



RESEARCH NOTE

Research Services

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Topic: Teacher Career Lattice Program

Focus: A review of the Teacher Career Lattice Program in Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools

Purpose: To respond to a request from the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, Grants Administration, and Community Services.

Background

Pay-for-performance plans have become popular as school districts search for ways to improve teacher quality and student academic achievement. There is a need to develop systems that are sensitive to the market and are performance based whereby higher performing teachers receive greater financial compensation and recognition. The sense of competition among districts also promotes a need to retain highly qualified teachers in the present climate of teacher shortages. Such programs have been developed with varying degrees of success in Florida (Star Plan), Denver (Pro-Comp), and Minnesota (Q-Comp).

The Montgomery County Public School District in Rockville, Maryland has completed 10 years of work on what is referred to as "growth systems" for all employees which "... concentrate on building the capacity of all staff members to work at a high level and generate results for students." The intent is to develop staff from the time they begin their careers to the time they retire from the system. These efforts have involved several new initiatives including the development of the Teacher Career Lattice Program. The remainder of this Research Note will review the major components of this staff development program which is scheduled to be phased in during the 2009-2010 school year.

Purpose

Development of the Career Lattice Program began with the realization that the public school district in Rockville Maryland needed a way to attract, develop, recognize, and retain high quality teachers throughout their professional careers. A 14-member Career Lattice Panel made up of an equal number of teachers and administrators was charged with the responsibility of developing the new program. Not only was financial compensation important to teachers but the panel also decided the district needed to develop opportunities to reward outstanding teaching and to compensate teachers for taking on greater responsibility for increasing student achievement and in closing the achievement gap. The Career Lattice Panel is also responsible for maintaining data on the teachers participating in the program and for measuring success of the program.

The program makes an important distinction between the lattice program and the traditional career ladder system. The additional responsibilities taken on by participating teachers in the Career Lattice Program remain within the teaching domain and do not represent advancement within those tasks typically associated with administration. Therefore, accomplished teachers remain in the classroom and the intent is not necessarily to prepare teachers for future principal or assistant principal vacancies.

Program Goals

The Career Lattice Program aspires to achieve goals that are tied to the district's strategic plan. The following goals were taken directly from the program literature provided by the Montgomery County Public Schools.

- To promote leadership skills, among teachers, both in the classroom and in the larger community of school, cluster or district .
- To attract and retain high-performing teachers, especially in high-need schools.
- To promote teacher leadership for measurable educational improvements.
- To promote and support collaborative and reflective practices that influence school culture and student achievement.

Program Components

The Career Lattice Program involves three stages including Induction, Skillful Teaching, and Leadership in Teaching. Each stage is briefly described below.

- Induction Stage: Provides training and support mechanisms to improve the skills and knowledge of the beginning teachers who volunteer to participate in the program. Consulting teachers, mentors, and administrators provide beginning teachers with "job-embedded professional development."
- Skillful Teaching Stage: Participants engage in continuous professional development activities including graduate courses to attain an advanced professional teaching certificate, to achieve tenure, and to become accomplished educators. Teachers may choose to remain in this stage for the duration of their career.
- Leadership in Teaching Stage: Teachers further develop their careers in the third and final stage by taking on additional responsibilities and become school leaders while still maintaining responsibility for direct student learning.

Lead Teacher Status

Teachers choosing to advance to the Leadership in Teaching stage must submit an application which provides personal evidence of "demonstrated instructional mastery and leadership skills." Once participants achieve Lead Teacher status they can be selected for various teacher leadership roles. Such additional responsibilities can include functioning as resource, consulting or developmental teachers or assuming leadership roles in schools failing to achieve adequate yearly progress or in high poverty schools.

Anticipated Benefits

The program is anticipated to benefit both students and teachers in the district. The development of skillful and collaborative teams of teachers will improve student learning and teachers will attain greater job satisfaction from the professional leadership and instructional skills acquired through their participation. It is also anticipated that individual schools will benefit from the increased leadership skills acquired by teachers and from the increased collaboration practiced by teaching staff. The "home grown" talent pool developed from teachers participating in the program will also aid the district in its attempt to maintain a future supply of competent and quality staff able to advance to administrative positions as needed.

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