

10-14-10

Dear Palermo Staff members,

I'm writing to provide an update on the progress of our Guided Democratic Inquiry committee work into the topics of teacher compensation and evaluation. We have been focused on building a common knowledge base by jigsaw reading from various sources including both the popular press and more academic journals. We have examined over 20 articles and book chapters to date. Following our reading, we teach each other what we have learned. We also just took part in a very helpful video-conversation with a true expert, Susan Moore Johnson, Ph.D., Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard. Some of our key learning is highlighted below:

- The current step and column salary schedule, in use for a century, solved the major problem of inequity in areas such as pay differential by gender (an issue when single women were paid less than married men). But the shortcoming seen now is that teachers are paid mainly for time in service. A new direction would not only pay teachers for service, but also re-invest in them over a career in ways that impact teaching effectiveness.
- Language has different meanings for the public and for professional educators. "Merit pay" is a hot button and sounds like a phony scheme based on favoritism or the luck-of-the-draw to many educators. It means differentiating teachers by their effectiveness at teaching to many parents and others in the public.
- Ideas that are based in our American business culture seem like common sense to many in the public but just don't work in education. Paying teachers bonuses to get higher test scores was recently debunked through a rigorous 3 year study at Vanderbilt University. Likewise, value added measures like those recently published in the LA Times are not able to provide an accurate measure of the effects of teaching on student learning. There are too many uncontrolled variables such as student growth and development or the non-random assignment of students to classes.
- More promising views of new teacher compensation systems focus on paying for what we value such as an investment in continuously improved teaching and strengthening collaboration for teacher learning. Conceptually, a career development model could support this kind of compensation system.
- A teacher evaluation system that provides a well-developed measurement of excellent teaching is a pre-requisite for a career development model of a teacher compensation system. Getting there could be accomplished over a 3-year process.

We'll be reading next about teacher evaluation before conducting our local research into our Palermo compensation and evaluation systems. If you have any questions about our work, please ask any of the members of the GDI committee or drop me a note through email. All are also welcome to check the link to "Guided Democratic Inquiry" on the district website. We will continue to post our agendas and reading summaries as we work.

Yours,

Bill Rich