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Compensation Models for Central Office and School Support Staff

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Introduction

In recent years, most of the focus for developing performance-based compensation systems has been devoted to classroom teachers and school-level leaders. However, we know that the work of central office and school support staff[1] can have an effect not only on the physical condition of the school building but the climate of a school as well. The contribution of central office and school support staff to student learning and the school environment requires state and local education agencies developing performance-based compensation systems to consider the inclusion of these staff in their models.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (ED), "every adult in the school contributes to the school's success, including…non-certificated staff, custodians, security guards, food service staff, and others working in the school" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). School support staff constitutes approximately 40 percent of all jobs within schools but often receives low pay with limited to no benefits due to part-time status (American Federation of Teachers [AFT], 2002). Moreover, the misperception is widespread that school support positions are low skilled and require a limited knowledge base. However, the positions are much more likely to be staffed by individuals who are skilled, have some post-secondary education, and require specific characteristics such as good judgment and physical strength (AFT, 2002). A 2001 National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) document acknowledged the importance of developing school support staff, suggesting support staff "be encouraged and assisted in their own career growth and drawn into the larger school community as adults who can promote the well-being of students" (p. 63). School support staff members are often responsible for the physical condition of the school, act as teachers by modeling appropriate adult behavior, and affect school culture and climate through their interactions with students, parents, and the community (Reeves, 2010). Past research shows that school climate and the physical condition of a school is not only important to student achievement (Schindler, Jones, Williams, Taylor, & Cardenas, 2009; Reid, 1983; Wu, Pink, Craig, & Moles, 1982; Anderson, 1982; Edwards, 1991), but can also affect absenteeism, effectiveness, morale, and job satisfaction among teachers (Wynn, Carboni, & Patell, 2007; Cocoran et al., 1988).

Similarly, the responsibilities and practices of district-level leaders have significant effects on student achievement, school-level decision making, and working conditions for teachers (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Marzano & Waters, 2009). Waters and Marzano (2006) found a statistically significant relationship between effective district leadership and increased student achievement. Moreover, the study found that effective superintendents focus on creating districts that are goal-oriented and provide schools with the autonomy to decide how they will meet the learning and instruction goals set by the district. Finally, the length of a superintendent's tenure is positively correlated with student achievement. Bottoms and Schmidt-David (2010) found that district leaders can positively affect schools by providing principals with the means to ensure instruction aligns with the goals and standards of the district, that high-quality professional development is provided to teachers and principals, that data is used to improve student outcomes, and that highly qualified principal candidates are identified.

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[1] School support staff includes nonadministrative and noninstructional staff, such as building engineers, clerical staff, custodial staff, cafeteria workers, and grounds keepers.

Given the importance of central office and school support staff to student learning and the school environment, this paper provides examples of performance-based compensations systems that acknowledge the work of those who help to create healthy, safe, clean, and supportive learning environments for students. The examples of performance-based compensation offered in this paper are limited in that the compensation given is not based on the performance of individuals but rather is based on schoolwide measures of student growth. Due to this limitation, the second part of this paper looks at examples of comprehensive evaluation systems that have included central office and school support staff in their model. While the examples of evaluation systems provided do not link evaluation to compensation, they do act as potential models for which performance-based compensation could be applied.

Existing Performance-Based Compensation Models

As mentioned above, available examples of compensation systems that include incentives for central office and school support staff are limited. However, the examples can serve as a starting place when thinking about the design, development, and implementation of performance-based compensation systems for central office and school support staff.

In the following section, we discuss the performance-based compensations systems of three school districts: Memphis City Schools (TN), Washoe County Public Schools (NV), and the Houston Independent School District (TX). It should be noted that each of these school districts was awarded a Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant to develop a performance-based compensation system. Under the TIF grant program, district central office staff are not allowed to receive performance-based awards. Therefore, when discussing each example, we will provide some district context and discuss the performance-based compensation system as it pertains to school support staff.

