



## Dangerous Mind Games: Are We Ready to Overhaul the Teaching Profession?

By Jack D. Dale

*In today's school reform discussions, the teaching profession is often mistakenly viewed as a singular activity. Evaluating teachers for their performance in the classroom assumes that the focus should be on each individual teacher. Merit pay and performance pay both assume that student achievement is the result of only the individual teacher. But it is not. In this Outlook, I use my experience as a school superintendent to articulate a vision of twenty-first-century teacher leaders—who work collaboratively to accomplish their goals—and explain the issues that might arise for schools and districts implementing this new model.*

A highly qualified teacher in every classroom,” “Merit pay for teachers,” “Get performance pay right”: how can we argue with any of these headlines? We strive to have every one of our students attain high levels of achievement. Many schools in the country accomplish this on a daily basis. Many other exemplary schools “beat the odds” and have great success with populations that include high percentages of children in poverty, of minority ethnicity, and whose native language is not English. But to succeed in the future, we need to move toward twenty-first-century teaching.

Twenty-first-century teaching is about the collective work of effective teams of educators focused on the success of individual students. We have learned that schools are complex environments, and learning requires more than the effort of the individual teacher. We must move our thinking to create twenty-first-century teachers, just as we are preparing students who exhibit “twenty-first-century learning” skills and

behaviors. Teachers and students must learn and practice the skills required for success in today's world, including collaboration, critical thinking, and communication.

### Key points in this Outlook:

- Calls for merit pay and performance pay for teachers still miss a crucial point: teaching must be a collaborative team effort, and incentivizing individual teachers will not accomplish our ambitious goals.
- Twenty-first-century “teacher leaders” would take on additional responsibilities and work outside the traditional school day and school year, with a 10–15 percent increase in pay.
- While adopting a teacher-leaders model may raise short-term issues, education needs this culture shift to attract better teachers and benefit all students.

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## Traditional Teaching Paradigm

Teachers have historically been assigned to teach a class of students (elementary), or a set of classes (secondary). In all cases, teachers were largely left alone to teach what was assigned and occasionally some personal-favorite content that was not part of the published curriculum guide.

As we increased accountability for results, teachers were often still held responsible for ensuring that all, or most, of their students performed at some expected level. When students did not, schools and districts typically added programs or services to “fix” the students. Over the years, we added summer school, modified calendars, and hired specialists to address unique issues like students with limited English proficiency or disabilities, or students living in poverty. In short, we kept adding people to the schoolhouse in hopes of substantively raising student achievement.

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In addition to adding extra people for new programs and services, we also increased the duties and assignments of current teachers to deal with the greater complexities in schools. We created department heads, team leaders, and coordinators. We also developed training and professional-learning programs to increase the skill sets of our teaching force.

In the last two decades, we have also added complex compensation programs to our educational toolbox to pay for all the creative program solutions. We have negotiated or unilaterally implemented a variety of pay schemes including stipends, hourly rates, skill-based pay, merit pay, performance pay, evaluation-based pay, pay for teaching before or after school, pay for added classes, and pay for teaching summer school. The list goes on. In fact, an inventory of different methods of compensation in a single district illustrates our attempt to creatively use scarce resources.

We are missing the point. And, as a profession, we are missing the boat. We still assume that teaching is an

individual responsibility rooted in the industrial, assembly-line model. We continue to “tinker around the edges” of the teaching profession. We are negotiating labor contracts that move teaching toward an hourly, blue-collar, piecemeal work paradigm. This is partly due to scarce resources, but also to our inability to reframe the teaching profession into what it must be for the future.

## Twenty-First-Century Teachers

As mentioned above, teaching is no longer an individual sport but a team sport. Successful schools have collaborative teams of teachers working together on complex teaching and learning strategies. Teachers must not only be focused on the students in their classroom, but on all the students in the school. There is no question that teachers must have individual competence. However, teachers’ competence spans both their academic knowledge and the art of knowing when and how to use particular strategies with groups and individual students.

