BACKGROUND

In 2015, the Idaho Legislature passed legislation creating the career ladder, a new funding mechanism to determine how much money the state will allocate to school districts for instructional staff salaries. School districts must determine the best way to align their salary indexes – the way they pay teachers – with the new career ladder – the way the state now distributes money to school districts.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the career ladder?
The career ladder is a new funding mechanism the state uses to distribute money to school districts for instructional staff salaries.

How is the career ladder different from the salary schedule?
The salary schedule is the mechanism Idaho Falls School District 91 uses to pay its teachers. It has steps and lanes, and teachers can move on the schedule, and earn additional money, based on their experience and education. Teachers could control their movement on the schedule by earning credits, and teachers were incentivized to earn credits as a way to increase their compensation. The career ladder is the new funding mechanism the state uses to distribute money to school districts to pay instructional staff salaries. It includes “residency” rungs for teachers who have been in the profession for three years or less and “professional” rungs for teachers who have been in the profession for more than three years.

Teachers have little control over their movement on the career ladder. Placement is based on cohorts and rungs. Factors that influence a teacher’s movement on the career ladder include teacher evaluations, student achievement and accumulation of 24 credits or a master’s degree. When it’s fully implemented, the career ladder will have three residency rungs and five professional rungs.

How are teachers placed on the career ladder?
Teachers are placed on the career ladder based on cohorts, which were determined by the state based on where teachers were on the state index at the end of September 2014. The state index was the funding mechanism the state used to distribute salary money before it adopted the new career ladder.

To determine your cohort, look at your placement on your 2014-2015 contract, and match that to the information in Slide 5 of the PowerPoint presentation entitled “How Are Teachers Placed On The Career Ladder For Funding?”

Please remember, this is not an indication of the compensation you might receive with the career ladder, but rather how much money the state will distribute to District 91. Compensation will be determined by the new salary schedule, which the district will develop in the coming months. The district has absolutely no plans to reduce current salaries or implement any pay cuts as part of that process.

Does the career ladder offer any benefits to teachers who continue their education and earn more credits?
Yes, but the career ladder only emphasizes a bachelor’s and 24 credits or a master’s degree, and does not provide any additional funding for random credits earned. When it is fully implemented,
the career ladder’s distributions include a $2,000 allocation for instructional staff with a BA +24 and a $3,500 allocation for instructional staff with an MA.

How many “compensation rungs” does the career ladder have?
Idaho’s career ladder essentially has two rungs – “residency” and “professional.” When it is fully implemented in 2020, the career ladder will have three residency cells, and five professional cells within those two rungs. In contrast, the district’s current salary schedule has seven lanes and up to 28 steps.

The rungs reflect the length of time a teacher has held their professional license and has met certain performance criteria. A teacher in their first three years of teaching starts on the “residency” rung, and progresses to the “professional” rung after successfully completing the “applicable performance criteria.” Teachers with more than three years of experience are automatically placed on the professional rung.

What performance criteria are factored into movement on the career ladder?
Performance criteria are defined as meeting the “standards specified for instructional staff to demonstrate teaching proficiency for a given compensation rung.”

What “applicable performance criteria” must teachers meet to move on the career ladder?
Teachers must meet two performance criteria: 1. An overall rating of proficient and no components rated as unsatisfactory on the state framework for teaching evaluation, and 2. Demonstrating the majority of their students has met their measurable student achievement targets.

What are the measurable “student achievement targets” teachers must meet?
The state defines “measurable student achievement targets” as the measurement of student academic achievement or growth within a given interval of instruction for those students who have been enrolled in and attended 80 percent of the interval of instruction.

Districts choose their own measures and targets in collaboration with teachers, administrators and staff. The new teacher evaluation procedures that were implemented this year required teachers and principals to collaboratively identify each teacher’s student achievement targets. Many measures and assessment tools can be used as achievement targets including: ISAT 2.0, student learning objectives, formative assessments, pre- and post-tests, performance based assessments, IRI, college entrance exams, end of course exams and more.

Does the career ladder mean more money for teacher salaries?
The Legislature created the career ladder as part of an effort to increase teacher compensation in the state, but, again, it is simply the state’s funding mechanism, not a salary schedule. Districts must determine the best way to align their salary schedules – the way they pay teachers – with the career ladder – the way the state now distributes money to school districts.

Once it’s fully implemented in 2020, the career ladder would allocate a base salary of $37,000 for teachers in their first year, and caps out at $50,000 a year for teachers on the highest professional rung. However, District 91 has historically paid its teachers and staff more than it receives from the state for salaries, and its salary schedule caps out at $60,177.

Will teachers lose money?
No. The district has absolutely NO plans to reduce current salaries or implement any pay cuts or reductions as part of this process.

Does the career ladder apply to all certified staff?
No. Currently the career ladder only applies to “instructional staff,” which the state has defined as those who are involved in the direct instruction of a student or a group of students and who holds an Idaho certificate issued under section 33-1201 Idaho Code.
Beginning with the 2016-2017 school year, pupil services personnel such as counselors, speech language pathologists, psychologists, media generalists, school nurses, instructional coaches and consulting teachers also will be considered instructional staff and will move to the career ladder.

**Are certified instructional staff paid according to the career ladder?**
No. Again, the career ladder is just the new funding mechanism the state uses to distribute money to school districts for instructional staff salaries. It’s up to each school district to determine the best way to compensate staff using those allocations.

Historically, District 91 has paid its teachers more than it receives from the state so the district is working to determine the best way to align its current salary index to the career ladder. The only reason the district is able to pay its teachers more is because of the supplemental levy, which patrons go to the polls to renew every two years.

**How will the district make the transition from its current salary index to the new career ladder?**
A committee made up of teachers and district administrators will meet this winter to look at how to move the district from its current salary schedule to one that is better aligned with the career ladder. We will take steps to ensure the committee’s make up is reflective of our teacher cohorts so all our teachers’ interests are represented.

The committee will study the issue and then make a recommendation to the negotiating teams representing the Idaho Falls Education Association and Board of Trustees, which must formally adopt and approve the transition plan.

**Who will serve on the committee?**
All teachers will have the opportunity to volunteer to serve on the committee. If you’re interested, just email Supt. Boland at bolageor@d91.k12.id.us. Representatives will be selected to represent our teacher cohorts to ensure all our teachers’ interests are included in the committee’s deliberations.

**Why is the district making the change? Why doesn’t the district just keep its existing salary schedule?**
There are a number of important reasons why the district needs to better align its salary schedule with the state’s new career ladder. They include:

- **Maintaining the district’s fiscal stability** – We need to ensure pay increases are tied to increases in revenue. If we don’t, the district will face shortfalls and possible budget reductions. The district already relies on the supplemental levy to provide the additional funding that allows the district to pay teachers more than it currently receives from the state.

- **Incentivizing the right kind of credits** – The career ladder only provides additional money for the accumulation of a BA +24 credits or a master’s degree. It doesn’t make sense to keep a salary schedule that incentivizes our teachers to take random credits since the state no longer supports that structure.

- **Competition from surrounding districts** – Most of the surrounding school districts have already moved to salary schedules patterned after the career ladder. Since the career ladder provides much larger increases to teachers at the early to middle stages of their careers it may be difficult for our district to compete with surrounding districts to attract and retain quality teachers.