

# TEACH +PLUS

Opportunities for Teachers,  
Results for Urban Students

## Building a Teaching Profession that Recognizes Excellence: Reimagining the Step-and-Lane Pay Scale

As classroom teachers, we believe that the teaching profession needs to be modernized. Part of this means valuing teachers' excellence in classrooms and schools. We believe that the teacher compensation system needs to be overhauled to accomplish the goals of:

- Better valuing the complex work of teaching and teachers' contributions to student learning and school-wide improvement;
- Building a career lattice of leadership roles for teachers who are successful in the classroom; and
- Better retaining great early career teachers (those with fewer than ten years of experience) in our profession by recognizing their accomplishments sooner and linking those accomplishments with tangible rewards.

Teaching is complicated, difficult work with a demanding imperative: ensure that students are college and career ready. It is time that teachers are valued for their accomplishments toward attaining this goal. Ultimately, we are seeking to reimagine the ways in which teachers are currently compensated in most districts. We hope to bring a new level of professionalism to teaching. We cannot continue to demand that teachers prepare students for college and careers of the 21st century while treating teachers as though they are interchangeable widgets who should be compensated according to a salary schedule invented in the early 1900s.

Further, the demographics of the teaching profession are shifting. There is a new majority; 52 percent of the teaching force is made up of teachers who have ten or fewer years of experience.<sup>1</sup> Our outdated, quality-blind compensation system rewards teachers based only on time served and defers benefits for too long. This system does not work for teachers, especially the new majority of early career and second-stage teachers. One teacher may put in many more hours than the teacher next door, achieve higher gains with students, and only earn half as much pay. Currently, accruing additional years of experience is the primary way to move up the pay scale. This means that even outstanding early career teachers need to wait patiently for ten or twelve years, moving up incrementally with each passing year, before they are eligible for maximum pay. This system is discouraging and demoralizing.

*"When I began teaching ten years ago, I had to live at home for four years until I earned my master's degree because I could not afford to live on my own with the salary I was making. Most of my friends in other careers were able to be independent much sooner than that. Even though I put in long hours at work, took on advising two student clubs, and steadily increased my students' performance, the only way I could increase my salary was to take graduate courses and wait my turn."*

— Christina Porter, Revere Public Schools

Additionally, we believe that we need to align teacher compensation with student progress and achievement, as well as with teachers' overall contributions to their schools. Right now, in most districts, salary is completely disconnected from a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom or a teacher's contributions to school-wide improvement efforts.<sup>2</sup> We advocate for a system that includes recognition for results and contributions with students and in the school.

The step-and-lane salary scale that many districts rely on began in the early 1900s, when there was a historical reason to design transparent compensation systems.<sup>3</sup> At that time, teacher salaries were susceptible to bias because of gender and race. It was important to value teachers on an objective basis — years of experience. Since then, professional development credits have served as an additional criterion for salary increases.

As history shows, there are pros to having a step-and-lane schedule like the one that has been in place for many decades. The pros of the system include:

- Provides transparency: Step-and-lane schedules based solely on easily quantifiable measures ensure equitable salaries without biases (of gender, race, etc) towards teachers.
- Allows teachers to plan for the future: Teachers are given reasonable assurance of their

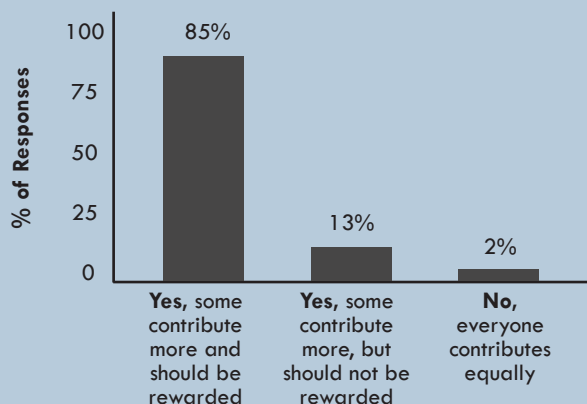
yearly income and can plan for future years. Additionally, teachers can make decisions that they know will be reflected in their pay. For example, teachers know exactly how many graduate credits they need to attain in order to move up.