But this basic competency is just that—basic. In recent years, there have been no significant changes in pedagogy and only slight increases in achievement. With the development of the Programme for International Student Assessment and the National Assessment for Educational Progress, we must move our students to broader international standards and change the way education in the United States does business. To do this, we must redesign the teaching profession, not add more programs.

While principals tend to be the instructional leaders in schools, a truly effective school has multiple instructional leaders working with the principal to orchestrate and facilitate exceptional teams of teachers. In addition to their normal classroom duties, teachers must fulfill the following roles to create a truly successful school for all students:

- *School Improvement:* Responsibilities include additional instructional-leadership duties—such as performance analysis, team building, and program evaluation—that are shared with the principal.
- *Feeder/Cluster Improvement:* Responsibilities include a focus on curriculum and instruction, collaboration, and expectations across schools and grade levels within a K–12 cluster of schools.
- *New Teacher Trainer/Mentor:* Responsibilities include a focus on training new teachers before

the start of school and mentoring and coaching them during the school year.

- *Extended Student Learning*: Responsibilities include a focus on tutoring and nurturing students who are performing below grade level. Such work would be done before or after school, or during school breaks, to ensure each child is successful.
- *Student Transition Leadership*: Responsibilities include a focus on analysis of individual students' academic and social progress and coordination of support services for children needing additional social or transition skills within and across school levels. This also includes addressing students who change schools during the year, which is an ever-increasing issue.

These are the roles teachers must fulfill in any successful school for twenty-first-century learning. Teaching is no longer a ten-month job; teaching is a full-time, twelve-month job. We must recognize these expectations for twenty-first-century teachers, including in public policy discussions. We must completely change our image of and rethink the teaching profession. We can no longer think about teaching "the way it was when I was in school."

## The Fairfax Story

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) initiated a teacher-leadership pilot in the 2005–2006 school year. Schools applied for grants to participate in the program. Twenty-four schools were chosen with 425 teachers participating at a cost of \$2.1 million. The purpose of this pilot initiative was to provide schools with flexibility and funding for extended-year teacher contracts so they could create solutions to increase student achievement and help students reach their potential. Schools presented individualized pilot projects to meet the unique needs of their staff and student populations. Furthermore, the teacher-leadership initiative allowed the FCPS leadership team to cultivate talent within the district.

Data analysis from a sampling of participating schools shows promising results both on student achievement and school climate. Three elementary schools—Dogwood, Westlawn, and Woodburn—were examined over the four-year program. All three schools have above-average higher-needs students, including minority populations, students who qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced-Price

Lunch (FRL) program, and English-language learners (ELL). Over the four grant years, there were gains at all three schools in the third- and fifth-grade reading and math Standards of Learning (SOLs). Only one school saw a dip in the third-grade math SOL. All three schools outpaced the district in a school-climate survey that asked schools about their leadership and professional-development efforts.

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Twenty-first-century teacher leaders work full time, twelve months per year, and their compensation package must reflect these additional responsibilities.

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The two middle schools analyzed were quite different demographically. Glasgow Middle School has a large minority population, with more than half its students qualifying for the FRL program and nearly half ELL. South County Middle School's minority population represents less than half the school, FRL less than 20 percent, and ELL slightly more than 10 percent. Their scores followed much the same pattern as the elementary school students' scores. Across the grant years, both schools had increases in their sixth- and eighth-grade reading and math SOLs. Both schools outscored the school system on professional development in the climate survey. While South County also scored higher on building leadership, Glasgow was slightly below the county average.

All three high schools examined were similar demographically: around 40 percent of the student population was minority and between 10 and 20 percent of all students were ELL or FRL students. At Marshall High School, all subgroups (Asian, black, Hispanic, and white) saw significant gains in percentages of International Baccalaureate participation. Similarly, West Springfield subgroups saw significant gains in percentages of Advanced Placement participation. South County saw increases in Advanced Placement participation in three subgroups (Asian, black, and Hispanic) and a two-point decrease in white students' participation. School-climate survey data were available for Marshall and West Springfield, both of which were equal to or surpassed the district on professional development. Marshall's leadership was rated higher than the district, while West Springfield's was rated slightly lower.

