research evidence that teachers make a crucial difference in student achievement gains.

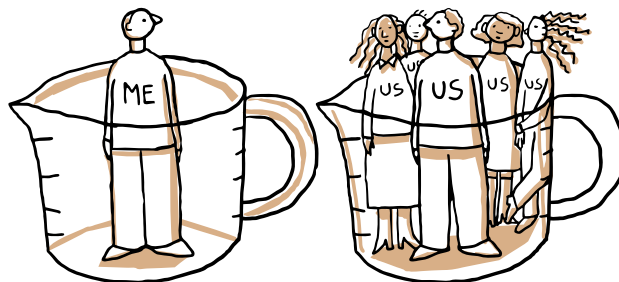
- *Assumption: Performance pay ignores the contribution of teachers who work with small groups or teach in untested grades and subjects, and it also ignores the previous contribution of the teachers who taught this year's students in earlier years.* In addition to rigorous observation and evaluation of all teachers, value-added methods account for the contribution of all teachers at a specific grade level who contribute to a student's success in

a particular subject. Moreover, the best solution for this potential problem would be to add schoolwide incentives to the performance pay system, not avoid individual incentives for those teachers whose performance can be measured.

- *Assumption: Performance pay based on test scores will create high-stakes incentives to cheat.*

A well-designed performance pay system balances test-based accountability with other measures such as classroom observations, and it keeps individual incentives in an appropriate proportion with base salaries and team incentives. Thus, any incentives to cheat are low-stakes, while the consequences of being caught cheating provide a high-stakes counterbalance to that temptation. Research suggests that cheating is minimized when individuals participate in a strong social network with a culture of collaboration and mutual accountability, which is exactly what the TAP system creates within a school (Annen 2003; Brass, Butterfield & Scaggs 1998).

Marshall (2009) offers some strong recommendations – salary increments for master teachers, higher pay for teachers in challenging schools or subjects, group incentives for gains in student learning. However, contrary to what Marshall posits, these recommendations need not be incompatible with individual performance pay. It is both possible and desirable to combine group incentives, individual performance pay, and differentiated pay for special responsibilities – the approach pioneered by the TAP system – especially when the system is based on



multiple measures and integrated with an on-site collaborative process for improvement based on accountability.

We do not know the best way to compensate teachers to increase student learning; more research on both individual and team incentives is needed. The limited reliable research on pay-for-performance plans is either not yet finished or does not demonstrate a clear direction on group versus individual incentives. Both group and individual incentives in experimental and quasi-experimental designs have resulted in modest positive effects as measured by student achievement (Podgursky & Springer 2007; Springer 2009).

#### **Timely Data, Better Alignment**

For teachers, the school-level value-added data would be helpful in improving instruction, but not nearly as helpful as having timely data that address the growth and success of individual students in their classrooms.

One way to ensure that helpful, teacher-level data are collected is to compensate at the individual level. NIET has found that states and districts are more likely to dig down to the individual classroom level for data analysis if compensation is attached to that level; if additional compensation were based solely at the school level, the data analysis would likely stop there. As momentum builds for classroom-level analysis for states that have been seeking Race to the Top funds, this level of analysis will likely become more commonplace and become an asset to states as well as teachers.

Ideally, individual and group incentives will recognize individual excellence while encouraging collaboration to enhance the effectiveness of the school as a whole. Combining group and individual incentives and aligning goals to benefit both the individual and the group provides data and accountability at the classroom level and creates a sense of shared responsibility.

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The other three pillars of the TAP system are based on a similar premise of individual and group effectiveness. Just as TAP employs multiple measures of effectiveness, TAP also uses multiple approaches to support and advancement. Multifaceted challenges require multifaceted approaches (Jerald 2009).

### ***A Comprehensive Approach to Increasing Teacher Effectiveness***

*Why address compensation, professional development, multiple measures of teaching effectiveness, and teacher career advancement at the same time?*

Few teachers would argue that merely adding a bonus to a paycheck would be enough to improve educational outcomes. Good teachers do work hard and are not waiting for more pay to work harder. This is why compensation reform alone is not enough. Some districts and organizations are beginning to understand the need for comprehensive overhaul. By aligning professional development, multiple measures of teaching effectiveness, compensation, and teacher career advancement, we can improve outcomes for students and teachers.