However, there are also cons:

- Does not value teachers' work of producing student growth and achievement: The current step-and-lane schedule does not value teachers for making huge gains with students. Outstanding teachers get paid the same (or less) than peers who are not making growth with students.
- Rewards time served, not work with students: The current step-and-lane schedule supposedly helps retain teachers, but instead gives teachers the wrong message: staying on for more years increases our salary more rapidly than improving our practice. It is critically important to signal to teachers that their expertise and skill is valued, especially at the "second stage" of the career, when so many teachers leave.
- Values graduate credits that are unrelated to improving teaching: Research shows little or no correlation between attaining an advanced degree and classroom effectiveness.<sup>6</sup> In fact,

**Figure 1: T+ Network Event Data, January 20, 2011**

At a recent T+ Network event in Boston, teachers in the audience (95% of whom had fewer than ten years of experience) overwhelmingly agreed that some teachers add more value to a school than others and ought to be compensated accordingly.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 2: T+ Network Event Data, January 20, 2011**

Teachers at the same T+ Network event were asked: "Would you be willing to be held more accountable for student outcomes in exchange for access to differentiated roles and additional pay?" Only 11% were unwilling to entertain the idea.<sup>5</sup>

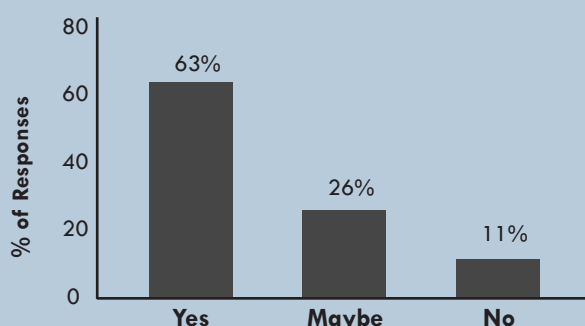
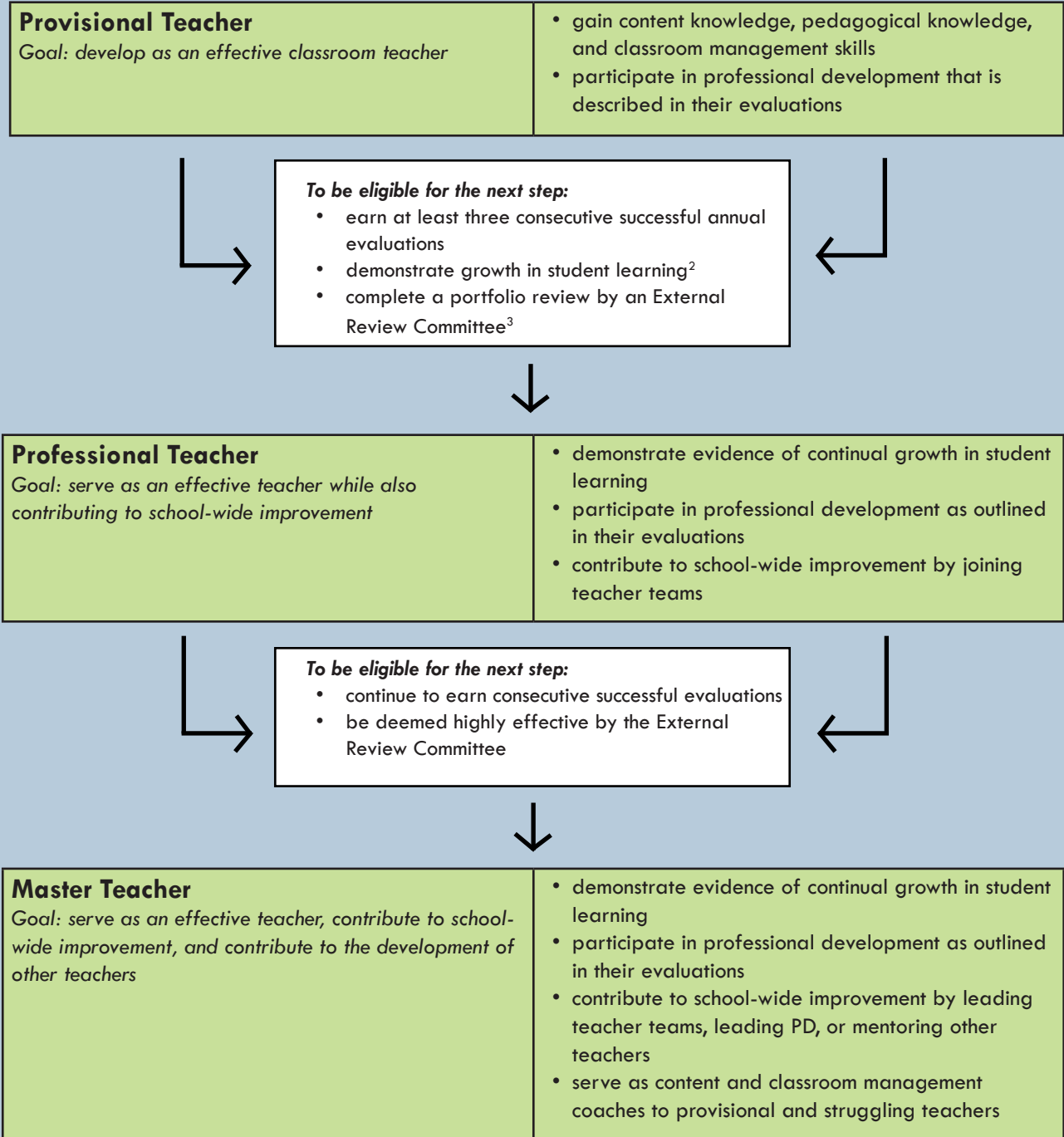


