Overview of Career Ladder Programs and Tiered Licensure Programs for Educators in Arizona, Minnesota, and New Mexico

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Arizona Career Ladder

Arizona's Career Ladder Program is a performance compensation program intended to help schools retain high-performing teachers and provide them with incentives to stay in the classroom. A five-year pilot program, beginning in 1985, originally included 14 districts. After the completion of the pilot, the program expanded to 28 out of more than 200 districts throughout the state. Due to funding limitations, the program never expanded further.

Unfortunately, Arizona's Career Ladder Program was found to violate the state constitution in 2010 and is nearing the last six months of its phase-out process. In 2007, a law suit from the Gilbert School System claimed that the 28 participating districts had an unfair advantage in recruiting teachers, due to higher salaries and better support for teachers. The court ruled in favor of Gilbert and gave the state the options of phasing out the program or funding it for all districts (a price tag estimated at $175M). The state opted for the former.

Arizona Revised Statute requires that career ladder programs provide for five key criteria. Though all criteria must be met, local districts may develop plans according to their own unique needs and contexts. Participating districts must demonstrate that they meet these criteria through an annual application process with the state department of education.

1. Increasing levels of teacher responsibility
2. Increasing levels of student academic progress as measured by objective criteria
3. Increasingly higher levels of teaching skills
4. Opportunities for professional growth
5. Equal teacher pay for equal teacher performance (not educational attainment and tenure/longevity)

In addition, districts must describe a process by which teachers are placed at various levels on the career ladder, develop a compensation structure, explain how they will administer the program, implement a program review and evaluation, and ensure that the program is integrated with other district programs (e.g. curriculum goals and staff development).

Funding to support the career ladder program has been derived from a combination of state funds and local taxes. All district programs are currently funded at a 5.5% increase from base-level support, with the local tax contributing between two to four cents for each percentage increase. In addition, the Arizona Department of Education is required to "consider the impact of program responsibilities" on building-level administrators and provide additional support for them if necessary—an important consideration for rural districts.

Teachers are evaluated for placement within the career ladder in their first year within the district but may choose to opt-out in their second year, returning to the traditional step-and-lane pay scale. Teachers who opt to participate in the career ladder program move up through the career ladder as a result of their demonstrated skill attainment and student academic progress.

Evaluation Findings

In 2007, the Arizona Department of Education—specifically, the Arizona Career Ladder Network and the Career Ladder Advisory Committee—commissioned an evaluation of Arizona's career ladder program. The evaluation, conducted by Sheila Murphy Associates, analyzed the student performance data, aggregate school performance profiles, and attendance rates of districts that did (and did not) participate in the program.

The evaluation found statistically significant differences in student achievement. "[Career Ladder] schools have a significantly higher percentage of students passing AIMS both in the aggregate and in the individual subject areas of math, reading, and writing." It also found a statistically significant positive relationship between participation in the Career Ladder Program and school performance profiles. However, no difference was found in school attendance rates.

Though the evaluation design was limited by the fact that districts self-selected into the Career Ladder Program, the results withstood adjustments for differences in student and school characteristics.

Minnesota Q Comp

Q Comp was created in 2005 in order to help schools and districts recruit and retain highly qualified teachers, to help those teachers undertake challenging assignments, to improve student achievement, and to provide teachers with incentives to improve their knowledge and instructional skills.

Q Comp is a voluntary alternative compensation program for Minnesota's school districts and charter schools. Each district or charter school partners with teachers (or teachers' representatives) to design and/or collectively bargain a compensation program that meet the requirements of five distinct components:

- Career ladder/advancement
- Job-embedded professional development
- Teacher evaluation
- Performance pay
- Alternative salary schedule

Approved districts (traditional) receive up to $260 per student when participating in the program; charter schools and non-traditional districts receive approximately $243 per student.
As of the 2013-14 school year, 69 districts and 66 charter schools have implemented or have been approved to implement Q Comp. These districts represent nearly 20,000 full-time equivalent teachers and over 280,000 students.

