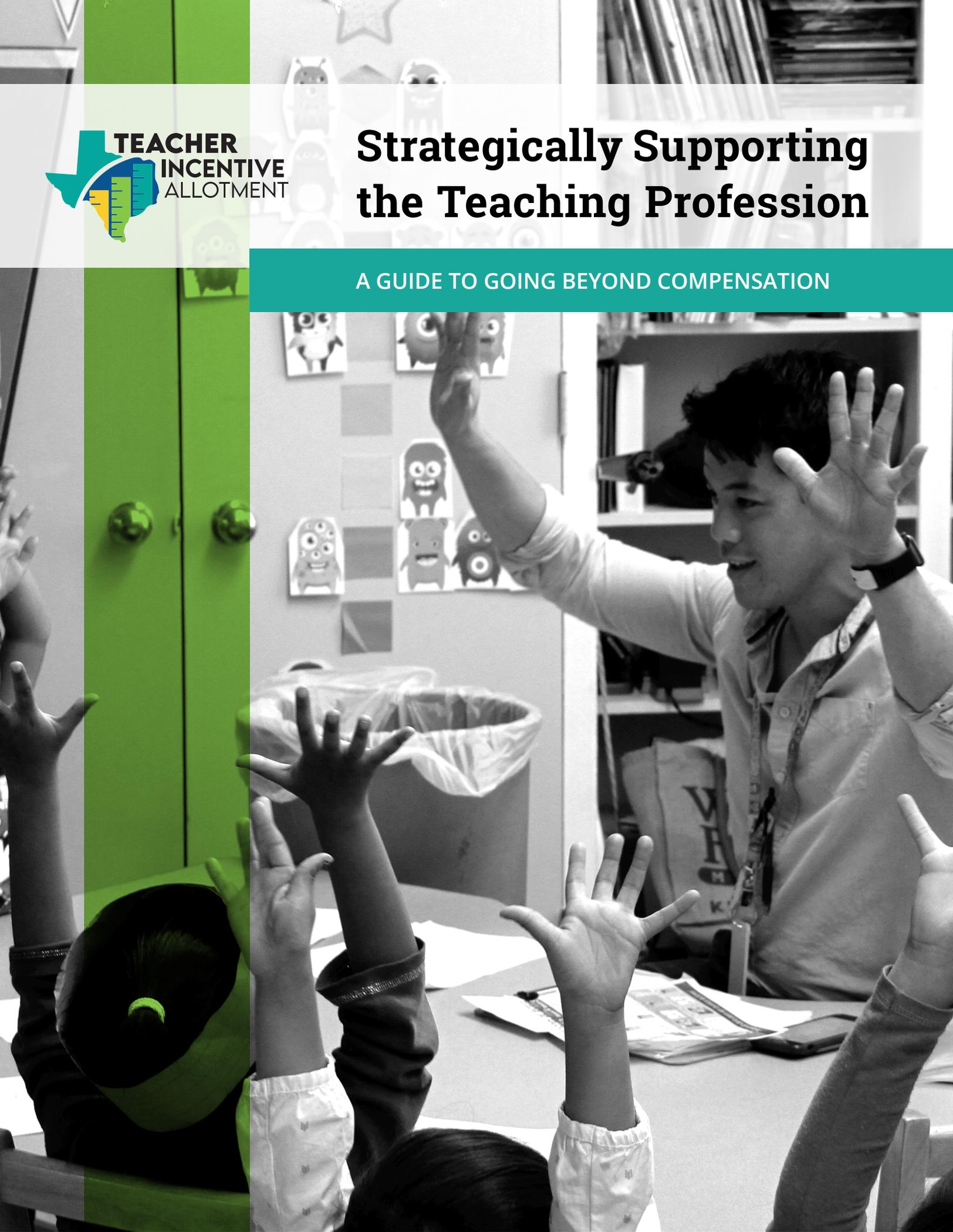




Strategically Supporting the Teaching Profession

A GUIDE TO GOING BEYOND COMPENSATION



TEACHERS AND THE TEACHING PROFESSION ARE AN ESSENTIAL RESOURCE WHEN IT COMES to ensuring that Texas students are able to succeed in school and thrive in life. Making strategic use of your system for compensating teachers is an important step toward improving school district performance and amplifying the impact of the considerable resources dedicated to educator compensation. However, compensation is only one part of the human resources functions of recruiting, onboarding, developing, and retaining effective educators. A strategically managed human resource system¹ can provide the infrastructure and processes for carrying out all of these important human resources tasks. Imagine the impact on the performance of your district, schools, and students if all of the pieces making up this system were strategically managed to ensure that every student is taught by an effective teacher and every school led by an accomplished school leader.

