

# School Reform, TURN, And Teacher Compensation

*The innovations in teacher compensation that have been brought about in districts within the Teacher Union Reform Network serve as examples of how change can happen when we really want it to occur and when we work in partnership with others to improve education, Mr. Urbanski and Mr. Erskine point out.*

**BY ADAM URBANSKI AND ROGER ERSKINE**

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In this article, we discuss how key dimensions of school reform require new forms of labor/management collaboration, one goal of the Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN) of local affiliates of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the National Education Association (NEA). We also argue that the efforts to improve the quality of instruction in all schools can be reinforced by new approaches to teacher compensation. This, of course, is in addition to, and not in lieu of, professional level pay for all teachers to begin with.

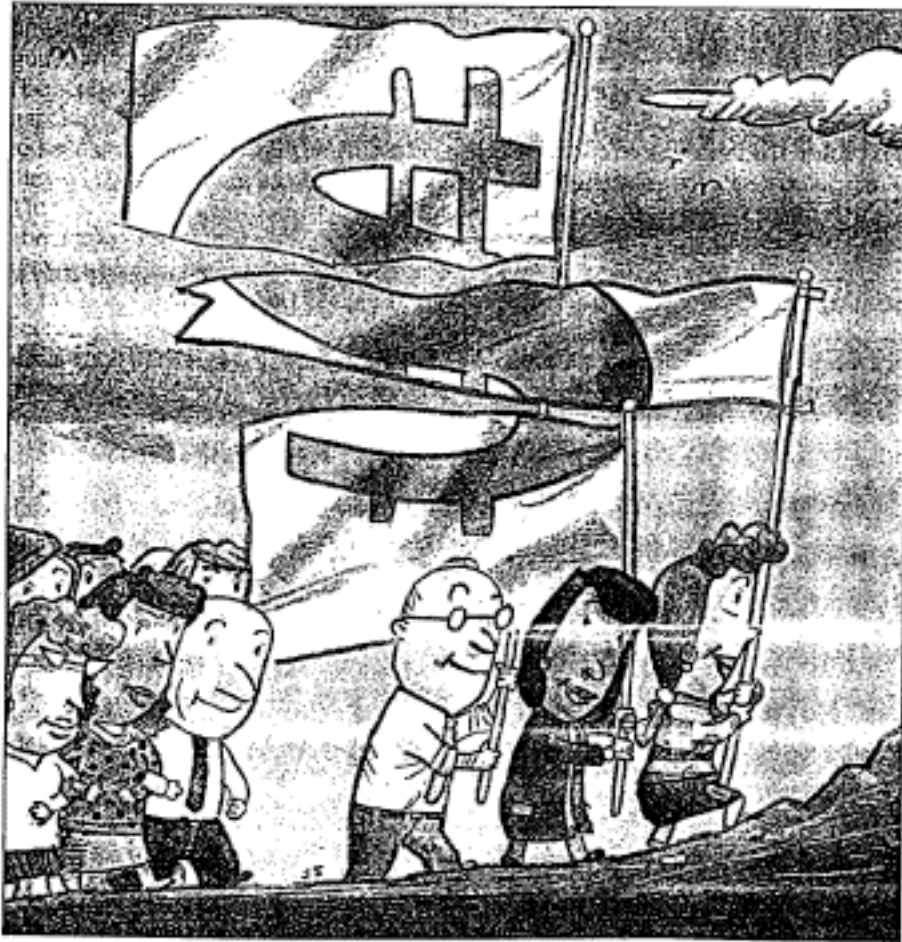


Illustration by Jem Sullivan

## **Re-conceptualizing The Role of Unions**

The Teacher Union Reform Network approaches the issue of reforming schools and education by re-framing the role of teachers and their unions as partners from the outset. Rather than regard teachers as an inert ingredient in the formula for school reform, TURN views them as catalysts. Further, improved instruction is the issue that drives the shape and focus of these new collaborations.

Bringing about this change in how teachers and their unions are treated requires a cultural change, as well. The teachers themselves must accept responsibility for change and see themselves as agents rather than mere targets of reform. They must champion sound efforts to improve instruction. The unions and union leaders must expand their view of themselves to include the role of leaders of reform.

Thus the primary goal of TURN is to promote new union models that can take the lead in building and sustaining high.

Achieving schools through improving the quality of instruction. The culture of labor/management relations in the education community must change to one of

shared responsibility, characterized by cooperation to improve instruction, rather than one of traditional polarized roles and adversarial relationships.