These gains are attributable to teams of teachers working together to analyze achievement data and seek solutions to help each student reach his or her potential. One of the criteria for the grant program was that schools had to be well versed in the tenets of professional learning communities—collaborative teams of teachers who work together to individualize the instruction of their shared students. So collaborative teams were not new to these schools, but working together on a grant project to improve unique areas of need to increase student achievement was new. And the results show that it was successful. Unfortunately, the program ended in the 2009–2010 school year due to the financial crisis. But the lessons learned continue in the buildings anecdotally, and we hope to restore the program when the financial picture brightens.

## Policy Decisions for Twenty-First-Century Teacher Leaders

There is a growing national debate on how to ensure there are quality teachers in all classrooms. The debate must be expanded beyond expectations for content knowledge and classroom instructional skills to include the complex demands of high-performing work teams. The expanded teacher-leadership roles and responsibilities must be well defined and used in personnel hiring, training, and evaluation. This is the only way teacher-leadership roles will be fully implemented into the human-resources (HR) function of school systems.

In Fairfax, we are using the tenets of professional learning communities to more fully define the team responsibilities of teacher leaders. We are also part of external organizations working to better define the more complex responsibilities of twenty-first-century teaching. The national Task Force for the Strategic Management of Human Capital is working on the complexities of education's most valuable asset, human capital. We are participating with Educational Testing Service efforts to more explicitly define teacher leadership. Participating with the Educational Testing Service not only brings the discussion to a national level but also helps districts recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in the classroom, ultimately improving student achievement.

Equally important to the selection and evaluation components of twenty-first-century teaching are the ongoing research and training that ensure we move from the current state of affairs to a new paradigm where virtually all teachers are successful. This may seem monumental,

but perhaps it will become more strategic and less daunting when we reframe the teaching profession. Data from the three-year pilot in Fairfax suggest that it is entirely possible for all teachers in a given school to learn to take on the larger set of roles and responsibilities of twenty-first-century teacher leaders.

Another major arena of policy changes is the compensation structure aligned with these new roles. Twenty-first-century teacher leaders work full time, twelve months per year, and their compensation package must reflect these additional responsibilities. Minimally, their work contracts should be an expansion of their current contracts, which would typically imply a 10–15 percent increase in pay. This compensation package also has the benefit of being much more competitive with the private sector and more attractive to those wishing to change careers. Teacher compensation must be addressed immediately, as we now lose 50 percent of our teachers in the first five years, half of whom leave the education profession altogether—a costly expense for school districts.

The final implication of creating twenty-first-century teacher leaders is the ability to scale back the central office. When we embed professional development within the teaching force, there is less need for central-office personnel taking on those responsibilities. And for every central-office position eliminated, the district can fund at least seven to ten teacher-leadership positions—a very good return on investment!

We cannot be satisfied with only 10–20 percent of our teachers succeeding. That will be the consequence of merit pay or pay for performance. Even other alternative compensation models give teachers discretion as to whether they will engage in the necessary work. Instead, we must completely overhaul the teaching profession and align it with the demands of today's world, with what we know about successful schools, and with what works.

The overhaul will be challenging at times, will impact many policies and practices in districts and communities, and will garner reactions—both positive and negative—from many different stakeholders. Let's take a look at some of the challenges.

**School Principal/Leadership Issues.** This distributed-leadership model requires a purposeful school-improvement plan. That plan must specify the expectations, duties, and functions needed in the school. It should be multi-year to allow for significant culture changes, necessary modifications, and resource acquisition. Clear job

descriptions must be developed for each type of full-time position needed to support the plan. A master calendar must reflect the common working days for the appropriate teams of full-time teachers. Some duties may include time outside the “regular” day for student tutoring or enrichment in lieu of added days. Unfortunately, this represents a huge culture shift, and not all schools can do it immediately.

