



Teacher Compensation Advisory Committee Jan. 27 Meeting Summary

The following is a summary of what was discussed and considered at the third Teacher Compensation Advisory Committee meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 27.

Discussion of Compensation Survey Results

WASB attorney Bob Butler said there were 349 total responses. Of those, 54 percent were regular education core teachers, while elementary had the highest rate of respondents at 39 percent. He said 4-9 years of experience in the District had the highest rate of participation, although he felt all of the age groups were fairly represented.

“This is a pretty good sample,” he said.

He also noted that teachers with 20-plus years overall were the highest group to respond. Director of Employee Services Tabatha Gundrum said she wasn’t surprised because the District hires lots of veteran teachers. Butler said that likely means the District’s hiring practices are more flexible than most, may pay more for veteran teachers than other Districts and that MCPASD is likely a destination district.

Advanced degrees and length of service were the highest rated areas that staff wanted factored into any compensation model, he said. There was some debate later in the day if advanced degrees were seen as valuable or if staff had already earned them and felt that effort was worth additional compensation. Additional duties and additional skills were the next highest-rated components by staff.

Butler went over what is perceived to be the strengths and weaknesses of the District’s current compensation package. Respondents noted salary increases haven’t been consistent, they aren’t sure if pay is comparable to surrounding districts, and there were also questions about the impact of the health-risk assessment. Staff feels good about the existing benefits, hope for regular pay increases and want a pathway developed to know what their future salaries might be.

Gundrum explained how market factors impact District hiring. The District may have to pay more for positions where there are few qualified candidates. She doesn’t believe the District has ever paid someone more for experience they don’t have but may count more of their experience

if the person is in a high demand position. She also noted that veteran teachers are less likely to move unless a district can meet or exceed their previous salary.

Discussion of Core Components

Committee members were assigned to one of four tables and in small groups spent most of the rest of the 7-hour meeting looking more closely at the survey results and discussing possible core components of an alternative compensation system.

Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services George Mavroulis said it is a struggle to find a balance between doing what is fair for all or rewarding some, which will be seen as unfair. An example is should advanced degrees be rewarded because some educators don't need that as part of their job

Butler filtered the survey results so committee members could see how specific groups responded. He noted that elementary staff say advanced degrees are more important than the all respondents did. When he filtered by the most inexperienced teachers, they rated advanced degrees as by far the most important factor.

Core teachers want licensure for PI 34 as part of their top four core components, while special education teachers and interventionists had market incentives in their top four. Middle school student services listed professional development in their top four and interventionists had additional skills among their top four. At the high school level, market incentives were important to special education teachers and interventionists, while PI 34 was more important to core and encore teachers.

Laura Love suggested including things that help teachers grow. She said they shouldn't be required but strongly encouraged. Sonja Hungness pointed out that newer staff is familiar with PI 34, while older staff is more familiar with getting credits and advanced degrees and wondered if a model should offer alternatives. Vicki Shaffer pointed out that younger teachers may have more time to do professional development so we have to think about where people are in their lives and how that might impact things.

Butler pointed out that in Sun Prairie they are going to a tiered plan for professional development so it decreases as you gain experience. That approach concerned Love, who believes education is changing rapidly and wonders if older teachers might be left behind without that extra help. Drew White suggested as a newer teacher he could use help with instruction from a veteran teacher but offered that he could help older teachers with technology.

Steve Plank pointed out that three staff members told him they decided to come to MHS despite lucrative offers elsewhere. He also came here for less money.

"I chose Middleton," he said. "Middleton chose me but it goes both ways. Maybe it's OK to pay them a couple of thousand less if we can give them a bump 3-4 years down the road."

Jay Barbeau said he has heard from many teachers who are disgruntled with their pay. Most committee members thought that view was most prevalent among teachers with 4-9 years of experience. Butler pointed out that many districts have faced the same problem because of lack of resources and have focused on raising the bottom of their pay scale. Stephanie Spence pointed out now that new hires can come in and ask for a certain salary because of their experience she feels like teachers in the district could do the same thing or go somewhere else.

“That isn't something this District did. It is just the new reality,” said Butler, who noted some districts don't negotiate with anyone while others do.