This guide describes how these human resources functions can be fine-tuned to boost educator effectiveness in your district. Educator compensation holds a unique place in this system in that it is both a part of the system and also, if designed correctly, supportive of the other components of the system. This guide also addresses each of these important human resources functions—recruiting quality candidates, developing teachers, retaining high-quality teachers, and strategically placing effective teachers—summarizing key best practices, providing examples, and, where applicable, how educator compensation may be strategically used to augment their effectiveness. The endnote superscripts found throughout this guide refer to numerous resources found in the References and Resources section at the end of the guide.

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RECRUITING QUALITY CANDIDATES

A strategically managed human resources system must first ensure a consistent pipeline of high-quality educator candidates. Even small districts face replacing multiple teachers every year. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the average teacher turnover rate in 2020–21 was 14.3 percent. At this rate of turnover, a district of around 500 students will, on average, face hiring six teachers per year. What can districts do to raise the odds that those newly hired teachers will be effective educators? Research and best practices provide several approaches districts can take.

Using Data to Track Vacancies

First, districts should take steps to understand and predict how many and where vacancies will occur. Further, districts should identify these vacancies, along with enrollment changes affecting staffing changes, as early as possible so they can hire early when the pool of candidates is largest and deepest.² Studies show that late hires, those made in late summer or into the fall, are more likely to result in lower retention rates and student achievement.³ There are tools available, such as a toolkit developed by the New Teacher Project, to help districts plan for upcoming vacancies and make timely hires.⁴

Employing Multiple Recruiting Strategies

Many districts, particularly those in rural settings, may struggle to find and recruit highly qualified candidates. Several strategies for addressing this issue have shown promise. Districts have found increased success by casting a wider net for finding candidates and employing multiple strategies when recruiting. These include developing relationships with multiple teacher preparation programs, including out-of-state institutions, and advertising on a variety of media platforms.⁵

TEA's Grow Your Own grant helps fund high school level education courses & teacher pipelines

Growing Your Own Candidates

Another strategy is to implement a “grow your own” teacher development program.⁶ Grow your own programs identify promising teacher talent among a district’s own high school students or uncertified instructional staff, such as paraprofessionals, and help them plot a course to certification. In some cases, districts (and states in the cases of North and South Carolina) implement educator career pathway programs for promising high school students. Other supportive policies include tuition assistance or college debt forgiveness programs for students who return to the district to teach. TEA’s Grow Your Own grant program helps fund high school-level education courses and teacher pipelines for districts, charter schools, and Education Service Centers (ESC).⁷ Grow your own programs have shown promise for alleviating teacher recruitment and retention issues in rural districts as students born and raised in a rural community are more likely to favor living and working back in their hometown.

Developing a Teaching Residency Program

Another promising practice for districts is to form teaching residency programs with one or more partner teacher preparation programs.⁸ In a teaching residency, candidates teach at their assigned school, typically for a full school year, with a menu of supports including a mentor teacher, while completing their teacher preparation program. By the time they receive their teaching credential, teaching residents have much more classroom experience than students completing traditional teacher preparation programs. Residency programs with sufficient funding to provide a living wage to the candidate while she or he completes the residency have shown promise for providing entry to the teaching profession for persons of color, low-income individuals, and non-traditional student candidates. Fifteen teacher residency programs in Texas earned TEA approval for 2021–22.⁹ Research on teaching residencies indicates they are more likely to attract more diverse candidates, to prepare a larger proportion of candidates in hard-to-staff subjects, and to have higher retention once in the teacher workforce.¹⁰

