



## One Schoolhouse

Online  
Grade 7-Postgraduate  
4,000 semester enrollments  
275 consortium schools

### Contributors

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## Case Study Focus

Curriculum at Scale and Per-Student Compensation Model

### Background

One Schoolhouse is a nonprofit educational organization that partners with independent schools to advance their diverse approaches to education. One Schoolhouse has two primary facets: the Association for Academic Leaders and the student online learning program. The online learning program at One Schoolhouse is designed to supplement what great independent schools can offer on-campus, often in advanced or specialized areas for which brick-and-mortar schools often do not have a faculty member or in areas that are cost-prohibitive to offer on-campus.

### Curriculum at Scale

The market in which independent schools operate frequently demands more programming, in areas such as language, computer science, math, electives, etc. Often these offerings have limited demands and can be difficult to schedule for coveted students who take multiple high-level courses. All this means that specialty courses can be difficult or cost prohibitive to staff. Finding a Mandarin teacher in some locations is near impossible, for example, and STEM teachers can often demand top salaries because for-profit business positions also available to them.

An online education provider such as One Schoolhouse can fill out the curriculum on a per-seat basis rather than a per-section basis. This allows schools to take risks with new curricular offerings while mitigating costs.

## **Transition Considerations**

Many faculty members still see online learning as a threat to their existence, and thus independent schools need to take caution when selecting partners as they move in this direction. Moreover, the quality of online education is as vast as the quality of in-person learning. Independent schools will want to ensure that the values they hold dear in face-to-face instruction are mirrored online, for example, the centrality of relationships, the quality of instruction, the challenge level of coursework.

Schools may want to consider using an online course to pilot new programming before making more costly investments in hiring an FTE.

## **Per-Student Compensation Model**

While in the vast majority of cases it is more difficult to teach a class of 20 than a class of eight, almost every school, public or private, compensates teachers for the number of sections that they teach, not the number of students that they teach. There is also a tremendous difference in preparation between teaching a course for the first time or after a major overhaul of a course, and teaching a class that has only had minor edits from the prior year.

Both situations create inequities, not to mention grumblings and bad feelings in the faculty room. One Schoolhouse aimed to fix those challenges in its compensation system, originally introduced in 2012 and revised annually for greater equity. As a result, teacher morale and retention rates are exceptionally high, and course quality improves year-over-year.

The school compensates teachers for creation or revision to courses separate from compensation for instruction and has varied levels for creation/revision depending on the scope of work required. This means that a teacher creating a new class is compensated more than a teacher doing lesser work (edits or slight revisions to an existing course). One added, initially unforeseen advantage to this part of the system is that for multi-sectioned courses, that school can contract the more effective course designer at a higher rate than less effective course designers.

Teachers are then compensated based on the number of students in their courses, beyond a flat per section rate. While teaching eight students isn't the same as teaching 20, a baseline of work is required that is the same for two or four or six students. Thus, our compensation structure starts with base compensation and scales up depending on demand.

## **Transition Considerations**

Moving from a per section to per student compensation model would be a challenge for most independent schools, and yet there would also be benefits, particularly when trying to attract the next generation of faculty members.

When One Schoolhouse moved to this model, leaders had to demonstrate to faculty that their compensation would largely remain similar or greater than compensation in prior years. This was accomplished through extensive modeling and individual conversations with each faculty member. It also required leaders to listen and adapt. Every year teachers reported back where they felt that the school could adapt the program to create more equity, and every year leadership made some changes.

One unexpected benefit that some schools may find is that the best teachers may make different decisions about what they want to teach. In many schools, the highest performing faculty can gradually gravitate to teaching elective courses, often with smaller enrollment numbers. Moving to a per student compensation model encourages high performing teachers to teach more students and therefore higher enrollment courses.

Finally, primary and secondary schools continue to have difficulty attracting and retaining teachers, particularly younger and new-to-the profession faculty. Movement to a compensation model that is fully transparent and more equitable, and perhaps less dictated by seniority, can help. Schools may even consider implementing such a model with new faculty members only, instead of trying to upend existing paradigms.