Additional school-leadership issues to consider:

- *A clear explanation of the number of extended contracts and the duties to be performed:* While five different roles are outlined above, individual teachers can be expected to fill more than one role. For example, the roles of school improvement and extended student learning can be taken on by a third-grade team analyzing student and teacher success, and intervening with students to ensure all students meet standards. Schools with more underperforming students will need more staff fulfilling extended student learning roles than those with fewer underperforming students.
- *The process of selecting staff for each of the full-time jobs:* The principal must have the right staff working on the jobs. Explicit job descriptions and appropriate selection procedures are a must for successful implementation.
- *Identification of current supplemental payments that will be subsumed into the full-time contract:* Stipends for team leaders, department chairs, and other new positions can all be eliminated, as these duties are now subsumed in the set of new teacher-leadership roles. While partly a budget issue, this is also a job-description issue.
- *Use of additional time:* While some of the additional time will be used for individual teacher preparation time, the majority of the added time should be devoted to working with other staff on key school-improvement initiatives. This is probably the most important transition because successful schools have collaborative teams, not just individuals.

**Personnel and HR Issues.** The major challenge for HR is determining how to create, support, and monitor the new contract for teachers moving to full-time employment. While most school systems have teaching contracts of

varying lengths, many simply use additional “per diem” contracts to add days of work. Annual extensions of the basic contract, however, do not revamp the teaching profession. There are substantive benefits from changing the work and compensation structure that go well beyond those from tweaks on the edges.

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Nevertheless, even a permanent change to the teacher work and compensation structure will result in a host of personnel and HR issues, including:

- *Flexible-length days and time versus required days and time:* At core, a major shift must take place to reprofessionalize teaching. Many current policies and collective bargaining agreements stipulate the days and hours to be worked. While such stipulations for school days may make sense (as long as we have standard school days), allowing variation in how work is performed during nonschool days is sometimes a difficult transition for management. It should be conceivable and permissible for different teachers to work different times and at different locations—including home—for the different leadership roles. The work to be done should drive the work schedule, not the other way around.
- *Time and attendance record keeping:* Many school systems have a standardized work calendar for teachers. The new paradigm gives teachers and principals greater flexibility in scheduling non-school work days. In fact, the various roles almost compel different work schedules. But tracking these work days becomes very challenging for HR and payroll. It requires a different perspective that may or may not be supported by the data systems within the district. Specific issues include how to determine days worked, days off, sick-leave accrual, vacation or nonwork days, and eligibility for workers’ compensation.

- *Continuing contract rights:* Every state has different laws governing continuing contract rights for teachers. The issue is how to craft the contract to allow teachers and principals to change to and from the “normal” teacher contract and the full-time contract. Not only will state laws need to be examined, but collective bargaining contracts will also need to be reviewed and most likely rewritten.
- *Teachers with different contracts in the same building:* Teachers typically view one another as having work responsibilities and pay structures that are well codified and well entrenched in the culture of the school and district. Assuming different leadership roles and being paid differently for those roles can create some tension. While we currently create titles such as department chair or team leader, this major shift to multiple and many leadership roles creates a new tension between those who have access to such positions and those who do not.
- *Contract-length decisions in subsequent years:* The number of teacher-leadership positions and how to staff them can be a year-to-year decision or be driven by other factors like local bargaining agreements. Ideally, the principal should be able to make annual decisions on both the number and type of leadership positions needed. The circumstances in a school and in the lives of teachers will change over time, and both should be respected.

**Budget-Planning Issues.** There are two major issues for the budget office. One is to determine what savings can be realized when full-time contracts replace stipends, per-diem pay, and other compensation strategies. (In addition to these, many school districts pay teachers for attending workshops during nonschool days, or training during the school day, which requires hiring substitutes. Depending on how training is scheduled—possibly during the extended contract time—there is a potential for substantial substitute cost savings.)

