

Teacher Co-operatives

To get more subject specialists into classrooms, it will be necessary to make fundamental changes.
By Paul T. Hill

Although the evidence is mixed about whether there is a shortage of teachers, big-city schools definitely have trouble finding capable people. There are also general shortages in science, mathematics, and special education.

Civil service and collective bargaining conventions prevent school systems from getting the teachers they need in three ways: by forbidding extra pay for people with rare skills; by tying pay increments to seniority rather than performance; and by emphasizing training in pedagogy over knowledge of content, even in math and science.

These problems all stem from politics and collective bargaining. One possible solution is to create a new status for teachers with rare skills. Science, mathematics, special education, and other teachers could be employed by independent organizations, which would be vendors to the school district and provide instruction on a contract basis.

Such organizations — let's call them teacher co-operatives — could employ and provide salaries and benefits for teachers for whom the school district would pay on a contractual basis. They could pay as much as districts now pay for teachers — more than \$60,000 a year, combining salaries, benefits, and expenditures for in-service training and substitutes. The co-operative would then be responsible for recruitment, training, and compensation.

As contract employees, teachers would not be covered by the same

rules on pay and certification that now constrain school districts. Younger teachers, who would receive relatively low pay as district employees, might prefer to work through co-operatives.

ual performance, rather than on seniority.

Thus, highly-capable younger people, and individuals who are masters of pedagogy in one discipline, would be able to maximize their own productivity and pay.

Co-operatives — with strong incentives to use teachers' time as efficiently as possible — would assign teachers only to those courses that they taught especially well.

Co-operatives would also promote experimentation with effective ways to use capital, especially computer-based instruction and televised presentations by master teachers.

The co-operatives might, in fact, be the mechanism whereby high-leverage uses of technology are finally brought into the public schools.

Co-operatives might also provide school

leaders. As with teachers, school leaders would be contract employees and thus would not have to meet all the arcane requirements that apply to district-employed school principals. School districts facing shortages of principals would then be able to tap a fresh supply of people experienced in managing small organizations.

Co-operatives would eventually be self-supporting. Philanthropic funding and initiative, however, are needed to get them started.

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Cartoon by Cindy Koelsch

Teachers employed by a co-operative could be assigned to work in more than one school. Thus, an advanced physics teacher might be able to work in two or three high schools rather than just one.

Some individuals might keep jobs in industry or pursue advanced degrees while working part-time as teachers. Community college faculty could also moonlight (or daylight) as schoolteachers. Co-operatives could pay more for teachers with advanced degrees than colleges and universities now pay their adjunct faculty.

Individual teachers' pay and benefits, including contributions to vested retirement accounts, could be based on scarcity of skills and individ-