The National Education Association

Professional Growth Salary Framework

Best Practices for Negotiating/Implementing Career Ladder Compensation Programs

A career ladder program tied to compensation can enable educators to grow professionally while staying in the classroom and earn pay increases tied to their greater skills and responsibilities. In supporting teachers’ professional growth through such programs, student learning is enhanced, producing benefits to teachers, students, administrators, and school districts. Such programs can also enhance teacher leadership – empowering educators to lead their profession. As with many non-traditional forms of compensation, career ladders are complex and multifaceted, requiring that local association leaders and school administrators have solid information and knowledge of both opportunities and obstacles.

The National Education Association (“NEA”) has developed this overview to assist local associations and school administrators in developing compensation programs based on career ladders. Additionally, NEA has developed the Professional Growth Salary Framework (PGSF) as career ladder example.

The PGSF lays out a set of essential principles for developing this type of salary framework:

1. Provide an outline of career options for teachers who want to seek additional responsibility without leaving the classroom;
2. Recognize and reward teachers who attain and can demonstrate knowledge and skills that improve professional teaching;
3. Recognize and reward improved teacher practices that are factors in student learning and outcomes. Salary enhancements should be based on evidence of student progress drawn from teacher documentation, student work samples, and classroom assessments.
4. Provide guidance for how to recognize and compensate teachers for the myriad duties that their daily work entails outside of direct classroom teaching
5. Position educators on par with the salary, professional growth opportunities, and career earnings of comparably prepared professionals.

Career ladder programs that align with these essential PGSF principles have been implemented in several states. Specific examples can be obtained by contacting Dan Holub with the Indiana State Teachers Association at dholub@ista-in.org.
The NEA also encourages schools and local associations to consider the following range of best practices when negotiating or developing effective career ladder programs:

**Base Salary:** A professional growth salary schedule must start with a professional-level salary of at least $40,000 for all beginning teachers entering the classroom. Teachers should be able to reach their "maximum" salary on the schedule within ten years.

**Association Involvement:** The schedule must be co-created or designed with teachers through collective bargaining or, where there is no collective bargaining, agreed to by the organization representing teachers, and supported by at least 75% of the current teachers.

**Salary Levels (Tiers):** A professional growth salary schedule must contain several levels through which teachers progress that are based on prescribed skills, knowledge, licenses, certifications, degrees, responsibilities, and/or accomplishments. Each level should build on previous ones and contain salary increases for specified time periods within each level.

**Advancement through the Levels:** Generally, early levels on the schedule should be linked to the probationary period of employment, and advancement through the levels should be required. Movement through later levels may be voluntary – for example, movement from professional educator to master educator.

**Linked to Quality Professional Development:** A professional growth salary schedule must be linked to a professional development system that has been locally developed with teachers and tied to quality professional development standards such as those of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC). The schedule should clearly define what will be measured and how those measurements will be conducted.

**Knowledge and Skills:** The professional growth salary schedule should be tied to locally developed, research-based, professional learning opportunities (knowledge and skills) targeted to the needs of the students.

**Funding:** A professional growth salary schedule must have adequate and sustainable sources of funding, both initially and on an ongoing basis. Grants should be viewed only as temporary resources that are not capable of sustaining a career salary program.

**Accessibility:** Any professional growth salary schedule should be accessible to everyone who is eligible, without quotas.

**Flexibility:** There is no single model for professional growth salary schedules. Schedules should be locally bargained or, where there is no collective bargaining, agreed to with the organization representing the teachers. Proposed schedules must be flexible and structured for the contexts in which they will be implemented.

**Transparency:** The schedule must be understandable to teachers and the public.

**Program Assessment:** There must be an annual assessment of the schedule to determine its effectiveness in improving teacher salaries, teaching quality, and the recruitment/retention of quality staff. The schedule’s administrative efficiency and cost-
effectiveness also should be examined each year. The association must be involved in all stages of these assessments, including identifying criteria that will be assessed.

**Definition of Those in the System:** When implementing a professional growth salary schedule, all parties must agree on, and clarify, who is eligible to participate.

**Other Considerations:**

**Teacher Assessment:** A professional growth salary schedule must be accompanied by a quality teacher assessment system (e.g., Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching) to ensure the quality of teaching for all those participating.

**Linkage to Licensure:** Those who develop the professional growth salary schedule will need to determine if it will be linked to the state licensure system or operate irrespective of state licensing structures, requirements, etc. Examples of both approaches exist.

**Longer School Year/Day:** One other item to consider is the length of the teachers’ work year or work day. School districts and teacher representatives may decide to provide voluntary options to extend a teacher’s year or day (for extra pay) under some pay levels in the professional growth salary schedule, or it could be determined that, in order to provide the necessary professional development to improve teaching and learning, an extended work year/day is necessary to effectively implement a professional growth salary schedule.

**Student Progress:** Improved teaching practice leading to improved student learning and evidence of changes in student outcomes can be factors in the professional growth salary schedule. This evidence can be drawn from classroom assessments and other forms of documentation, including pre- and post-test measures of student learning in specific areas and evidence of student accomplishments in relation to specific teaching activities.