A linchpin in this new labor relations environment is the establishment and maintenance of mutual trust among the parties. This would allow unions and management to go beyond the traditional bread-and butter issues, expanding into areas that are directly and vitally related to school reform - e.g., student assessment, professional development, peer evaluation. The existence of collaborative relationships, especially between parties that have typically been adversarial, is indispensable to the improvement of public education.

This changed relationship calls for changes in roles at many levels. Rather than rely on a one-size-fits-all labor agreement, a union might consider provisions that are tailored to specific schools. For example, instead of an arrangement in which schools negotiate exceptions to a district wide contractual agreement or policy, there might be contractual provisions that give school level labor/management teams the authority to decide how issues will be addressed at the school level. Sandra Feldman', president of the AFT, recently proposed adopting such "thin" contracts, which would leave many of the details to individual schools.

### **Identifying Existing Models and Solutions**

One of TURN's goals is to facilitate dialogue among teachers and union leaders about topics that are critical to effective school reform. TURN members are committed to a close examination of unions' strengths and weaknesses and to developing greater capacity within unions to lead education and union reform. To that end, TURN members have charged themselves with a wide array of goals, including:

- improving professional development by creating new roles for unions;
- sharing successful strategies;
- influencing teacher preparation; and
- setting standards for their own local unions and for labor/management relations.

Our members represent 21 local teacher unions that have been active proponents of school reform.' We believe that the traditional roles and interests of teacher unions must be expanded if the unions are to provide the type of representation and leadership that teachers want and students need in the context of major school reform.

TURN has three subcommittees that work on separate aspects of the broader TURN agenda of school reform. These subcommittees revolve around professional development, pre-service education issues, and compensation

redesign. The subcommittees have face-to-face meetings as well as online group dialogues. TURN has several full-group meetings each year, at which the progress of the subcommittees is discussed within the context of the central issue of improving instruction.

## **TURN's Partners**

As experienced teacher union leaders, TURN members have a wealth of practical and policy knowledge related to school reform. In addition, in recognition of the fact that the "business" of school reform involves many stakeholders and requires various types of expertise, TURN invites outside experts from different areas to participate in its discussions. Each subcommittee draws upon its own set of external "critical friends" whenever necessary.

For our Compensation Redesign Subcommittee, for example, we invited Allan Odden and his staff to work with us. Odden is a professor of educational administration at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and director of the Teacher Compensation Project, which is associated with the Consortium for Policy Research in Education. His interest in teacher compensation reform predates the existence of TURN. Odden and his colleague Carolyn Kelley were co-authors of the 1997 book *Paying Teachers for What They Know and Do.* While the book is largely theoretical, it includes strategies that support many of TURN's beliefs and emphasizes the general notion that the resources devoted to teacher compensation can be used effectively to support a school's strategic goals and needs. Some TURN districts had already started to engage in compensation redesign efforts before the Odden and Kelley book was published. Thus the principles outlined in the book sounded a responsive chord with TURN members who had pursued some of the same ideas.

## **How New Teacher Compensation Looks**

TURN members have engaged in a sustained conversation regarding alternatives to the current models of teacher compensation. The discussions have been guided by the question of how changes in teacher compensation can support improved instruction. Members whose own districts have designed, modified, or supplemented their teacher compensation systems have shared their experiences. Although no TURN district has completely replaced the traditional salary schedule, the concepts underlying the districts' compensation innovations point to a willingness to begin to break the mold.

We want to present an overview of these innovations for several reasons. First, we want readers to see that change is possible, even if it is only incremental change. Second, we want to provide some actual examples of how new ideas on teacher

compensation can take different forms, depending on the context in which they exist. Third, we want to begin to show how difficult changes of this type can be to accomplish and how susceptible they can be to external influences.

The following section highlights information from the 21 TURN districts about three specific types of new compensation elements: school-based performance award programs, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification, and knowledge- and skills-based pay systems.

### **School-Based Performance Award Programs**

The underlying principle of a school based performance award program is that some incentive, typically monetary, is granted to a school or to individual teachers if specified performance goals or improvement gains are met. A school-based performance award is an element of serious accountability programs that attach consequences to results.

Some type of school-based performance award program is in place or is being proposed in more than one-third of TURN locals. These programs typically are part of broader accountability programs aimed at improving the overall level of student achievement. The range of practices evidenced by the TURN districts is generally illustrative of the range of accountability programs with monetary awards in other places. Six TURN districts (Cincinnati, Columbus, Denver, Memphis, Miami/ Dade County, and New York City) grant bonuses directly to the staff with no restrictions placed on their use. In four other instances (Boston, Minneapolis, Montgomery County, and Rochester), the funds are granted at the school level and must be used for school improvement or other education-related purposes.