The Minnesota Department of Education's guidance document includes statutory language, practices required by statute, recommended best practices, and unacceptable practices for each of the five program components. The department has also released a model plan for rural districts, which face different implementation challenges from other school districts. Sample salary schedules and computations are included in the Appendix.

Evaluation Findings

Minnesota's Office of the Legislative Auditor completed an initial evaluation of the Q Comp program in 2009. The report found that the state education department had inconsistent application approval processes and monitoring for Q Comp districts and schools. Though satisfaction was high among administrators, many teachers were unhappy with the program. Further, many administrators in small districts said that their limited capacity made it more difficult for them to apply to Q Comp and successfully implement the program, largely limiting its reach to metro districts in and around the Twin Cities.

Because the program had only been in place for three school years years at the time of the evaluation, researchers were unable to draw conclusions regarding its impact on student achievement. Additionally, its voluntary nature makes the Q Comp program difficult to evaluate for outcomes such as student achievement, as self-selecting districts may be different from those that choose not to participate in the program.

The evaluation also looked at fidelity of implementation. Participants are required to base at least 60 percent of any compensation increases implemented as part of Q Comp on teacher performance using 1) school-wide achievement gains, 2) measures of student achievement, and 3) an objective teacher evaluation program. An evaluation of the program found that schools have tied the majority of their performance pay to teacher evaluations rather than to specific performance goals. Q Comp participants are also required to reform the traditional steps and lanes salary schedule or create an alternative salary formula. However, the evaluation found that few meaningful changes were being made to salary determinations.

New Mexico 3-Tiered Licensure System

New Mexico has a tiered licensure system, first implemented in the 2004-05 school year. Teachers first earn a provisionary five-year (Level I) license and are paired with a mentor teacher during their first year. After three years in the workforce, they become eligible to apply for a permanent (Level II) license. They must apply for a permanent license after five years. Once a teacher has taught with a Level II license for three years and earned either an MA or certification from the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, the teacher may choose to apply for a Level III license. There are guaranteed minimum salary levels and titles for each level (I: Provisional Teacher, II: Professional Teacher, III: Master Teacher).

Evaluation for movement to higher levels is completed by way of an evaluation known as HOUSSE: High Objective Uniform Statewide Standard of Evaluation and the submission of Professional Development Dossiers (PDDs). HOUSSE is an evidence-based system comprised of local evaluations and the state licensure advancement process, both based on the state's

nine teacher competencies. Each level within the nine competency areas has differentiated indicators for each licensure level. The nine competencies are as follows:

The teacher:

1. Accurately demonstrates the knowledge of the content area and approved curriculum
2. Appropriately utilizes a variety of teaching methods and resources for each area taught
3. Communicates with and obtains feedback from students in a manner that enhances student learning and understanding
4. Comprehends the principles of student growth, development, and learning and applies them appropriately
5. Effectively utilizes student assessment techniques and procedures
6. Manages the educational setting in a manner that promotes positive student behavior and a safe and healthy environment
7. Recognizes student diversity and creates an atmosphere conducive to the promotion of positive student involvement and self-concept
8. Demonstrates a willingness to examine and implement change, as appropriate
9. Works productively with colleagues, parents, and community members

Each year, teachers must work with their principals to create professional development plans (PDPs), which must be based on the nine competency areas, though they may also include local goals. These are reviewed at the end of the school year and teacher performance is evaluated based on the PDP. Teachers submit a dossier based on the PDP to the state department of education, which reviews the information and determines whether a teacher moves from one level to the next. There are three avenues (strands) for teachers to move to a higher level. Strand A is based on evidence of effective teaching (based on competencies 1, 2, and 5). Strand B is based on evidence of student learning (based on competencies 3, 4, 6, and 7). Strand C is based on evidence of professional learning (based on competencies 7 and 9).

