

Great Ideas for Great Public Schools

MONTANA

New compensation plan encourages and nurtures collaboration

In 2002, more than half the teachers in the Helena School District were nearing retirement and starting salaries were among the lowest in Montana. In a joint effort to attract and retain quality teachers, the Helena Education Association and district administrators agreed to work together to develop the **Professional Compensation Alternative Plan (PCAP)**. Educators could remain on the traditional salary schedule or move to PCAP, which increased 2004 starting salaries from \$23,000 to \$30,000, and top salaries from about \$55,000 to \$65,000. The new plan encourages and nurtures collaboration among teachers in the same subject areas and across grade levels. The Helena School District has roughly 1,000 employees (550 teachers). Response to the new pay matrix has been positive. The year PCAP was implemented, the district received 700 teaching applications, far more than the 200-300 applications per year previously received.

Fair and effective compensation plans

- Helena has two plans: the original salary schedule and PCAP. Teachers who were on staff when PCAP was instituted in 2004-05 got to decide whether to stay on the traditional plan or move to PCAP. New teachers are automatically placed in PCAP.
- PCAP is based on professional development. To move up the salary scale, educators must develop and complete a career development plan, perform professional service (such as committee work or community outreach), and receive a positive evaluation.

Meaningful professional development for teachers

- A joint committee determines how the district-funded Professional Growth Fund is spent; it also approves sabbaticals, tuition reimbursement, and other professional growth opportunities.
- Individuals develop their own professional development plans.
- Professional development activities are embedded in the school day.

Strong mentoring program

- Each new teacher is matched with a master teacher who has been in the district for at least five years.
- Release time is given for mentor and mentee observation and peer review.

Cooperative and constructive evaluation system

- Non-tenured teachers who complete professional growth plans are in the "accountability strand." Annual evaluations are continuous, constructive, and a product of cooperation between the evaluator and the teacher.
- Tenured teachers who set goals for professional growth are in the "professional growth strand." The contract lays out the process.
- The union and the district are working together to further improve the evaluation system.

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Great Public Schools for Every Student