The second issue is determining the net cost increase for the longer teacher-leadership contracts. Multiple methodologies are possible. As new roles and responsibilities are defined, all new contracts could be of a standard length or could vary in the number of expected work days. Additionally, different lengths could be established for different teacher-leadership roles. Resources and specific duties could dictate the framework for a given school

district, and contract negotiations might also play into the decision-making process.

Other budget issues include:

- *Calculating potential savings from stipends, per-diem pay, substitute demand, and any other extra compensation:* Many functions currently paid for through multiple processes should be eliminated in the transition to teacher-leadership positions. The list of opportunities is extensive: stipends for department heads and grade-level team leaders; extra days of pay given to guidance counselors, career technology teachers, coaches, and mentors; pay for staff development and substitutes during training; and other expenses.
- *Added employer costs:* Employer costs for retirement and Social Security are typically based on salary, whether supplemental pay or contracted pay, and will increase under a new system. Health and other insurance costs, on the other hand, will not increase since most employees already have those benefits. To the extent central-office positions can be reduced, there is an opportunity for minimal increases in net costs.
- *Overhead costs to administer full-time contracts versus regular contracts, plus “added pay for added duties” paperwork:* Every school district expends overhead costs to compensate teachers for extended duties in the traditional, piecemeal approach. If these duties were all embedded in the core contract, schools could achieve savings from reduced administrative costs.
- *Developing a multiyear budget for a phase-in period:* A school district will probably phase in this new system over multiple years so all the educational and business-process changes occur in a thoughtful and diligent manner. Phase-in can occur by starting with specific roles across the system; by elementary, middle, or high school levels; or by K–12 pyramids of schools. Local scaling-up issues will need to be addressed in a multiyear budget.

**Union/Employee-Association Issues.** A significant shift must occur in the leadership of employee groups because this model requires differentiated pay for differentiated duties. That said, many teachers will now be eligible to

receive much higher salaries, which always creates tensions. Tensions will also arise when designing and implementing the selection process and when staff move back and forth from a teacher-leadership position to a regular classroom position.

Be prepared for specific issues such as:

- Negotiation of pay and length of contract (wages and hours).
- Longstanding concern over working conditions: the demands to limit work-day length, limit meetings, and increase planning time during the school day.
- Different perspectives from union leadership, union boards of directors, and teachers.
- Members with full-time contracts versus members with regular contracts.
- Process for selecting those with full-time contracts.

**District and Community Issues.** There is usually a positive response from parents when we acknowledge the significant changes in the demand on teachers. School board members likewise understand the significant challenges teachers face in the classroom, both in preparation and time demands. In fact, there is usually a strong push from unions and teacher spokespersons to the school board to reduce time demands. This paradigm shift can help the school board respond to these time issues by significantly increasing compensation (by about 10–15 percent) while recognizing the added duties that go along with it. In many cases, teachers are already performing some of those added duties; school boards and the community can now give compensation and recognition for that important work.

Even with the positive response, other public policy issues include:

- Added compensation and time for only one group of employees. This can be viewed positively—as supporting teachers—or negatively by other employees.
- Work hours or days and compensation systems different from other school-based employee groups.
- Shift to school-based leadership away from central-office leadership.
- Opportunity to mesh summer curriculum work and other extended time needs with full-time contracts.
- Significant increases in teacher pay that give the district a greater competitive advantage for recruitment and retention. A full-time contract is also potentially more attractive to career changers.

## Conclusion

Not only are the roles for teachers changing, so are the expectations for how education is delivered and received. We are experiencing more and more learning opportunities that are not bound by the clock or the day of the week. As education becomes more personalized and available 24/7, 365 days a year, the teachers responsible for coaching, mentoring, tutoring, and teaching will also move into the 24/7/365 space. Time is becoming the variable, learning the standard. As we complete this shift in the next decade, we will need an agile teaching force.

Now is the time to ensure that twenty-first-century teacher leaders are in every school, working for every one of our country's youth. The only question is whether we have the courage and conviction to make that change.