This portfolio includes teacher narratives, examples of student work, and specific evidence related to the nine competency areas. Annual evaluations also help increase the program's focus on continuous improvement.

Evaluation Findings

In 2012, the New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee and Public Education Department conducted an evaluation of the tiered licensure program (as well as value-added models and resource allocation from the state funding formula). One of the central findings of their report was that the tiered licensure program, unlike the career ladder in Arizona, does not align increased pay with increased student achievement.

Though one of the policy goals of creating the tiered licensure plan was improving student achievement, this has not been an outcome of the program. Instead, the evaluation found, teachers are not effectively screened for advancement, resulting in ineffective teachers receiving large pay increases. Further, these teachers are never "screened out" of higher pay tiers because the program does not have a rigorous licensure renewal process—teachers do not have to demonstrate *continued* effectiveness to remain at Level II or even Level III. A number of teachers have also been grandfathered in to Levels II and III, because of their tenure

at the time of the program creation or because they moved into the state with prior experience that allowed them to automatically qualify for higher pay. The evaluation also found that 92 percent of applicants move from Level I to Level II and 90 percent move from Level II to Level III.

When evaluators looked at student achievement data, they found that 30 percent of underperforming (ranked in the bottom 16 percent of all teachers based on annual student assessments) teachers in reading were Level III educators. Almost 50 percent of those that were grandfathered into the program are also in the lowest half of performers when ranked on the basis of student achievement. Finally, teachers themselves see weaknesses in the system, with over one third in one survey disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement that "the PDD successfully identifies highly effective teachers."

The report also highlighted a drawback to the evaluation system used as part of the three-tier program, noting that its binary rating scale (satisfactory/unsatisfactory) does not allow for nuanced feedback. The PDD is also not a robust measure of performance, as the student work submission requirements are primarily self-selected by teachers themselves.

The Legislative Finance Office had several recommendations for reforming the three-tier program: 1) replace the professional development dossier, 2) create licensure terms, 3) create new requirements for Level II and Level III license renewal, and 4) develop meaningful effectiveness evaluations.

Appendix: Minnesota Q Comp Performance Pay and Salary Schedule Examples

Table 2.6: Excerpt of a Q Comp Salary Schedule with Grid

Performance Increment	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree Plus 15 Credits	Bachelor's Degree Plus 30 Credits	Bachelor's Degree Plus 45 Credits
A	$32,361	$32,981	$33,914	$35,002
B	32,361	32,981	33,914	35,002
C	33,604	34,225	35,158	36,556
D	35,002	35,622	36,556	38,424
E	36,556	37,179	38,111	39,975
.	.	.	.	.
.	.	.	.	.
.	.	.	.	.
O	40,975	46,145	51,647	54,132
P	43,663	48,854	54,369	56,639
Q	45,934	51,125	56,639	58,912

NOTE: As outlined in this district's Q Comp application, "Employees completing two successful evaluations annually will be entitled to one performance increment...."

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor, from the Wayzata School District Q Comp application, submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education, December 16, 2005.

Figure 2.1: Sample Q Comp Salary Computation without a Salary Grid

Employment		$26,000
Performance Level (up to $16,000)[a]	+	_____
Master's Degree ($2,000)	+	_____
Q Comp Performance Pay (up to $2,500)[b]	+	_____
Master or Mentor Teacher (up to $4,000)[c]	+	_____
Advisor Responsibility	+	_____
Administrative Duties Responsibility	+	_____
Club or Activity Advisor Responsibility	+	_____
Extended Days[d]	+	_____
Total	=	_____

[a] Based on performance evaluation.

[b] Based on student achievement scores, teacher's evaluation, and teacher's individual growth plan.

[c] Based on master or mentor teacher responsibilities.

[d] Based on number of hours and hourly rate.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor, from the Academy for Sciences and Agriculture Q Comp plan, submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education, September 18, 2007.

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