To work, accountability programs must ultimately help teachers improve their instruction, because better instruction is the key to higher levels of student achievement. So even accountability programs that provide monetary awards to teachers must be inextricably linked to good professional development and a system-wide focus on improving the quality of teaching.

### **National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**

One of the most rigorous efforts to identify and recognize good instruction is reflected in the work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Most TURN leaders are strongly supportive of the National Board and encourage teachers to seek board certification, believing that board-certified teachers should be paid more and receive other forms of recognition for demonstrating accomplished practice.

Teachers in 15 TURN districts (Bellevue, Boston, Cincinnati, Columbus, Hammond, Los Angeles, Miami/Dade, Minneapolis, Montgomery County, New York City, Pinellas County, Rochester, San Diego, San Francisco, and Toledo) receive some form of compensation or fee support or are granted special standing as mentors, lead teachers, and so on after attaining board certification. Nine TURN locals are in states (California, Florida, Maryland, and Ohio) that provide some sort of state-funded bonus or salary supplement to teachers who attain board certification. In California and Florida, the state provides additional pay to board-certified teachers who mentor other teachers.

More direct ties between compensation and high-level instruction are evident in several other programs. Nine TURN districts (Cincinnati, Miami/Dade, Hammond, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Montgomery County, New York City, Rochester, and Toledo) provide a district-level supplement or a cash bonus, which in some cases is in addition to that provided by the state. Such a bonus might be a flat dollar amount or might be incorporated into the salary schedule. For example, Los Angeles provides a 15 % salary increase for board-certified teachers. Hammond, Indiana, treats board certification as the equivalent of the Ph.D. lane on the traditional salary schedule. New York City treats board certification as equivalent to the master's-plus-30years lane, or about \$3,700 more than the same point on the previous salary schedule. Dade County adds \$5,000 to the state stipend, and together these figures total 20% of the average teacher's salary. Seven TURN districts (Bellevue, Boston, Cincinnati, Miami/Dade, New York City, Pinellas County, and Rochester) and one state (Florida) provide stipends that cover all or most of the assessment fee (currently \$2,000). In some cases the stipend is contingent on the teacher's remaining in the district for a certain number of years; in that way the financial investment in the teacher's professional growth is at least partially offset by the enhanced knowledge and expertise the board-certified teacher brings to the district. And, indeed, board-certified teachers often assume leadership roles in their districts and in their unions - particularly in such areas as professional development.

### **Knowledge- and Skills-Based Pay Systems**

Knowledge- and skills-based pay systems provide salary increases for the demonstration of specified knowledge, skills, and professional expertise. Such salary increases can be focused on beginning teachers, experienced teachers, or mid-career teachers. They can be based on deeper knowledge of content, as represented by a master's degree or doctorate in the content area, or on demonstrated instructional expertise beyond that expected of a beginning teacher. The latter can be assessed through peer review, as long as a district has specified teaching standards and assessments. At least nine TURN districts (Bellevue,

Boston, Cincinnati, Denver, Miami/Dade, Minneapolis, Rochester, Toledo, and Westerly) have systems that, although not formally identified as knowledge- and skills-based, provide compensation for specific knowledge or credentials. For example, to receive credit for a master's degree on the salary schedule in Dade County, the degree must be in a field in which the individual is teaching. In Westerly, Rhode Island, teachers receive extra pay for taking district-identified professional development courses, which are provided primarily by the teacher union.

Another form of knowledge- and skills-based pay involves paying additional money to teachers who perform certain functions, such as lead teachers who mentor new teachers. These programs typically have "term limits" so that participating teachers eventually return to classroom instruction, both to maintain and enhance their own instructional expertise and to allow other teachers an opportunity to participate in these new leadership roles.

Finally, several TURN districts allow for teachers in shortage areas (e.g., science, mathematics) to be placed on a higher salary step. This practice acknowledges both the reality that certain types of skills cost more in the marketplace and the school's interest in hiring and retaining teachers who are knowledgeable about their subject area and can teach it well.

### **What's Ahead?**

Although our discussion has highlighted compensation provisions that are in place and that have, in some cases, been in effect for a number of years, it is important to note that other innovations for compensating teachers are planned or being developed. Cincinnati is working on a knowledge- and skills-based pay program that would be integrated into a newly aligned system of performance evaluation and professional development. The union and district also developed a school-based performance award program that was initially rejected by the membership but is being reviewed for possible changes that might make it more acceptable, although it is now being used to provide principals with performance bonuses.

