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COMPENSATION, COLLABORATION AND CULTURE: A WINNING STORY

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One of the most challenging issues for schools and school leaders is managing expectations about salaries, benefits, workload, evaluation, professional development and job security. Leaders must at the same time build a trusting environment in which the school's needs for quality, accountability and cost controls are met while the ability to recruit and retain the best teachers available is ensured.

School culture, i.e., the history and lore of each school's internal "story" is a crucial back drop to managing change and bringing improvement to the sensitive themes mentioned above. School culture either allows for or impedes collaboration between staff and administration when a discussion about compensation and workload must occur. Furthermore there are often deep issues of resentment and even anger within faculty cultures about compensation/benefits/workload/evaluation.

There is a proven process that has worked well in over 2500 independent and international schools for the past 25 years. This process addresses the need to be creative yet realistic with the challenges of compensation and workload while managing the financial constraints that the board and the budget dictate. It is an intellectual dialogue among trustees, teachers and administrators guided by specific rules of engagement that provide for honesty, sharing of information, management of expectations and collaboration. This dialogue enhances school culture as well as deals with the prickly issues of money and time.

The schools for which Littleford & Associates has undertaken this process are located in 35 countries so it is not a one size fits all solution. It is very culturally dependent. Here are the steps:

1. Review goals with the Board leadership, head and senior management team. What are the compensation, workload, salary system, benefits design, professional development and cultural enhancement expectations? Are there clarity and agreement among the Chair, Head and senior leadership team about these goals? Is there receptivity to allowing faculty input in a structured format?



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2. Invite teachers to participate in a process that is not tied to a specific calendar or time frame but is an opportunity for teachers, board members and administrators to talk about these sensitive themes. It can take as little as 6 months from beginning to end or up to a year. Teachers need time to talk and reason. Board members, who are crucial to the process, want to move more quickly toward a conclusion. They should. They are volunteers but they also bring their business acumen and perspective to a review of salary system design, benefits and even teacher appraisal/ evaluation and professional growth.
3. The Consultant interviews key trustees, the entire leadership team and a cross section of teachers in individual confidential sessions to gather a body of data about faculty quality of life, benefits, professional growth opportunities and overall compensation, including its design and methodology, evaluation, and workload. Such sessions should also build connections, rapport and credibility with these individual teachers. Confidentiality is crucial. The outside perspective is equally important.
4. The listening process is important because every teacher has a "story" about his or her life or that of a colleague: how the individual or family fares under the current salary and benefit system and what kind of philosophical messages the current salary system conveys to them personally. The Consultant learns whether the faculty and the leadership see any relationship between the school's mission and the compensation and benefits structure and the evaluation/professional growth process. Or were their systems borrowed from some other school? Schools should not "import" or mimic other schools in the creation of salary delivery systems or benefit packages unless all schools are alike. And of course, they are not.
5. At the end of the interview process or "listening time", all those who participated attend a 3 hour workshop. The concluding workshop reveals what the Consultant uncovered in the way of patterns, history, trust and effectiveness of delivery in money and benefits to the teachers. It is important to stress to board members and teachers at the outset that this process is NOT about more money. It is about defining the distribution systems that deliver the money, whether at the same amounts or higher. Given that up to 85% of a school's budget is spent on salary and benefits, it is critically important that board members understand how the School's resources are being spent, for what purpose, and to attract and retain what kind of people.
6. The workshop also covers current best (and strange) practices worldwide in salary system design, benefit systems and the wide range of approaches to teacher evaluation/appraisal/professional growth. It explains the messages that various salary and benefits schemes send. Do these schemes favor single or married teachers or young, mid-career or senior teachers, for example? Which group or groups is gaining overall financially and which is falling behind?
7. From the Consultant's recommendations come the creation of three committees on these



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topics: evaluation/professional growth; salary system design (how to deliver the money and this includes the definition of a full time job); and benefits design and understanding them.

Most teachers do not have a good grasp on how even the current benefits actually work.

8. The first followup task is to develop a mission-based philosophy of compensation. Such a philosophy is the underpinning of the entire salary, benefits and evaluation system.
9. The process that unfolds after the Consultant leaves is outlined in steps and in detail and involves building a larger and larger circle of acceptance of the Committee' recommendations, with some modifications to those recommendations. The process involves board approval before going to a final meeting with the faculty as a whole and with presentations by each of the three committees.

At a prominent US independent school with 350 teachers, I heard the co chairs of the Benefits Committee make their presentation. The Board member Co-chair, also a CEO of a nationally known company, spoke first. A teacher sitting next to me in the audience said: "He sounds just like a teacher!" When the Co-chair, teacher, spoke, the same teacher sitting next to me said: "He sounds like a board member!" Yes. That is the point. Teachers and board members learn to walk in each other's shoes during this journey and have empathy for the role of each other. The end result is always a substantial boost in faculty morale, regardless of the actual changes made to salary and benefits systems and evaluation protocols.

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