

In numerous national surveys, faculty compensation has repeatedly been identified as one of the most difficult and divisive issues facing independent schools. It is an issue that is charged with emotion, saddled by history, and riddled with questions around fairness, equity, and justice. In the annals of headmaster lore, it has been said that to endeavor to solve the compensation conundrum is to tempt one's own fate. I can't tell you how pleased I am to be writing you this article.

Recognizing the need to protect and preserve its number one "asset," in November of 2002 the Eagle Hill School Board of Trustees voted to make researching, designing, and implementing a comprehensive compensation plan a strategic priority. Not surprisingly, and in line with everything that we do at EHS, we set forth on this endeavor with the understanding and the mindset that the process was going to be at least as important as the final product.

We understood from the outset that to design an effective and enduring plan would require knowledge and input from a wide range of people. Accordingly, to understand the national, local, and internal (EHS) dialogue surrounding compensation, we enlisted the services of two of our own 30-year boarding school veterans. John White (EHS trustee and 23-year Headmaster at two boarding schools) studied the needs of teachers at various stages of their careers/lives, while Brinley Hall spent an entire year examining compensation models at 40 public and private schools, and interviewing every former EHS employee since 1999 to understand their reasons for leaving. Simultaneously, we attended local and national conferences, held weekly faculty meetings, and conducted internal surveys to ascertain the needs, priorities, and desires of our faculty.

Armed with this information, we began to realize that the compensation plan could play a larger, more significant role within the EHS community than we originally imagined. If designed and implemented thoughtfully and carefully, the compensation plan would be a vehicle that allowed us to: 1) reduce teacher and staff turnover, 2) attract a superior faculty, 3) better monitor and predict our financial future, 4) increase accountability, 5) reward performance, 6) stabilize tuition, 7) improve the culture and ethos, 8) reward a professional life, 9) revise staff and administrative salary structures, 10) reward commitment and longevity, and 11) support the mission of the school.

After spending eighteen months designing a plan that met all of the aforementioned objectives, we then addressed the issue of affordability. Many more months of study with our board finance committee and our accountants led us to the conclusion that, in fact, we could afford the plan (and the commensurate increase in faculty and staff) in light of our previous, deliberate, and related decision to increase the student body by twenty-six students (to a total of 150 students). Finally, after two long years of study and planning, on September 24, 2004 the board of trustees approved the new compensation plan.

On October 8, 2004 we held a full faculty and staff meeting to unveil what we believed to be a comprehensive, competitive, and transparent compensation model. At the end of the

discussion, the entire faculty and staff agreed wholeheartedly with our assessment of the plan. In addition to providing salaries that were competitive with other public and private schools, the faculty and staff were most appreciative of simply having the realistic opportunity to live a life of middle class dignity, to commit to a professional life at EHS, and to plan for a comfortable retirement. It was an enormous success.

Our compensation plan has earned national attention as well. I have presented the model to several hundred headmasters at various national conferences, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Like they have in so many other aspects of education, it is clear that many schools will soon follow the Eagle Hill lead in terms of compensation. On a personal level, and in spite of the tales of horror from my colleagues, the compensation initiative is the single most important and rewarding initiative I have worked on in my twelve years at EHS. I am so pleased that our extraordinary faculty will finally be honored and compensated for their amazing commitment and work.