Keeping New Hires Engaged

Recruitment of high-quality candidates also involves ensuring those candidates interested in working in your district in spring or summer show up at your schools come fall. The New Teacher Project suggests several strategies for keeping new hires engaged and excited about teaching in your district. These strategies range from effectively selling working in your district during the interview to maintaining contact with candidates through the start of the school year. Districts should begin setting expectations by sharing their vision of effective teaching and outlining the professional development and other supports available to help new teachers be successful. New hires should be given access to their classrooms as soon as possible and given tours of their schools, along with a tutorial of what the beginning of the school year will look like. Districts can help to relocate teachers by offering financial support for moving costs or by helping to locate housing.¹¹

Using Compensation Strategically for Recruiting

A strategic compensation plan can also help with recruiting high-quality candidates. First, districts should strive to provide a starting salary competitive with those of other districts and employers seeking workers with education levels comparable to teachers in the local labor market. Adequate salary progression (i.e., competitive pay increases over time) is also important to both attract and retain quality educators. Another approach, becoming more common as teacher shortages grow more pronounced nationally, is to offer signing bonuses to new teachers. Jackson County Public Schools in Michigan is offering \$10,000 bonuses to new teachers agreeing to stay in the district for at least 3 years. Guilford County Schools in North Carolina is offering \$20,000 signing bonuses to new teachers agreeing to work in the district's lowest-performing schools.¹² Another strategy available to districts is offering new teachers financial support for repaying their student loans. TEA's website provides information on several federal and state loan forgiveness programs, including the Teach for Texas Loan Repayment Assistance Program available to certain designated communities and subject areas experiencing teacher shortages.¹³

DEVELOPING TEACHERS

Supporting New Teachers with Quality Induction Programs

Recruiting effective teachers and getting them in the door at the start of school are just the first steps in hiring effective teachers. Districts must continue to support the development of teachers throughout their careers to give them their best chance of reaching their potential as educators. For new teachers, this means providing induction services, such as introducing new teachers to the profession by establishing performance expectations, defining the district’s model of high-quality instruction, orienting them to how things work and where things are within the district and school, and providing an experienced mentor teacher for at least their first year in the district, preferably longer. Studies show the participation of novice teachers in high-quality induction programs improves both retention and the quality of instruction.¹⁴

For example, a pilot program in Louisiana helped districts adopt an induction program referred to as “shelter and develop.” Under shelter and develop, new teachers are sheltered by easing their workload through reducing their number of daily teaching hours, simplifying lesson planning, or delaying other responsibilities such as serving as lunch monitors. This eased workload allows them to focus more time on learning and improving their instructional craft. This effort is accompanied by additional supports from the district, such as providing more planning periods, weekly observation and feedback sessions, and mentoring from a high-quality mentor teacher.¹⁵ Mansfield Independent School District (ISD) in Texas implemented the KEEPS teacher mentoring program for teachers in their first 2 years of teaching in the district. The KEEPS mentoring program provides one-on-one mentor relationships for new teachers along with district and school orientations, ongoing professional growth activities and recognitions.¹⁶ Funding is available from TEA to support local mentoring programs for teachers with less than 2 years of experience through the Mentor Allotment Program.¹⁷



Providing Ongoing Professional Development

All teachers, both novice and veteran, also require ongoing, high-quality professional development to learn new skills, sharpen existing skills, and adjust to a changing instructional environment. The consensus of research on high-quality professional development highlights the following features:

A coherent program aligned with other elements of instruction such as student content and performance standards, standards-based teacher evaluations, and school and district goals

Activities that are school-based and job-embedded

Long-term and ongoing activities rather than brief sit-and-get workshops

Collaborative activities organized as groups, teams, or entire school faculties

A focus on subject content and pedagogical content knowledge

Activities offering opportunities for active learning such as developing curriculum units or scoring student work¹⁸

An example of professional development incorporating these characteristics is the Texas Lesson Study program administered by TEA through Education Service Centers (ESCs). The Texas Lesson Study program supports collaborative teacher teams in developing researched-based lesson plans through inquiry-based and job-embedded activities within a professional learning communities framework.¹⁹

