



The 3rd Semester Program: How to increase teacher pay by 50%, with NO tax increase

For the last year, the Taxpayers Association has promoted a proposal to expand the school year from 2 to 3 semesters. By not leaving school buildings empty for that third semester, school districts could avoid having to build new buildings, and increase teacher pay by 50 percent without any tax increase.

Everyone loves the idea of paying teachers more, but generally they have a hard time understanding how the pay increase we tout can happen without a tax increase. Let me explain exactly how that works.

Because the Jordan School District's financial plight prompted our review of this proposal, I'll use Jordan as an example. However, the raw numbers matter less than the basic ratios, so the same math will apply as well in the Nebo or Ogden districts as it does in Jordan.

The Jordan School District has approximately 48,625 students distributed between seven high school prisms. (A high school prism is the high school and its feeder junior high, middle and elementary schools.) Because of the dramatic changes this proposal would require if implemented across an entire district in one fell swoop, this analysis assumes that a 3rd semester proposal is implemented one prism at a time, so that no teacher or parents feel forced into the 3rd semester option.

On average, the 267 teachers in each of the Jordan School District's prisms currently teach two semesters to 6,946 students. However, 178 teachers could teach the same 6,946 students, if each of those teachers taught for 3 semesters. That would mean the district wouldn't need as many teachers.

At first glance, that sounds like a recipe for laying off teachers. It's not. Remember that teachers retire or otherwise stop teaching every year, so every school district hires scores of new teachers each year. The Jordan School District hires approximately 200 new teachers. Moving one high school prism to a 3rd semester program simply means the Jordan School District would only hire 111 new teachers.

If the 178 teachers in the 3rd semester prism are still teaching 6,946 students, the district no longer has the costs associated with the 89 teachers who weren't hired. The salaries the 89 teachers would have earned are instead spent on 50% pay increases for the 178 teachers teaching a third semester.

The benefits to teachers who opt into the 3rd semester are even richer. While school districts pay teachers for the 2 semesters they teach, they buy their teachers' health and dental insurance for a year. That means the district doesn't have to spend on insurance what they would have spent for the 89 teachers who aren't hired.

That savings is equal to about 40 teaching days for each teacher who opts into the 3rd semester. This savings would allow the district to offer 3rd semester teachers 3 weeks, or 15 days of discretionary, paid vacation, plus 10 paid holidays.

It may come as a surprise, but teachers do not currently receive any paid holidays or paid vacations. In fact, teachers who take a day off have to pay for their substitute teacher out of their own pocket. These 25 days of paid vacation and holidays should go a long way towards mitigating the concern many people have voiced about teacher burnout associated with a 3rd semester.

Even if the paid vacations and holidays alone do not stop the teacher burnout, the insurance savings offer other opportunities to help teachers. With the remaining 15 days, the district could pay for teacher training, and/or hire part-time administrative help to do the grunt work of data entry that so often burns teachers out.

Moving one prism to a 3rd semester program means every teacher who wants to continue teaching in the district could do so, whether the teacher prefers the higher pay of a 3-semester program, or the free semester of a 2-semester program.

And because this program is entirely voluntary, teachers from across the district would have the opportunity to opt into or out of the prism using a 3rd semester program.