Many well-intentioned states, districts, policy-makers, and educators have attempted to improve teaching quality by focusing on only one or two of these four levers. Professional development has probably been the lever of choice for the longest period of time: either bringing in outside experts to address large groups of teachers on central office-identified needs, or sending teachers to outside workshops on teacher-identified needs. The problem with traditional professional develop-

ment is that it does not transfer from training to practice; there is no system in place to support teachers and hold them accountable for what they learn.

In contrast, the hallmarks of the TAP system are its coordination of evaluation, job-embedded professional development facilitated by master and mentor teachers located in the school, and recognition of teaching excellence. The TAP system addresses all four levers for school improvement in a comprehensive, tightly aligned system (Jerald 2009).

### Evaluation

TAP differentiates teaching effectiveness through multiple observations, observers, and measures. The foundation of both the evaluations and teacher support is the TAP *Teaching Skills, Knowledge and Responsibilities Performance Standards*, a set of twenty-six research-based indicators of effective classroom instruction. After each evaluation, teachers receive a score of 1 to 5, with 5 being exemplary.

A NIET (2010) research summary shows the distribution of teacher evaluation ratings on the TAP 5-point scale, demonstrating what sets the TAP system apart from most other evaluation systems (see Figure 1). The mean evaluation score for TAP teachers nationwide is 3.5 out of 5. In contrast, Weisberg and colleagues (2009) found:

In districts that use binary evaluation ratings (generally “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory”), more than 99 percent of teachers receive the satisfactory rating. Districts that use a broader range of rating options do little better; in these districts, 94 percent of teachers receive one of the top two ratings and less than one percent are rated unsatisfactory. (p. 6)

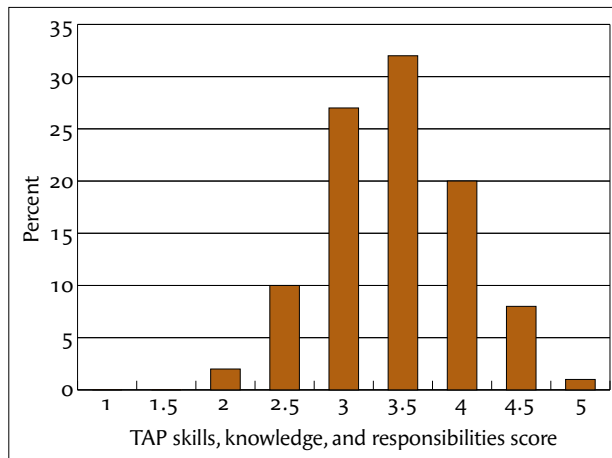


Figure 1: Distribution of TAP teacher evaluation ratings in TAP schools

Note: Analysis is based on NIET internal data for 7,377 teacher-year cases in 138 schools in 12 states, for school years 2004–2005 through 2007–2008. The data include all TAP teachers in all states for which NIET has data in those years.

Source: NIET 2010

In TAP schools, teachers are observed and evaluated four to six times per year. Highly trained master and mentor teachers observe teachers and provide feedback, allowing rigorous and frequent evaluations (Eckert 2009).

Moreover, teachers are evaluated based on value-added growth measures that rate the teacher’s impact on student learning as identified by individual student gains on assessments over time. Value-added models vary, but generally involve observing at least two data points for a student at different times on vertically aligned tests to determine growth that could be attributed to the

teacher (see footnote 2 on page 27). In a recent analysis of 1,780 TAP teachers, there was strong correlation between the TAP skills, knowledge, and responsibilities and the teacher's value-added scores (NIET 2010).

### **Professional Development**

TAP's multiple measures of teaching effectiveness inform professional development for individuals and teams of teachers. Master and mentor teachers receive release time from their classes to work with teachers through job-embedded professional development. Along with administrators, the master and mentor teachers assist teachers in analyzing student work and data. Based on value-added data and classroom observation data, teachers work together to identify "just-in-time" supports and professional development that will help teachers grow in areas where student work indicates growth is needed.

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In most schools, teachers are so isolated and receive so little useful data on their students that they would be hard-pressed to provide evidence of their effectiveness beyond anecdotal narratives.

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### **Career Advancement**

TAP's professional development is directly tied to the career advancement, compensation, and evaluation of teachers in TAP schools. Teachers who have been identified as effective through multiple measures become master and mentor teachers. Instead of layering on more work for already hardworking teachers, TAP provides release time from class and additional pay for additional work outside the school day and traditional school calendar for its master and mentor teachers. In so doing, TAP not only recognizes and rewards effective teachers, but also enables those teachers to help raise the level of effective instruction among their colleagues. These master and mentor teachers become instructional leaders who have credibility with their colleagues, the time to help facilitate improvement, and the skills to provide innovative research- and practice-based approaches to improving results for students.

