

A Stronger Profession Through Appropriate Teacher Incentives

Effective incentive systems should reflect the principles that intrinsic rewards are more powerful than extrinsic ones and that encouraging collegiality is preferable to rewarding individual teachers.

An impressive array of recent state and local policies share one overriding aim: improving the quality of teaching in the nation's schools. Virtually every aspect of the profession is affected—job responsibilities, career paths, salary arrangements, recruitment, training, certification, selection, evaluation, even labor relations and teacher involvement in school governance.

The most complex new policies attempt to restructure the teaching work force completely. The Carnegie Task Force (1986) report, for example, calls for differentiating teacher work roles and establishing a system of truly professional training and certification for a cadre of "lead teachers." By contrast, the Holmes Group (1986) urges sharply increased levels of skill and tighter certification standards for all teachers. Meanwhile, American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker calls for a radical decentralization of decision making (Shanker 1985, 1986).

Often taking a narrower focus, state legislatures have enacted a virtual avalanche of teacher accountability measures, competency testing, performance evaluation, and incentive pay programs. The most systematic of these policies are associated with Career Ladder programs being devel-

oped or implemented in at least 26 states.

Large-scale restructuring and intensified accountability are not the only issues. Persistent teacher shortage problems occupy the attention of policymakers in many parts of the country. In some subject areas—mathematics, science, foreign language—shortages are serious and apparently growing. And in specialized areas such as bilingual education and special ed-

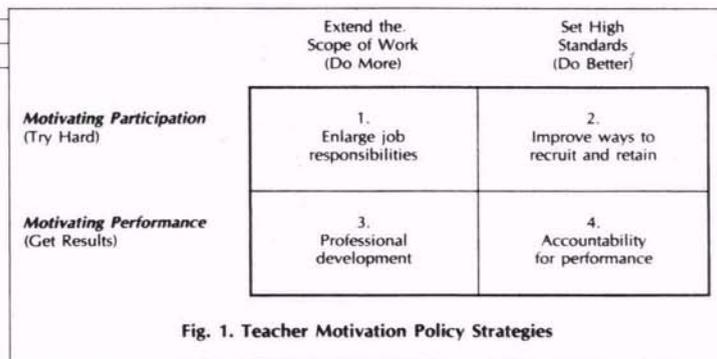
ucation, the problem is widespread and serious. This problem has stimulated a variety of teacher recruitment and retention policies. Salary and benefit increases are often seen as the most important elements in recruitment and retention, but nonsalary incentives are proving to be equally important.

Psychological aspects of teaching are also being scrutinized. While some observers emphasize the frustration and stress found in the schools, others concentrate on the tedious routines that occupy much of the teacher's workday. Regardless of its cause, however, emotional disengagement or burnout is widely recognized as a serious problem. Treatments range from greater assistance and support for individual teachers, especially new ones, to reorganizing and increasing the variety in teacher's day-to-day work responsibilities. Survey data confirm the findings of individual case studies that underscore the importance of giving teachers control over their own working conditions (Mitchell et al. 1987).

Improving Teacher Motivation

While mass media rhetoric emphasizes disciplinary action toward low-performing teachers, the primary goal of the teacher-focused "second wave" reform policies is *enhanced work mo-*

Targeted use of scarce resources will be more effective if we recognize that the most potent rewards for good teaching are *intrinsic and symbolic* rather than *extrinsic and material*.



High priority is given to energizing teachers whose dedication and commitment are flagging and to redirecting the efforts of current and potential teachers whose energy is high but inadequately focused on important teaching tasks. As suggested by the terms in Figure 1, policies aimed at enhancing teacher motivation must solve two basic problems. First, they must balance support for more enthusiastic entry into and continued participation in the workplace against strategies for improving the performance of critical teaching tasks. If teachers are faced with demeaning or impossible performance demands, their willingness to enter the profession or work energetically at assigned tasks is undermined. But if they are rewarded for merely participating enthusiastically, the work becomes disorganized, and productivity suffers. Teacher motivation policies must, in short, encourage teachers both to *try hard* and to *get results*.

In addition to providing adequate incentives for both job performance and participation in the school, teacher motivation policies must strike a balance between enlarging the *scope of work* responsibilities and setting high *standards*. Policies that give too much emphasis to meeting objective standards encourage teachers to adopt an unduly narrow job definition and avoid criticism by denying responsibility for key aspects of their work. At the same time, overemphasis on enlarging job definitions and task responsibilities obscures the importance of adequately performing basic work elements. In short, an appropriate incentive system will motivate teachers both to *do more* and to *do better*.