Denver just ratified a contract that calls for a two-year trial period during which three different forms of pay for performance will be piloted. One form is based on teacher performance and will reflect some type of knowledge- and skills-based pay innovation. The other two are based on improvements in the performance of students in individual teachers' classrooms. The agreement requires an outside evaluation of all three models, including their effect on student achievement. The results will be incorporated into future salary negotiations, with changes contingent on a teacher vote.

In our own districts, as well, changes are under consideration. Rochester's teacher contract already includes several features of performance-based compensation and school-wide incentives. For example, the Career in Teaching program has been in place for over a decade. It provides progressive job responsibilities and opportunities that allow teachers to grow professionally throughout their careers. Financial incentives are tied to the top two levels of this four-level program. Rochester also has a school-wide incentive program (Classroom Resource Fund) that provides school improvement dollars for meeting specified goals for student outcomes. In addition, for nearly 14 years, Rochester has sustained innovations in the area of peer review and performance appraisal. As part of our effort to continuously improve instruction within the district, future initiatives include a collaborative plan to develop public charter schools that would have, among other things, considerable latitude in how their teachers are paid.

In Seattle, a strong partnership existed between the teacher union and the late superintendent, John Sanford. Much progress was made in important areas, including school-based management. We hope that this partnership will continue with the new superintendent, Joseph Olchefske. More recently, the union presented a radical proposal that would transform the roles and responsibilities of teachers in Seattle, as well as their compensation system. The key elements of the proposal include lengthening the school year and adding paid teacher days to provide "full-time employment." A correspondingly significant increase in the base salary would accompany the movement to such full-time employment. As the district moves aggressively into standards-based, results-driven instruction, it is seeking to align its compensation plan with skills and knowledge. A knowledge and skills-based pay system that provides four levels of movement in each of six knowledge or skill categories would provide compensation growth similar to that of a traditional single salary structure, but would be based on professional expertise more closely aligned with students' educational needs.

## **The Big Picture**

The list of compensation innovations that have been adopted in TURN districts is just a beginning. How can a handful of innovations in a very small subset of all the school districts in the United States be presented as evidence that changes in teacher compensation are not only possible but also emerging as feasible for a growing number of teachers and their unions? To make this point, we come back to our argument that a new labor/management culture must be created so that all education partners are involved in the key decisions that are so critical to the continued existence of public education.

The new ways of compensating teachers that we have discussed are proof that change is indeed possible. We know from our conversations with TURN colleagues that the changes that have been adopted were not necessarily "easy sells" to either teachers or management. Some of these changes touch upon very sensitive' deeply felt issues, such as whether it is appropriate for teachers to play a role in evaluating the performance of other teachers. Accomplishing these changes requires persistence and mutual trust.

Even those districts that have successfully implemented some changes continue to face resistance as they press their efforts to reform the roles and relationships of labor and management in education. For example, Cincinnati's teachers voted down a bonus program last spring that they had approved in principle only a few months before. Other districts too often find it necessary to fend off old-fashioned merit pay proposals.

The question then may be not only whether these changes can be sustained, but also whether they can be replicated in other districts. We optimistically believe that the answer is "yes, if." A key "if" is if local unions are able to get their members to embrace the new forms of unionism that view teachers as active change agents in education. Another "if" is if school management and elected officials can support this new way of thinking about the role of unions in school decision making. Finally, as long as key educational issues remain the sole purview of central decision makers, most notably the superintendents and school boards, progress will continue to be hampered by the relative lack of stability in those positions. A new superintendent or a change in the composition of the school board frequently signals a change in direction for the district and, at a minimum, the need to actively rebuild trusting relationships with the new actors.

Despite these cautions, we believe that labor/management relations and the culture of schools must change in response to current education conditions. We also believe that the innovations in teacher compensation that have been brought about in TURN districts serve as examples of how change can happen when we really want it to occur and work in partnership with others to improve education.

1. The 21 charter members of TURN are Albuquerque (AFI); Bellevue, Wash. (NEA); Boston (AFT); Cincinnati (AFT); Columbus, Ohio (NEA); Dade County, Fla. (AFT); Denver (NEA); Hammond, Ind. (AFT); Los Angeles (AFT/NEA); Memphis (NEA); Minneapolis (NEA); Montgomery County, Md. (NEA); New York City (AFT); Pinellas County, Fla. (NEA); Pittsburgh (AFT); Rochester, N.Y. (AFI); San Diego (NEA); San Francisco (AFT/NEA); Seattle (NEA); Toledo (AFI); and Westerly, R.I. (NEA). 2. Allan Odden and Carolyn Kelley, *Paying Teachers for What They Know and Do: New and Smarter Compensation Strategies to Improve Schools* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 1997).