### **Privileging Excellence and Improvement**

High-performing teachers – those receiving recognition and rewards for effectiveness under the TAP system – are more likely to remain in their schools, and underperforming teachers under the TAP system are more likely to leave (see Figure 2). In most schools, teachers are so isolated and receive so little useful data on their students that they would be hard-pressed to provide evidence of their effectiveness beyond anecdotal narratives. The TAP system is designed to ensure that teachers understand how they are doing and support teachers where they are, and then move them forward. This creates a cycle that privileges excellence and improvement. At the same time, the

system identifies areas where improvement is not occurring and can help facilitate change.

### ***The High Cost of Keeping the Current System***

In difficult financial times, many district administrators may argue that there is not money for individual or whole-school performance bonuses, let alone a comprehensive system such as TAP. However, systems such as TAP move districts from relying solely on poorly aligned individual incentives built into the traditional salary structure toward more effectively aligned whole-group and individual incentives based on student learning.

The current system is composed solely of individual incentives that are decoupled from student outcomes. These incentives include: generous pensions, nearly guaranteed pay raises for additional years of experience, bonuses for advanced degree attainment, and a substantial amount of vacation time. The question is, do these incentives attract and retain the most effective teachers? Taken as a whole, one could easily argue that they do not. In most cases, after teaching for fifteen years in a district, it would be imprudent financially for teachers to leave the district due to the generous pension that awaits their retirement. Studies have shown that neither a master's degree nor teaching experience beyond the first five years are strong predictors of a teacher's effectiveness, as measured by student achievement gains (Aaronson, Barrow & Sander 2007; Murnane 1975; Murnane & Phillips 1981; Rice 2003; Rivkin, Hanushek &

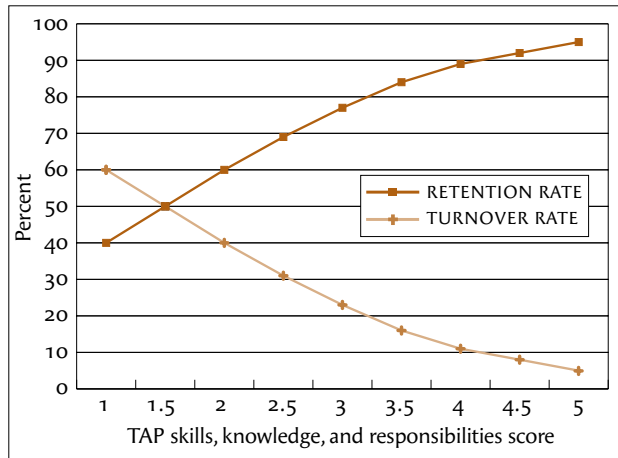


Figure 2: Retention and turnover rates by TAP teacher effectiveness rating in TAP schools

Note: Analysis is based on NIET internal data for 7377 teacher-year cases in 138 schools in 12 states, for school years 2004–2005 through 2007–2008 (with retention into school years 2005–2006 through 2008–2009). The data include all TAP teachers in all states for which NIET has data in those years.

Source: NIET 2010

Kain 2005). However, districts across the U.S. spend over \$8.6 billion on the master's salary increase alone (Roza & Miller 2009). The individual incentives in the current system and the lack of any group incentives may not attract or retain the most effective teachers.

After spending twelve years on the traditional salary schedule teaching in public schools, I spent a year trying to improve public education as a Teaching Ambassador Fellow at the U.S. Department of Education. Now I am a college professor who teaches twenty- and twenty-one-year-olds how to be effective educators, and I love it because I love teaching. But if I had had

the benefit of a system of recognition, support, and reward for excellence like the TAP system, it would have been a powerful incentive to stay in the K–12 public school teaching profession.

Career educators can only sit through so many differentiated instruction professional development days that are not differentiated and do not address our needs. We can only watch for so long as a few uninspired teachers collect relatively large paychecks waiting for their pensions to kick in. We have limited patience for being acted on by policies made by people who have not been in a classroom for a very long time, if ever. However, comprehensive reform that includes additional performance-based compensation, professional development, multiple measures of effectiveness, and career advancement could dramatically change the way we think about teaching and learning – and dramatically improve teacher quality and student outcomes.

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