Using Compensation Strategically for Teacher Development

Teacher compensation plans can be designed to incentivize teachers to continue growing professionally by engaging in professional development activities throughout their careers. For example, under Austin ISD's Professional Pay for Teachers pay plan, teachers earn points toward their annual raises by engaging in approved professional development activities.²⁰ Denver Public School's ProComp teacher pay plan allows teachers to earn \$1,000 per approved professional development unit (PDU) as well as pay-grade changes (moving to higher pay categories horizontally across the salary schedule) by accumulating PDUs.²¹

Facilitating Teacher Collaboration

A key component of teacher development is providing a school environment that encourages and facilitates collaboration and sharing among teachers. This means both setting expectations and norms for collaborative work as well as providing time for collaboration. Rework school schedules to provide time for professional learning communities or other collaborative activities such as collaborative planning time for teacher grade level or subject area teams, or provide release time, such as late-start or early release days, where teacher teams or whole school faculties can learn and share together.²²

RETAINING HIGH-QUALITY TEACHERS

Just as recruiting high-quality teachers requires a strategic approach, so does retaining them once they are hired. Rural districts, in particular, have a difficult time holding onto novice teachers who, looking to gain experience, may teach for 1 or 2 years in a rural district and then move on to larger districts offering higher pay and, in some cases, greater social opportunities.²³ In a district strategically managing its human resources—where the goal is placing an effective or highly effective teacher in every classroom—administrators realize that not all teacher turnover is necessarily bad. Losing an ineffective teacher may be a net positive if that teacher can be replaced by a higher-performing teacher.²⁴ Conversely, districts should make every effort to retain their effective teachers. Fortunately, studies have identified several strategies for doing this.²⁵

Supporting Quality School Leadership

Poor school leadership is one of the top reasons given for leaving districts or the teaching profession altogether. Surveys of teachers find that they want to feel supported by their school principal across the three areas of emotional, environmental, and instructional support. Providing emotional support requires school leaders to demonstrate to teachers that they are being listened to and appreciated. Acknowledging teachers' good work both privately and publicly lets them know their efforts have been noticed and recognized. Recognition is especially important for letting a school's best teachers know their extra effort and talent are appreciated. This acknowledgment could be simply writing a note, buying treats for the teachers' lounge, providing dinner on parent-teacher nights, or appointing an educator of the month. Environmental support for teachers consists of establishing a desirable school culture, including establishing school-wide goals, open communication between leadership and educators, shared decision-making, and teacher collaboration. Providing instructional support not only means working with teachers to improve instruction through observations, feedback, and aligned professional development, but also allocating adequate funding for instructional materials and supplies.²⁶

A recent review of the research literature on leadership behaviors influencing school outcomes found four key domains of effective leadership practice in schools:

- 1** Engaging in instructionally-focused interactions with teachers
- 2** Building a productive school climate
- 3** Facilitating teacher collaboration and professional learning communities
- 4** Managing personnel and financial resources strategically²⁷

Studies have also identified several areas of focus for developing effective school leaders, including instituting a pipeline for identifying and nurturing promising school leaders; encouraging shared leadership models with teacher leaders; providing school leaders with the autonomy to act to meet the needs of their students, faculty, and parents; employing research-based principal evaluation tools using multiple indicators; and finally, providing adequate compensation for attracting and retaining high-quality leaders.²⁸

Creating Collaborative School Environments

Similar to its positive impact on recruitment, a collaborative school environment can help with teacher retention. Creating a school culture where teachers feel a sense of belonging, strong collegial relationships, and the sense of working toward shared goals is an important factor for teachers' job satisfaction. Research suggests that schools where teachers feel supported by their colleagues and leadership, have a voice in school decision-making, and engage professionally in professional learning have higher teacher retention, especially for novice teachers.²⁹

Holding the “Teacher Stay” Conversation

District and school leaders can use teacher stay conversations to gauge how teachers are feeling about their positions and whether or not they are contemplating leaving their school. This is a proactive step for supporting the retention of effective teachers by checking in with them on their intentions, letting them know their work is recognized and appreciated, assuring them their return to the school is important to its success, and laying out the steps the school can take to reward their efforts and help them to continue to be successful. The New Teacher Project developed a planning guide to help school leaders successfully manage these conversations.³⁰

Using Compensation Strategically for Improving Retention

Combined with attractive working conditions, a strategic compensation plan can play an important role in improving teacher retention. Low pay is a significant factor in teachers leaving the profession.³¹ Ensuring competitive teacher pay and rewarding your best teachers should be an important part of any retention strategy. Districts that can afford to pay competitive salaries should use this fact as a marketing tool in recruiting new teachers. Teacher compensation can be strategically designed to support teacher retention in several ways, including providing adequate pay progression, retention bonuses, or career pathways/ladders.

