



Transitioning to a Performance-Based Pay System: Combining compensation, evaluation and professional development

Project Summary

Yongsan International School of Seoul had a very traditional step-based scale that resulted in the very best teachers being compensated at the same base rate as a poor or inexperienced teacher. This was a very egalitarian system, but it was not a system that rewarded deserving teachers or that supported the accomplishment of the school's mission.

In an attempt to align compensation with accomplishment of the school's mission and to allow excellent teachers to be compensated at a higher level, a performance pay system was developed. This initiative has also been linked closely to the development of a new evaluation system and an expanded professional development program for the faculty.

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Project Focus

Yongsan International School of Seoul (YISS) used a traditional step-based salary scale. A teacher's pay increased with each year of service and with educational achievement. The salary scale had always been used at YISS.

YISS has been very blessed over the past five years and was able to raise the base salary on the scale, a teacher with no experience and a BA, by 87% over that period. At the same time a teacher who has 20 or more years of experience with a doctorate has seen a 77% raise in salary. This is also a robust percentage over five years but only about \$11,000 separates a beginning teacher from a well established and hopefully, excellent teacher.

While examining the pay scale the administration realized the inequity. The scale was simple and traditional, but the way it was structured did not support the excellence in teaching that was being sought. We had many excellent teachers who were making almost exactly the same amount as an inexperienced or struggling teacher.

As this issue was discussed, the administration realized that to adjust the salary it would also be necessary to strengthen the evaluation of the faculty and to provide many opportunities for the faculty to grow professionally. Three issues had arisen in the discussion: compensation, evaluation and professional development. These three components could have been addressed separately, but it seemed to make the most sense to address them as a whole instead since they were interrelated.

For example, if a teacher was excelling, the evaluations and compensation for that teacher should reflect that excellence. It also made sense that the professional development requirements for that teacher reflect that excellence. A high performing teacher as part of increased compensation would get more freedom in required professional development and would be asked to serve as a model for other teachers to observe and seek out as a resource.

In another example, the evaluation program would identify an underperforming teacher. At that point the professional development program for that teacher would include a professional improvement plan and would become very prescriptive and would also include increased evaluation to gauge improvement. They would be compensated at the base rate.

The decision was made to create a program that included each of the components for the benefit not only of the faculty but also of the students of the school.

Methods and Processes Used

Faculty support of this idea was the most important key. Many conversations explaining the direction and rationale that allowed for input and questions were held. Some of these were formal but many more were informal. One thing that became clear through the conversations was though the teachers in general were not motivated by money but a bump in pay in recognition of their proven excellence was deeply meaningful because it recognized their hard work on behalf of their students.

Many professional development plans were gathered from other international schools and schools in the US. These were from very large to very small schools and all were examined in the light of current research to develop a plan that would be exemplary but also tailored for the school's needs.

Much work was also done in tying the professional development plan to the compensation and evaluation components. The most interesting component at first glance is the performance pay piece, but what finally emerged is primarily a professional development plan with a performance pay component.

For the 2010-2011 school year, it was decided to pilot the program with a select group of teachers. Two were selected from the elementary, two from the middle school and two from the high school. These six teachers will be compensated on the new scale and will be subject to the professional development and evaluative parts of the plan. This is to help find any areas that need to be addressed or clarified before including the entire faculty in the program and to help insure the programs succeeds despite a change in the administration.

Project Results

Compensation, evaluation, and professional development are now viewed as one, emphasizing the dependence of each on the other. None of these are viewed correctly if they are examined apart from the others. They could each stand-alone but are much more powerful if their interconnectedness is emphasized.

A modified performance pay system was created which has sizable salary increases for each level. This allows the school to communicate the value to the students and the school community of teachers who help the school more effectively accomplish its mission. All new faculty enter on probationary status but highly experienced teachers who perform well receive a year-end bonus equal to their salary increase for the following year.

The faculty evaluation program was modified to support the new program. Each faculty level has different requirements as to number and type of evaluations. The Professional Improvement Plan for teachers who struggle in any area was also standardized and integrated into the new system.

Professional development now has certain prescribed elements for every faculty member and for proven faculty it now has many more options. More experienced teachers have a great deal of freedom and can even develop professionally by helping other teachers grow.

The Professional Growth Plan was developed showing the progression between levels along with requirements for each level. A flow chart illustrating the plan and progression has also been developed.

What was learned?

I now firmly believe faculty compensation, evaluation and professional development should be viewed as one and not as separate. These three are vitally interlinked and are best viewed as such. It makes sense to talk about professional development along with evaluation. It also makes sense to talk about compensation with professional development. Now I cannot imagine thinking about the three individually rather than as one.

In the end we felt more like what we had developed was more about professional development than about performance pay. Performance pay is a more interesting topic on the surface, but to describe the overall project it makes more sense now to call it a Professional Growth Plan. Again this has to do with the interrelatedness of the three components.

Trust between the administration and faculty is vitally important in the introduction of a new initiative. This level is high at YISS, and it made every discussion better. If the school had an adversarial administration and faculty relationship it would be almost impossible to introduce a major initiative. When the two are working toward a common purpose, however, it benefits the entire school community.