Mavroulis said at the elementary level professional development is focused on writer's workshop and August training, while at the secondary level it is about revising curriculum. He believes salaries shouldn't be tied to how much professional development a teacher does but how meaningful and impactful it is.

Another group struggled with comparing an elementary teacher who might have one degree with a high school social studies teacher with eight certifications. Another group wondered if there could be different contracts based on how much professional development you want to do.

Strengths of current system

Survey respondents see them as fair with excellent benefits. They like the idea that employees can advance, but also believe they are underpaid. Butler suggested trying to take what the District does well and build upon it in a new compensation model.

Committee members did say they were concerned that benefits will they erode over time. Staff also likes the voluntary early retirement benefits but is concerned about their sustainability. One group liked the idea of having a vision so a staff member can see where they can be if they do X, Y and Z. White said he sees a salary schedule as the most fair system and gives him comfort although he understands it will be a challenge to support it.

Butler shared an analogy from the Sun Prairie union president, who said they took the old system, put it in a blender and added a few new things to the blender. He felt like they built upon the strengths they already had, which was important.

Weaknesses of current system

The committee had a lot of questions: Do you lower the top end of the schedule to help elsewhere? Are there other retirement options? Is it sustainable? What is the driver here? What is our focus? Can we establish a growth model using a system that is already in place?

The Board of Education has already indicated Educator Effectiveness won't be used in any compensation model, but some committee members wondered if it made sense to include it rather than adding one more thing for staff to worry about. Plank believes some staff may prefer to have Educator Effectiveness be part of a model. Barbeau countered that he is concerned about the program and its longevity.

Spence wondered if the District would have to budget for everyone getting the highest marks from a model that uses Educator Effectiveness because if it doesn't budget that way and everyone gets it then there isn't enough money.

Butler reminded the committee there are a long list of failed systems that said they would find the money with SLOs being a factor and had to take a step backwards. Love also said she has read a lot of research that shows pay for performance doesn't help educators grow.

"If we have a good solid process for growth, we don't have to worry if the state takes away Educator Effectiveness," she said.

Other concerns

Much of the afternoon was spent discussing various concerns. Should a compensation model foster competition or cooperation? How can the extra work be meaningful? Is there mistrust of the committee and what are they doing?

Lori Ames said she believes people don't understand that more money in one area means less in another. She also pointed out some funds must be kept separate, which obviously means it can't be spent on salary and benefits. Another staff member said there is less concern about compensation model being created but that the system could be changed at any time.

Committee members were also concerned that the District will develop a model but then ask employees to take a pay cut or lose their jobs if things don't work out.

"You don't live in a vacuum. If you set up a system where staff can be let go unless they take a salary cut, you will lose staff," he said. "Other districts will raid your staff."

Open-ended, qualitative question

There was lots of discussion about MCPASD salaries and how competitive they are. White wondered if a comparison made much sense seeing as Madison and MCPASD are the only districts with an old salary schedule. Mavroulis thinks staff who believe their salaries are low are only making a comparison with Madison and not the rest of Dane County. He also wondered if staff feel like they are underpaid because they don't know what other districts are offering.

Butler pointed out Gundrum can compare the average salary of MCPASD with any district in the state, however, that won't tell a teacher what their salary will be in five years. Anne Bauer pointed out just because others have a schedule doesn't mean they are actually able to follow and fund the schedule.

Butler said the data indicates staff in the 4-9 and 10-14 years of experience have the most dissatisfaction. White asked if at a future meeting can look at those groups and see if anything can be done for them. Love acknowledged that staff members also now paying for health and WRS so as a result aren't even back to 2010 net pay levels.

Models

Committee members debated how to set up a model that values things without making people be a department chair because they don't have time to do those things. Can they still move through the system? Does a master's degree make sense when it might take 15 years to recoup the cost of it? White pointed out the current model doesn't allow someone to make more unless they get a master's degree or take a lot of credits.

Some suggested creating a better and broader definition of professional development. Mavroulis shared background on Middleton professional development credits, which were developed after Act 10 but weren't offered because there were no funds to pay lanes and the District felt it would be unfair to offer those credits but people couldn't get money for them.

Gundrum then went through four examples of unidentified staff members and salary-only comparisons since Act 10. She said the impact was pretty much the same no matter your level of experience and where you fell on the salary schedule. She also said every district across the state saw similar declines if not more.