Strategic compensation can play an important role in improving teacher retention.

Providing Adequate Pay Progression

To avoid having compensation work against teacher retention, districts must pay attention to how their salaries compare to other competing employers in their labor market—both other school districts as well as professions drawing from candidate pools with similar education levels and skills as teachers. Ideally, teacher salaries should be

competitive for teachers at all stages of their careers, from those new to the profession to those in mid- and late-career. If this is not economically feasible, districts may reduce costs by basing competitive salaries to support district human resource goals such as improving retention of early-career teachers, teachers in hard-to-staff subject areas or schools, or effective teachers.³² A 2021 Education Week Research Center survey of 1,000 educators found that higher pay was the most important move districts can make to keep teachers from leaving the profession.³³

Implementing Career Pathways/ Career Ladders

Providing teachers with pathways to leadership roles can also contribute to improving teacher retention and recruitment. These leadership roles may include serving as instructional coaches, mentor teachers, curriculum developers, professional developers, or other functions. A career pathway plan offers teachers avenues for career advancement focused on instructional improvement without necessarily leaving the classroom.³⁴ Strategic pay plans support this development by establishing career ladder pay schedules with higher salaries for teacher leaders or by paying stipends for assuming leadership roles.³⁵ Baltimore City Schools adopted an entirely new career ladder-style teacher salary schedule with four levels: 1) Standard, 2) Professional, 3) Model, and 4) Lead.³⁶



Offering Retention Stipends

A strategic compensation plan can also help with retaining teachers by offering retention stipends or bonuses to teachers agreeing to return to the district the following year or to teachers in hard-to-staff schools or subjects such as math, science, foreign languages, and special education. For example, the 1,300 student West Independent School District in Texas is using its American Rescue Plan, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Release III (ESSER III) funding to pay \$1,000 retention stipends to all staff through the 2023-24 school year, while the Marlboro County School District in South Carolina paid teachers a \$2,500 bonus for returning for the 2021-22 school year. Trousdale County Schools in Tennessee pays stipends of \$3,000 to \$4,000 to teachers teaching hard-to-staff subjects. The Austin Independent School District takes a different approach by offering a permanent salary increase for teachers working in hard-to-staff schools through its Professional Pay for Teachers pay plan.³⁷

ENSURING EQUITY AND THE STRATEGIC PLACEMENT OF EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS

Studies show, for reasons ranging from teacher seniority rights to challenges in accurately identifying the most effective teachers, students in the neediest schools are often taught by the least qualified teachers.³⁸ This practice creates serious equity concerns both in terms of school resource allocation and student outcomes. Increasingly, districts are participating in efforts to better align educational resources—specifically highly effective teachers but also including other resources, such as instructional technology and materials—with school and student need. For example, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina undertook a comprehensive assessment of its lowest-performing schools and implemented their Achievement Zone initiative to strategically target more resources, including highly effective teachers and principals, to these schools. The initiative has shown promise with growth in the proportion of students achieving proficient or higher on state tests in one or more subject areas in these schools. Others around the country are also engaged in efforts to better manage the equitable distribution of quality educators across schools, including Florida’s Duval County Public Schools and a statewide initiative in Michigan led by the Michigan Department of Education.³⁹

SUMMARY

Strategically designing educator compensation is an important tool for improving teacher quality and raising student performance. However, a more powerful approach is to integrate and align compensation with the other key human resources functions of educator recruitment, induction, development, retention, and placement in a system where all of these elements are focused on improving educator quality and achieving other important district goals. A well-designed compensation system can be used to support each of these human resource functions through a set of financial incentives that may be paired with other, non-financial initiatives such as ensuring high-quality school leadership and positive working conditions in schools.

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