



## Schools Find Creative Ways to Pay Teachers - Phoenix teacher's stand illustrates the difficulties of competing with firms that offer big salaries.

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Kindergarten teacher Andrew Creighton-Harank didn't want to leave his job. The Kyrene School District here didn't want him to leave, either. But after 19 years in the classroom, the award-winning teacher was tired of the same old praise and apologies - your work is important and we'd like to give you more money, but we can't.

He decided enough was enough.

Rather than accept the 5 percent increase awarded to teachers in his district, Mr. Creighton-Harank said he wanted a \$14,000 raise or he would leave. The board denied his request, so next year will be his last in the district.

Creighton-Harank's moment of truth is far from unique. In a booming economy where teachers have many options, school districts across the country are finding it more and more difficult to recruit and retain good teachers.

Experts offer many reasons, but pay is a key factor. Some districts are fighting back by offering incentives such as signing bonuses. Others are reconsidering the standard single-salary pay system in favor of merit-pay models. Whatever the method, many school districts are realizing that with rising student enrollments, accelerating retirements, and class-size reduction efforts, the need for teachers will only grow more acute. So they are reconsidering old models in order to hold onto the

Although teachers' salaries have increased since the 1970s, those increases have not kept pace with salaries offered by private businesses. In specialized areas, where teachers have skills that are valued by industry - bilingual education, foreign languages, and industrial arts - the migration to businesses has been particularly severe.

In fact, nearly a quarter of the bachelor's degree recipients who majored in education in 1992-93 never taught. Of those who do make it to the classroom, 22 percent leave their jobs within the first three years.

### A family affair

Kyrene School District Superintendent Brad Barrett says he has seen the phenomenon at work in his own family.

His son grew up wanting to be a teacher. After working as a bilingual reading aid in a local district, however, Mr. Barrett's son decided that doing what it took to become a teacher was not worth the pay. He went into computer engineering instead. Similarly, Barrett's daughter left her teaching job after a year to write lesson plans for a Utah-based computer software company.

### New incentives

To become more competitive, pioneering school districts are offering creative hiring incentives.

\* The Fort Worth Independent School District in Texas offers a one-time \$2,000 hiring bonus for teachers of "critical-need" subjects. In addition, bilingual teachers in kindergarten through third grade are eligible for a recurring stipend of \$1,000 to \$2,700.

\* The Baltimore City Public School system decided last year to offer new teachers \$5,000 for a down payment on a house within the city as well as allowing them to borrow as much as \$1,200 against their first year's salary for relocation costs. Hawaii schools also offer relocation allowances of up to \$400.

\* In North Carolina, 18 rural districts have reduced attrition by subsidizing the cost of college tuition and books for existing school-district employees who want to become teachers.

Part of the problem with teacher pay stems from a restrictive pay structure, says the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Researchers say the single-salary system was instituted for good reasons, mainly to reduce the possibility of discrimination. But under such a system, teachers can double their salaries at best, and only after substantial graduate training and 30 years of service.

Instead, many experts suggest that schools move to alternative models such as group-based incentive programs - give all teachers bonuses when their schools reach certain performance goals - and knowledge and skill-based pay.

A much-hailed program in Douglas County, Colo., includes elements of both systems. So far, reviews have been mixed. While initial research suggests that incentive programs are effective in focusing teaching efforts on districts' needs and increasing public confidence, they do not necessarily address basic wage and recruitment issues.

And even in Douglas County, which altered its pay scale to be more competitive, Assistant Superintendent Ellen Bartlett says it has been increasingly difficult to recruit qualified teachers.

For Creighton-Harank, the future may lie elsewhere. He has gotten five job offers, three of them unrelated to education. He says he'll consider them all.

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