As indicated in Figure 1, four overall strategies for improved teacher motivation are created when performance

and participation goals are linked to the problems of setting high standards and extending the scope of teacher work responsibilities. The four motivational strategies are:

1. *enlarge teacher job definitions* by extending the range of task responsibilities;
2. improve methods for *recruitment and retention* of good teachers (and discourage continued service by their less adequate colleagues);
3. enhance teacher capacities through high-quality *professional development* programs;
4. improve task execution by strengthening *accountability for performance* in the schools.

Providing Appropriate Rewards

It is one thing to know what changes in teacher motivation are needed, quite another to know how to secure the desired results. Teachers cannot be coerced into pursuing high performance or accepting expanded professional responsibilities. Coercion and close supervision of their work efforts are incompatible with the open and trusting classroom climate required for effective teaching and learning. Moreover, since teachers' professional growth and development also depend on spontaneous and enthusiastic engagement, they cannot be easily pressured into improving their own skills. Development of an effective reward system, not increased use of threats and coercion, will be necessary if teacher motivation is to be substantially improved.

Perhaps the most important question facing school managers and education policymakers today is how to create a teacher reward system capable of generating strong and balanced support for all four teacher motivation

goals. What sort of reward system can simultaneously assure enthusiastic entry into the profession, acceptance of personal accountability, continuous professional development, and acceptance of an enlarged definition of teacher work responsibilities?

Recognizing the Importance of Intrinsic Rewards

Increasing the full range of teaching rewards would, of course, improve overall teacher motivation. Resources are limited, however, so a more targeted approach is essential. Targeted use of scarce resources will be more effective if we begin by recognizing that the most potent rewards for good teaching are *intrinsic* and *symbolic* rather than *extrinsic* and *material*. In addition, the targeting process needs to: (1) make the entire incentive system more reliable, and (2) maintain an appropriate balance among various types of incentives.

The rewards provided to teachers, like those given in other occupations, are a mixture of intrinsic satisfactions (e.g., exciting work, commodious working conditions, interesting co-workers, or the joys of competently performing important tasks) and extrinsic benefits (promotions, wages, or public recognition). Research has demonstrated quite clearly that teachers are most sensitive to intrinsic rewards directly linked to their relationships with students and co-workers (Lortie 1975; Mitchell 1987). While extrinsic benefits play an important role in encouraging good teachers to enter and remain in the profession, day-to-day teaching efforts are more effectively stimulated by a sense of pride in student achievement and pleasure derived from working with students who appreciate the opportunity to learn. Conversely, material benefits are no match for the negative effects of distasteful working relationships, a sense of hopelessness in the schools, or uncooperative and low-achieving students.

While policymakers are quick to highlight the political and economic problems associated with increasing salaries and other extrinsic rewards for teachers, they often fail to recognize the motivational role played by the more potent, but harder-to-manage, in-

	Individual	Group	Organizational
Stimulating Greater Participation			
1. Enlarge Job Definitions	Extra pay for extra work	Incentive funding of cooperative projects	Categorical district funding
2. Recruit and Retain More Effectively	High starting salaries; loans and scholarships	Support for team teaching	Teacher corps; inner-city service pay
Encouraging Higher Performance			
3. Professional Development	Evaluation-based promotions; mentor teachers	Support for group training	Grants for staff development to schools and districts
4. Accountability for Results	Merit pay	Team teaching performance bonus	Bonus payments for school/district performance

Fig. 2. Typical Extrinsic (Monetary) Teacher Work Incentives

trinsic rewards. To a substantial degree, good teaching generates its own rewards—a fact that frustrates poor teachers and confounds mediocre managers.

The linking of reward distribution to specific work activities is probably the hardest problem to solve in the development of systematic support for improved teacher motivation. In most public school settings, the flow of rewards to teachers is constantly threatened by program disruption, social conflict, or the personal inadequacies of administrators, teachers, or students. As a result, the distribution of critical rewards and sanctions is frequently seen as arbitrary, capricious, and unfair rather than as a legitimate effect of high-quality work. In homogeneous, middle-class communities where children are highly motivated and schools perform well, both intrinsic and extrinsic teaching rewards flow more regularly, but they are still not explicitly linked to specific performance or participation goals. As a result, teachers are easily encouraged to pursue easier and more comfortable assignments opportunistically rather than trying to improve their own work performance.

