

Good Teachers = Good Students

Boosting student achievement by rewarding improvement and collaboration among teachers



SESSION: A TEACHER SALARY STRUCTURE FOR IMPROVEMENT AND COLLABORATION

Presenters: Ripon Area School District: Richard Zimman, district administrator (pictured); Rick Ketter, business manager; Andy Lyke, board member; David Scott, board member

Richard Zimman, superintendent of the Ripon Area School District asked school leaders to imagine what their district would look like after five years if every one of their teachers improved each year. That is what school leaders at Ripon are trying to accomplish by implementing a new salary structure aimed at promoting teacher improvement and collaboration.

The process began when Ripon school leaders decided the best way to improve student achievement is to improve the skills of their teachers. The result is a new salary structure that rewards teachers for improving not for longevity or necessarily collecting college credits.

The salary schedule that the Ripon Area School District developed is based on the improvement-focused collegiate model that promotes collaboration among teachers and gives incentives to teachers that improve their teaching skills.

The salary structure has five levels: beginner, intermediate, associate, lead, and veteran. The first four levels have two, three-year evaluation cycles. After successful completion

of the first three-year evaluation in the beginner, intermediate, associate, and lead levels, teachers get a salary bump. After successful completion of the second evaluation cycle, they are promoted to the next level and receive another salary increase.

Every three years, teachers submit a file or portfolio of their work to the district's promotion review committee, which is composed of three teachers and two administrators. The teachers are elected by their peers to serve on the committee and are compensated for doing so. The decision to promote teachers is based on what they put in their file and what the teacher did to improve themselves as educators. David Scott, Ripon school board member and professor at Ripon College, said the things that the promotion committee looks for are genuine improvement efforts such as summer research projects, or, among other efforts, graduate classes.

One example of a teacher improvement effort, Zimman said, was that teachers could take a summer technology course offered at the school and show how they have used

something from the class to improve their teaching.

"There are no automatic promotions," Zimman said. "But if we make good hires, we expect the vast majority of teachers to be promoted."

In addition, teacher collaboration plays a big part in the teacher development at Ripon. As part of the teacher collaboration model, teachers are required to invite other educators into their classroom to observe their instruction.

In transitioning to the new salary schedule, Rick Ketter, business manager for the Ripon Area School District, said that the district had to find a way to move staff into the new schedule so that no one would lose money. The district looked at where teachers were in the old schedule and placed them in the level that most closely fitted their old salary level.

While implementing the schedule took tremendous research and development by district staff, Zimman said the focus is on the students.

"How can we make things better for kids?" Zimman asked. "We make the classroom teachers better." ■

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