Memphis City Schools (TN)

Memphis City Schools (MCS) developed the "In the Zone" project to provide group and individual incentive stipends to teachers, principals, and other personnel in MCS's 28 most challenging schools, which were identified and managed under the district's Striving School Zone. The 28 schools included In the Zone serve a student population where 83.5 percent to 100 percent qualify for free and reduced-priced lunch; 18 of the 28 schools have a poverty rate that is more than 95 percent. The student body for the 28 schools is made up of predominately racial and ethnic minorities, ranging from 80.2 percent to 100 percent.

The In the Zone program offers incentive stipends of up to $1,500 for educational assistants and $1,000 for other school personnel (defined as all other nonadministrative personnel in the school, including support teachers, teaching assistants, building engineers, clerical staff and cafeteria workers), awarded solely through schoolwide recognition awards based on a school-level value-added measure of student growth. The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) is used to determine which schools have the highest student achievement gains. Based on this data, schoolwide recognition awards are made, and from those awards, educational assistants and other personnel receive incentive stipends. Full stipends are only awarded to those who participate in districtwide professional development activities or accept additional leadership roles and responsibilities in their school.

The first incentives will be awarded at the end of the 2012–13 school year.

Washoe County School District (NV)

The Washoe County School District (WCSD) is the second largest school district in Nevada, with 102 schools serving almost 65,000 students across diverse settings, including urban, suburban, and rural. The high school graduation rate in WCSD is 54 percent, making it among the lowest in the nation. WCSD has implemented the Principal and Teacher Performance Growth

System, a performance-based compensation plan for teachers, principals, and other personnel in WCSD. The program includes nine of the highest need elementary and middle schools in WCSD, where an average of 80 percent of the students receives free or reduced-price lunch and the student minority population is 74 percent.

WCSD's Principal and Teacher Performance Growth System provides incentive awards to educators, school administrators, and school support personnel. School support personnel are eligible to receive a $500 award when schoolwide performance targets based on the WCSD Accountability Model are met. Aligned with Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF), these targets are based on levels and proportions of students meeting proficiency and student growth targets. School support personnel are eligible to receive a $500 award if they meet the following criteria: (1) on the roster or employed by the district for 85 percent of the days for the school year; (2) on the Evaluation Listing Report, which lists the employees to be evaluated during the school year, sent to the TIF school by the office of human resources at the beginning of the school year and on November 1; and (3) received an overall rating of commendable or competent on their final evaluation for the school year.

Houston Independent School District (TX)

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) is the largest school district in Texas, serving 279 schools and over 203,000 students. A large portion of the student population is disadvantaged, with 30 percent of students having limited English proficiency, 79 percent economically disadvantaged, and 65 percent at risk for dropout. HISD has implemented the ASPIRE program (Accelerating Student Progress, Increasing Results & Expectations). Using the Educational Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) model, ASPIRE proposes to reward various teacher groups and other campus staff based on improvements in student test scores.

HISD's ASPIRE provides performance-based incentives to administrators, teachers, instructional support staff, teaching assistants, and operational support staff. Noninstructional or operational support staff members are eligible for an award up to $750. Operational support staff includes school secretary, data entry clerk, teacher aid, clerk, attendance specialist, business manager, SIMS clerk, computer network specialist, registrars, and CET staff. Awards are distributed to support staff based on the campus overall value-added score (i.e., Campus Composite Gain Index), which is calculated across all grades and subjects using EVAAS. Operational staff members are eligible to receive this award if: (1) all students on the campus meet gains at above-average academic progress, and (2) students' are placed in quartile 1 or 2 of their HISD comparison group for their average progress.

Inclusion in Comprehensive Evaluation Systems

Examples of performance-based compensation that include school support staff are limited, and no examples include central office staff. However, some states participating in the Race to the Top program are beginning to develop and implement evaluation and performance recognition systems that include central office and school support staff (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This section briefly discusses best practices for linking evaluation to performance-based compensation, and highlights a few evaluation system models that include central office or school support staff.