Distinguishing Incentives from Rewards

In developing policies that align intrinsic rewards with the goals of improved teacher work motivation, it is important to distinguish between the *potency* of the rewards available to teachers and the *incentive* value of those rewards. The potency of a re-

ward is measured by the amount of benefit, satisfaction, pleasure, or excitement it generates. Reward potency alone does not control motivation, however. Before a reward can be pursued, workers must know how it will be distributed. Less potent rewards may have higher incentive values if they can be reliably and confidently pursued. That is, the incentive value of a reward refers to the extent to which teachers are willing to reshape their work efforts in order to obtain it. To become an incentive, therefore, a reward must not only be desirable, it must be *anticipated*. Only if teachers contemplate receiving greater rewards as a result of reshaping their work activities in specific ways will they be motivated to enter the profession, to try harder, to do more and better work, or to focus their efforts on producing particular results.

While most education leaders acknowledge both the intrinsic character of key teaching rewards and the importance of creating a focused, reliable distribution system to link them to improved teaching, they devote too little attention to these factors in personnel programs and policies. Most policies are directed exclusively to the more easily manipulated extrinsic rewards, like job security or salary and fringe benefit adjustments. Moreover, the systems devised for distributing these rewards tend to be narrowly linked to the work efforts of *individual* teachers, rather than reinforcing the important but more subtle processes of collegial cooperation and school program implementation.

Designing an Effective Incentive System

Effective incentive systems emerge only when motivation goals are clearly identified, an adequate supply of potent rewards is available, and a distribution system reliably links the rewards to the motivational goals. While most recent reforms have been preoccupied with selecting appropriate motivational goals or increasing the overall level of rewards available to teachers, we can predict that these changes will have only limited effect without the development of carefully designed incentive distribution systems.

The most important single factor in the design of an incentive delivery system is determining whether rewards will be conveyed directly to *individual teachers*, to *collegial work groups*, or to *formal organizational units* (i.e., programs, departments, schools, or entire school districts). In recent years, so much attention has been directed to individual level distribution systems that the importance of the more aggregated mechanisms for rewarding teachers has gone largely unnoticed. Many important teaching rewards, however, simply cannot be distributed to individual teachers. Consider, for example, the excitement and satisfaction generated when teachers find themselves working with an interesting group of colleagues who share their educational values and provide a warm supportive environment in which to work. This type of reward cannot be made available to one teacher without at least

some others having the opportunity to share in it.

A similar sharing process is involved in the distribution of community recognition and support. When local citizens respond by approving budgets or otherwise expressing approval for the schools in their community, they offer organizational approval that is shared by all educators in the school system, not just a favored few who are held to be doing heroic work. Of course, some teachers are respected more than others, but community support for the entire system translates into support for the weak as well as the strong teachers. These simple examples can be multiplied a thousandfold. Either by the nature of the rewards themselves or through specific arrangements for their distribution, it is possible to ensure that teachers will receive their greatest rewards only when they work cooperatively with fellow teachers or participate fully in the implementation of adopted school programs.

Figure 2 illustrates the differences among individual, group, and organization level extrinsic monetary incentives. The rewards identified in this figure all involve money payments or resources readily translated into financial rewards. The rows of the figure represent the four motivational goals identified in Figure 1. The three columns distinguish rewards destined for

individual teachers from those that are made available to collegial groups or formal organizational units. At the individual level, for example, teachers are stimulated to enlarge job definitions and accept broader task responsibilities when they receive extra pay for accepting extra work assignments. They are stimulated to enter the teaching profession and to stay longer within its ranks if salaries and other financial incentives are used to reduce training costs or reward continuity of employment. Professional development is enhanced when financial rewards are connected to evaluation-based promotions. The Mentor Teacher and Lead Teacher programs being tried in several states use this distribution strategy. Merit pay is the archetypal incentive for encouraging individual performance accountability. All of these teacher payment strategies share in common the fact that monetary payments are made directly to individual teachers.

As shown in the second and third columns of Figure 2, however, there are many other ways to distribute financial incentives. Teachers can, for example, be encouraged to form and participate in collegial work groups in exactly the same way that recent cooperative learning programs have encouraged children to work in collegial groups while pursuing higher classroom achievement. If the objective is

to enlarge the job definitions for the work group, funds can be made available to teachers who cooperatively produce new instructional programs or participate in other valuable activities. When the goal is improved recruitment or retention within a well-established framework of job responsibilities, rewards can reinforce cooperative teaching work if a bonus is paid to individuals who participate in team teaching activities. Similarly, professional development can be linked to collegial group development by supporting group training opportunities. Moreover, giving bonuses for improving student attendance or achievement strengthens collegiality among teachers if the units assessed are larger than single self-contained classrooms.

