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Pittsburgh Teacher Pact Tests 3 New Pay Elements

By [Stephen Sawchuk](#)

The Pittsburgh school district and its American Federation of Teachers-affiliated local union have reached agreement on a five-year contract that contains significant new pay elements and that officials there say is the result of a new approach to collective bargaining.

The new contract includes a revamped salary schedule for new hires, with a focus on teacher performance, and the creation of two programs to award pay bonuses to school staffs and individual teachers who significantly boost student achievement.

In large part, the pact codifies elements of the district's Empowering Effective Teaching plan—its successful bid for \$40 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's \$500 million Intensive Partnerships for Effective Teaching initiative. ("[Winners Named for Gates Teacher Grants](#)," December 2, 2009.)

Beginning in April 2009, the district and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers jointly devised a plan to qualify for the grant dollars, an effort that officials said laid the groundwork for a bargaining process that put the goal of student learning ahead of traditional bread-and-butter union concerns.

"It wasn't done by bullying. It was done by a mutual recognition of the need to change," said Mark Roosevelt, the superintendent of the 28,000-student district. "Over the long haul, we think working with our workforce will show greater possibilities for students than engaging in fisticuffs."

New Schedule

In addition to raising teachers' base pay over five years, the contract lays out a number of changes in how teachers are compensated. In probably the contract's most revolutionary feature, it creates a new salary schedule that emphasizes teacher performance.

Most schedules reward teachers for longevity and credentials earned. Under the revamped schedule, which will go into effect July 1, new teachers will continue to earn "step" increases each year, but they will no longer win automatic raises for receiving master's degrees.

Instead, teachers will earn major pay boosts by satisfying a periodic review based on a combination of their teacher-evaluation scores and by demonstrating that they have advanced students' academic growth.

After meeting the four-year tenure mark, and

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each third year thereafter, teachers will be placed into one of four "professional growth" levels. The most effective teachers could pass the \$100,000 mark in as little as eight years.

In time, veteran teachers would have the opportunity to qualify for a career ladder that would reward them with \$10,000 to \$14,000 annually in additional compensation for working with students with the most challenges and in extended-day programs.

Few districts across the nation have overhauled their salary schedules to focus on teacher performance and student outcomes. An attempt to tie teacher evaluations to pay in Cincinnati failed in the mid-2000s.

More recently, Harrison School District Two in Colorado Springs, Colo., instituted a pay system based on evaluation results and student outcomes, but that district does not bargain its salary schedule with a teachers' union. ("[Colo. District Boots Traditional Salary Schedule](#)," May 12, 2010.)

Bonus Pay

The Pittsburgh district and the local union will jointly flesh out the details of two additional bonus-pay programs, to begin in the 2011-12 school year. A school-based pay program will reward teachers, paraprofessionals, and other staff members at schools whose student-achievement growth falls within the state's top 15 percent.

The contract also creates a pilot individual performance-pay program that will reward individual teachers for increasing student growth. As outlined in the contract, the bonuses will be based on two factors: a mandatory demonstration of student growth, and a "choice" component giving teachers credit for high performance on the teacher-evaluation system, demonstrated leadership, or providing professional development to others.

Participating teachers could earn up to \$8,000 additionally through the program, and will be able to opt out of it when the pilot ends.

Superintendent Roosevelt said that the information gleaned from the voluntary performance-pay program will help the district shape its new salary schedule. For instance, the committees will determine how to document evidence of student growth in subjects not covered by standardized tests.

In remarks submitted as an op-ed commentary to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, PFT President John Tarka and the president of the national AFT, Randi Weingarten, said they are committed to continuing the collaboration with the district.

"We won't agree on everything, but we are now better equipped to communicate and find a way to deal with disagreements, so we can focus on what we all agree on: doing everything we can to help students succeed," the union leaders wrote.

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jasonglass wrote:

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