Linking Evaluation and Performance-Based Compensation

When implementing performance-based compensation systems, states and districts must strategically address issues such as the quality of data systems, key stakeholder buy-in during the design phase, multiple valid and reliable measures of effectiveness and performance, professional development, and program sustainability (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2010). Alone, a revised pay structure is not enough to improve teaching and learning. Instead, performance-based compensation needs to align with the entire human resource management system (Odden, 2008). Additionally, if the compensation systems are not aligned with broader improvement plans or human resource policies, then sustainability and impact on educator performance are negatively affected (Heneman, Milanowski, & Kimball, 2007). When considering performance-based compensation models for central office and school support staff, it is important to consider how to align performance-based compensation with the entire human resource management system, as well as with improvement plans and policies.

In the following section, we describe three examples of comprehensive evaluation systems that include central office and school support staff: the Kansas KEEP system, Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools' Professional Growth System, and District of Columbia Public Schools' IMPACT system. Although none of these systems link evaluation to performance-based pay for central office and school support staff, they are good models to draw from when considering strategies to include central office and school support staff.

Montgomery County Public Schools (MD)

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Maryland has developed and implemented the Professional Growth System (PGS), which is a set of standards, job-embedded professional development, and the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program. Through PGS, all personnel within the school building are evaluated. The PAR program, a part of the PGS, is used to make hiring and dismissal decisions for all personnel, as well as identify professional development opportunities. PGS is broken up into three subsystems: one for administrators and supervisory personnel, one for teachers, and one for support personnel. For the purposes of this paper, we will discuss the two components designed for district-level administrators and support services personnel.

Central Administrators

The purpose of the PGS for central administrators is to assure and document quality performance of central services administrators and to provide feedback on performance for the purpose of professional improvement. The six standards of performance for central administrators include clear expectations and measures. Formal evaluations are required during the first and second year of service, the first year after a change in administrative position, the fifth year as an administrator, the ninth year as an administrator, and every fifth year following the ninth. Formal evaluations for central staff include the following components:

- Meetings between the central staff administrator and their supervisor to set and review goals, as well as discuss progress in the professional development and strategic plan

- Formal observations and other interactions to evaluate performance against the six standards, which may include stakeholder meetings, project or program leadership, strategic planning meetings, leadership meetings, staff evaluation conferences, interactions with customers, professional development trainings or presentations

Data sources for the central staff administrator evaluation may include: formal observations, informal observations and other interactions, strategic plan, summaries and reports, professional development plan, office or program performance measures, staff profile, state and local compliance requirements, surveys, business and operations administrator's portfolio, business and operations administrator's use of systemwide data, and data submitted by the business and operations administrator.

Supporting Services Staff

The purpose of the PGS for supporting services staff, which include all nonadministrative and nonteacher positions, is to establish a comprehensive system for recruiting, staffing, developing, evaluating, recognizing, and retaining high-quality supporting services staff (MCPS, 2011). The first evaluation occurs prior to the end of the six-month probationary period, another evaluation occurs within 18 months, and a third before the completion of the second year. Following two years of employment, a supporting services formal evaluation occurs every three years. Supporting services staff are evaluated based on seven core competencies, which include: commitment to students, knowledge of job, professionalism, interpersonal skills, communication, organization, and problem solving. Supporting services staff are evaluated using two levels: meets competency or does not meet competency.

Although MCPS does have a comprehensive evaluation system that includes central office and school support staff, the district's decision of whether to develop a performance-based compensation system is hinged on whether Maryland proceeds with the development of a system at the state level.

District of Columbia Public Schools

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) IMPACT program is an evaluation system that targets all personnel within a school. IMPACT is designed to clarify expectations, provide feedback, facilitate collaboration, drive professional development, and retain great people.

IMPACTPlus is a sister program of IMPACT that provides performance-based compensation for employees within DCPS. However, IMPACTPlus only covers those who are members of the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU). Individuals in positions permitted for membership in WTU are not discussed in this paper. Here we will provide a brief overview of the IMPACT program's process for evaluating office staff, custodial staff, and other personnel.