Categorical funding is a time-honored strategy of providing fiscal rewards aimed at broadening the work responsibilities of formal organizational units in the schools. Whether desegregation, bilingual education, or urban schools are the target of the funds, categorically supported programs generate more job security and promotion opportunities for those who embrace the goals of the specialized program. The Teacher Corps and other proposals for special service pay to teachers willing to accept difficult teaching assignments are organizational incentive strategies for strengthening the overall capacity of a whole

	Individual	Group	Organizational
Stimulating Greater Participation			
1. Enlarge Job Definitions	Interesting work, enjoyable working conditions	Exciting teamwork on broad learning problems	Identification with broad vision of school
2. Recruit and Retain More Effectively	Involvement in exciting classroom experience	Development of collegial relationships	Sharing in the goals of school and district
Encouraging Higher Performance			
3. Professional Development	Expanded sense of competency	Shared sense of capacity for high-quality work	Participation in management and governance
4. Accountability for Work	Pride in personal accomplishments	Strong sense of cooperative achievement	Pride in working for a high-performance school

Fig. 3. Typical Intrinsic Teacher Work Incentives

school program. When the goal of incentive system design is to encourage higher organizational performance, financial grants can be linked to the willingness of school units to undertake particular program and staff development programs, or they can be offered as bonus payments for particular types of school or district performance.

This discussion of monetary rewards is not intended to be exhaustive. Other extrinsic rewards, like improved working conditions, easier work assignments, public recognition, or professional prestige, could have been described in Figure 2. The point is that the incentive value of any reward is related to the way it is incorporated into a particular distribution system. Collegial cooperation and organizational program implementation are just as dependent on the creation of an effective incentive system as is the level of satisfaction produced for individual teachers. With a bit of ingenuity, it is possible to design incentive distribution systems that link any available incentive to specific work motivation goals while simultaneously using it to reinforce individual, group, or organizational performance goals.

Figure 3 illustrates how the more potent intrinsic work incentives are distributed to individual teachers, collegial groups, and organizational units. Again, the four motivational goals embedded in recent state and local policies are shown in the left-hand column of the figure. At the individual level, enlarged job definitions are stimulated when teachers find the new work challenging, enjoyable, or exciting. When individual teacher recruitment or retention is the primary goal, attention needs to shift to making regular teaching assignments more exciting and interesting. Professional development becomes its own reward when teachers experience an enhanced sense of their own capacity or competence. And pride of accomplishment is the most important incentive to encourage teachers to accept direct personal accountability for the quality of their work.

Various dimensions of collegial solidarity and sharing are shown in the middle column of the figure. As suggested by the entries in this column, the motivational goals of enthusiastic participation and high performance

can be effectively supported through the creation of a strong sense of group membership and mutual support.

The importance of organization level intrinsic rewards has recently begun to receive long overdue attention in the development of programs for enhancing the sense of "vision" or "mission" brought into the schools by principals and other administrators. The breadth of the educational leader's vision controls whether teachers who identify with it are stimulated to broaden their job definitions and accept a wider array of task responsibilities. Regardless of the breadth of the vision, however, making it vivid and explicit plays a significant role in giving teachers the sense of membership and identity in the school that encourages them to remain in the profession and work diligently under less than optimal conditions.

Participation in school management or governance is the most important organization level incentive for professional development among teachers. Developing a sense of pride in the achievements of a high-performing school will go far in supporting organizational accountability.

As with the discussion of extrinsic monetary rewards presented earlier, the incentives described in Figure 3 only serve to illustrate the nature of the incentive system that operates within the public schools. The analysis presented here is intended to highlight the broad array of incentives available, and to encourage a fuller consideration of the role played by collegial groups and formal organizations in controlling the effects of various rewards on the performance of all teachers.

The Best Incentives

Too many recent policies have tried to induce improved school performance by threatening teachers' job security or concentrating financial rewards on individual behavior. The result has been an unbalanced and often unreliable incentive system that frustrates and alienates as many teachers as it succeeds in rewarding. While some aspects of teaching can be improved by isolating individual teachers and encouraging them to concentrate their efforts on a small group of students, the most serious

problems confronting today's schools call for coordinated work efforts by teachers who are able to work closely with trusted colleagues and who take pride and a sense of personal identity from participation in the total school organization.

Incentives capable of improving accountability, encouraging professional development, strengthening recruitment and retention, and expanding teacher job definitions are readily available in most school settings. Too few managers have the capacity to nurture and support an effective incentive system, however. While monetary rewards may be important, they are viewed as the most important incentives for good teaching only by policymakers and school managers who do not understand the potency of intrinsic satisfactions for teachers and who constantly disrupt the development of needed collegial groups and strong organizational structures by rewarding teachers for self-centered and organizationally subversive actions. Good schools are the best incentives for good teachers. □

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