

# Delaware Educator Compensation and Careers: Educator Working Groups Round 2 Feedback

Monday, November 3 and Wednesday, November 5, 2014

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On Monday, November 3 and Wednesday, November 5, educators throughout the state of Delaware (including teachers, specialists, school leaders, and central office personnel) were invited to participate in the second set of working group sessions in order to inform the design of the educator career ladder. During these working sessions, participants received contextual information regarding the design process and the career ladder structure and shared their input regarding key design questions. Specifically, the participants discussed the following topics:

- Background and context for this work, including an overview of the parameters outlined in Senate Bill 254.
- The proposed career ladder framework, including an overview of the original and alternative proposals.
- An educator's career trajectory, including a discussion regarding Master's degrees and professional development opportunities.
- The selection process for teacher leadership roles, including the strengths and weaknesses of existing selection approaches.

Through these working group sessions, a total of 66 educators had the opportunity to receive the latest design information and provide their input regarding key design questions.

## Key Feedback

- **While there are still questions and concerns regarding the career ladder proposal, many educators shared positive feedback regarding the latest design changes and feel it is moving in the right direction.**

As a result of the latest design changes, many educators have said that they feel like their feedback is being heard, acknowledged, and incorporated into the system's design. Specifically, they feel the new model is responsive to their feedback regarding the importance of Master's degrees and that it does a better job of recognizing educators who have built their career within Delaware's schools. During the working group sessions, educators engaged in a thoughtful discussion regarding the proposal and highlighted areas where they would like additional clarity. Outstanding questions include:

- Whether the starting salary will be differentiated to recognize educators who have already obtained a Master's degree, career changers with relevant career experience, and educators with previous years of instructional experience in another district or state.
  - How the system will recognize educators who obtain a Master's degree prior to their seventh year in the classroom, educators with a doctorate degree, or educators with more than 17 years of experience.
  - How the system applies to specialists (e.g., counselors, nurses, psychologists, audiologists, etc.).
  - How the new system will recognize educators who have obtained the National Board Certification.
  - The responsibilities of Teacher Leaders and Senior Teacher Leaders and the distinction between the two levels, local-level flexibility in defining leadership roles, and the difference between leadership roles across districts.
  - The number of Teacher Leader and Senior Teacher Leader roles that will be included in the model and how those roles will be allocated throughout the state.
  - The term length for leadership roles and its impact on educator accessibility to leadership roles, the volatility it would create in educator earnings, the impact on pensions, and an educator's professional career progression over time.
  - The proposed selection process for Teacher Leader and Senior Teacher Leader roles.
  - The financial impact of this new system on local districts due to existing budget concerns.
- **The majority of current educators who attended the working sessions value their Master's degree and feel it has contributed to their instructional and professional development.** While educators agreed that Master's degrees are costly, time consuming, and taxing, there was strong support for Master's degrees because it provides educators a structured development opportunity they wouldn't have had otherwise. Additionally, it has provided educators the opportunity to switch into a new grade-level or teach a new content area. While some educators obtained their Master's degrees prior to teaching and others pursued a Master's

degree later in their career (after year 10), the majority of educators in attendance obtained their Master's while in the classroom and towards the middle of their teaching career (e.g., between years 5-10). Many educators felt that it was more valuable to obtain their Master's degree after they had been teaching for a number of years, allowing them to put what they were learning into context and to reflect on their practice to-date. While educators were supportive of Master's degrees in general, particular programs were highlighted as being particularly helpful to an educator's instructional development, including those aligned to a teacher's grade-level and/or subject area, programs regarding curriculum design and assessment development, and classes regarding lesson planning and classroom management. Specialists also continue to highlight the fact that they are required to acquire a Master's degree in order to obtain their certification. While professional development at the district-level is currently weak and lacking in consistency, there are some professional development opportunities educators felt were meaningful (e.g., National Board Certification, the Science Coalition, Math Coalition programs such as P-cubed and the Elementary Math Teacher Leader [EMTL] program). Professional development that is differentiated and tailored to their specific needs are the most valuable and are currently difficult to access. Various groups discussed the role that teacher leadership roles could play in filling the existing gaps in teacher professional development and support.

- **There continue to be questions, concerns, and misinformation regarding what this process means for the current steps and lanes system and whether it will be affected as a result of this process.** During these sessions, we have been correcting many misconceptions regarding the effect this process will have on the current steps and lanes system, EPER roles, and the compensation of educators who choose to remain on the current system. Many educators fear that money will be removed from the current steps and lanes system in order to fund the new system, that EPER roles will be replaced by these new teacher leadership roles, that teachers on the current system will be frozen in their current step and/or lane or receive a pay decrease, and that educators will eventually be required to transition to the new system. We continue to assure educators that the current steps and lanes system and EPER roles will continue to exist as they currently do.
- **Educators have questions regarding the details of the opt-in process.** Educators would like to receive additional information regarding the opt-in process, including when the opt-in process will occur, how often educators will have an opportunity to opt-in, and whether their salary will be adjusted if they choose to opt-in. Many educators who have obtained the Masters + credits or Doctorate degrees are also concerned about the potential drop in their current salary if they were to opt-in, hold a leadership role for a term, and then drop to the Established Professional level, which is lower than their current salary.
- **While many educators agree that teacher leaders should receive time to complete leadership responsibilities while maintaining a foot in the classroom, there are concerns regarding the effect of release time on students and the student to teacher ratio.** Currently, many educators feel overwhelmed by their current workload and cannot imagine taking on additional leadership responsibilities. As a result, many educators are supportive of release time that would allow a teacher leader to fill a leadership role (although this is more often the case with secondary educators than elementary educators). Other educators, particularly elementary teachers, have expressed concern about having to leave their students in the care of another educator and the effect that it may have on their students. Additionally, many educators have expressed concern regarding how this release time would affect the student to teacher ratios within their schools and whether it will cause class sizes to increase considerably. As a result, there have been many questions regarding the unit funding formula and how it will be altered to account for the release time.
- **Educators have strong opinions about the teacher leader selection process and provided valuable insights regarding selection processes today.** Given the significant amount of additional compensation associated with Teacher Leader and Senior Teacher Leader roles, educators feel strongly that the selection process should be consistent across districts and defined by the state. Across all sessions, educators communicated the need for a selection process and criteria that is transparent, fair, and accessible to all educators. Educators were in favor of a multi-step process (e.g., letter of intent, application, interview, peer feedback, recommendations, etc.) and a process that is tailored to the specific responsibilities of the role a candidate is applying for. Additionally, many educators expressed concerns with favoritism and believe it is essential for the selection process to be less subjective and for all selection decisions to be made by a committee composed of a variety of representatives (e.g., school leader, school leadership team members, other educators, parents, students, etc.). Although some educators have expressed concern regarding the impact that these competitive roles will have within the school building and fear that they will limit collaboration and breed resentment, ultimately, all educators agreed that it is important to have a robust selection process that will increase the Teacher Leaders' and Senior Teacher Leaders' credibility with other educators in the building.