Office staff, custodial staff, and other personnel are evaluated twice a year by their administrator. If an employee is rated highly effective during the last two school years being evaluated and receives a 3.0 or higher on a scale of 1.0 to 4.0 (1.0 being the lowest and 4.0 being the highest) for the first evaluation cycle of the next year, the employee then has the option to waive the second evaluation cycle for that school year. The IMPACT components and standards for office staff, custodial staff, and other personnel group are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. IMPACT Components

| Staff Category | Positions Included | Percent of Total Evaluation Score | | Core Professionalism |
		Category-Specific Standards	Commitment to School Community	
Office Staff	Administrative assistants, administrative aids, business managers, clerks, registrars, attendance aids, and other office staff	Office Staff Standards (90%) Core job functions; customer service; communication; adaptability; data supply management; budget and procurement	10%	Measure of four basic professional requirements for all school-based personnel. Scored separately from the others.
Custodial Staff	—	Custodial Standards (90%) Building maintenance; classrooms and office spaces; common areas and school grounds; restrooms; moving and arranging; safety, records and work orders (head custodians only); management and leadership	10%	See above
Other Personnel	—	Core Standards (100%) Core job functions; positive rapport with students and families; customer service; communication; and adaptability		See above

As noted previously, IMPACTPlus is a performance-based compensation system in DCPS and provides a strong model for compensation reform. However, only members of the WTU, which include all teachers, instructional coaches, mentor teachers, librarians, counselors, related service

providers, and a handful of other educators, are a part of the IMPACTPlus program. DCPS has been able to work out agreements with WTU on how performance-based compensation will work for its members. Nonetheless, it is not clear whether DCPS plans to include non-WTU members in IMPACTPlus in the future.

Kansas' KEEP

Kansas has developed the Kansas Educator Evaluation Protocol (KEEP) to assess performance and facilitate professional growth among teachers, principals, and district-level administrators. KEEP includes multiple data points as part of a formative and summative review process. The KEEP process is ongoing, connected to district improvement goals, and based on the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards[2] and ISLLC Standards.[3] Educators are evaluated using rubrics developed for each component under every construct, where the number of components varies by construct and type of educator. Each rubric reflects the research-based educator practice that impact student achievement, and each component has four levels of performance. The KEEP system does not evaluate school support staff. However, the system does provide a good example of how district-level staff members are being evaluated.

For district-level staff, the KEEP system is broken into seven steps: orientation; self- assessment and goal setting; beginning-of-conference; artifact and data collection; mid-cycle conference; artifact and data collection; and an end-of-cycle conference. District-level staff members are evaluated on four constructs: setting direction and making the organization work, supporting student growth and development, developing staff, and engaging stakeholders and external influencers. Each of these constructs is broken down into components with performance levels and descriptors, and each component has a rubric that cites the sources of evidence that may be used for that particular component.

Kansas has yet to develop a performance-based compensation system. KEEP is currently in its second pilot in 20 districts throughout the state of Kansas and was developed to provide districts with a state model that they could implement if they so choose. However, KEEP does include a model for evaluating central office staff, which puts the Kansas model ahead of others. For this reason, KEEP may be a useful model to learn from when developing a system to reward central office staff for their contributions to student learning.

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[2] The Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) is a consortium of state education agencies and national educational organizations dedicated to the reform of the preparation, licensing, and ongoing professional development of teachers. The InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards outline what all teachers across all content and grade levels should know and be able to do to be effective in today's learning contexts.
[3] Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards are high-level policy standards for education that reflect the wealth of new information and lessons learned about education leadership over the past decade. It provides guidance to state policymakers as they work to improve education leadership preparation, licensure, evaluation, and professional development.

Conclusion

The work of central office and school support staff affects the physical condition of the school building and the climate of a school, thereby affecting student learning. We were unable to find performance-based compensation systems that included central office staff, and systems that did include school support staff did so based on school-level measurements of student growth. However, states participating in the Race to the Top program have begun to think about performance-based compensation systems that include central office and school support staff; however, these are still in their infancy.

What can be ascertained from the literature is that to be effective, performance-based compensation has to align with the entire human resource management system and with state or district improvement plans and policies. Additionally, performance-based compensation systems need to be grounded in multiple valid and reliable measures of effectiveness and performance. This paper provides some examples of possible models for multiple measures for central and school support staff, as well as possible award levels for school support staff. Additionally, a few examples demonstrate how to align evaluation with professional development for central office and school support staff.

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