Figure 3: An alternative model of teacher compensation and career growth

**Career Step<sup>1</sup>: At this stage, teachers are expected to:**



<sup>1</sup>We have used language that mirrors Massachusetts' tenure and licensure because we believe that licensure and tenure in our state should be similarly linked to a teacher's growth and effectiveness.

<sup>2</sup>"Growth in student learning" should be determined by multiple measures and will likely be collectively bargained at the local level.

<sup>3</sup>The "Professional Peer Review Committee" appears in the Baltimore Teachers Union contract, adopted in the Fall of 2010.

some research shows a negative correlation between advanced degrees and impact on student learning.<sup>7</sup> This is particularly important to note given that our current system does not differentiate between graduate courses that are relevant to a teacher's subject or area of need and those that are completely irrelevant.<sup>8</sup> Teachers should not be rewarded simply for the act of taking a graduate class.

Now is the time to modernize compensation structures and to better align them to our national goal: ensuring that all students are college and career ready. Districts around the country, in collaboration with teachers unions, are adopting compensation models that will help bring our profession into the 21st century. The recommendations in this report are based on innovative models we have studied in Baltimore, Denver, Pittsburgh, and Washington, DC. We were most intrigued by the Baltimore plan, which was ratified by Baltimore teachers in the fall of 2010. Based on the innovations of these other cities and on what we believe as a group of committed teachers who would like to modernize our profession, we advocate for a new compensation system with three levels that teachers progress through based on accomplishments, including:

- excellence in the classroom, as demonstrated through successful annual evaluations and proof of student learning;
- completion of professional development that demonstrably aligns with teachers' subject area or area of need and improves student learning; and
- a teacher's contributions to the overall improvement of the school.

## What should "count" for salary increases?

In a newly designed teacher compensation system, we believe the following elements should count towards increases in teachers' salaries:

### Excellence in the classroom

- Teacher evaluations in our state are undergoing change.<sup>9</sup> We anticipate that evaluation will soon be more closely tied to growth in student learning, as determined by multiple measures. Therefore, an excellent evaluation should

truly signal that students are making excellent progress in a given teacher's classroom.

- Teachers who receive excellent evaluations should be able to advance through the steps and attain salary increases quickly. This serves to both recognize excellent teaching and better retain top teachers by valuing their contributions.
- Teachers who receive poor evaluations should not receive automatic yearly raises (except for cost of living adjustments).

### Coursework and PD that is tied specifically to subject/grade level and/or a teacher's area of need

- Professional development is a critical part of improving practice and should be aligned to what will actually improve a teacher's instruction. Teachers' evaluations should clearly outline their areas of need and guide them towards coursework that will be beneficial.
- Coursework that improves a teacher's leadership skills should also count. For example, teachers should be able to take courses on data analysis, mentoring, or leading teacher teams. Opportunities such as these will help a teacher grow professionally outside the classroom, which is in and of itself a lever for retaining teachers who are eager to take on leadership amongst their peers while remaining in the classroom.
- District and union representatives should come together to agree on appropriate and specific criteria for PD that "counts."

### Contributions to colleagues' professional growth and to the overall improvement of school and district

- Mentoring colleagues or student teachers
- Leading professional development for other teachers
- Leading or participating on school-wide teams and collaborating with peers (ex. Data Team, Instructional Leadership Team, School Site Council)
- Leading a district-wide effort or committee
- Choosing to teach in a turnaround or "high need" subject/grade level
- Leading extracurricular student activities, such

as sports, student government, debate teams, etc.

*“As a young teacher I was asked to serve on interview committees and as a coach in my first year, and to serve as a team leader and class advisor in my second year in addition to teaching a full load of classes. I reluctantly took on some of these tasks, and unfortunately my classroom teaching suffered as a result. I see the same thing happening still... new teachers [first and second year] are being asked to stretch themselves so thin that their classroom teaching falls short. The teacher’s most important job is to instruct students and help them grow. Everything else, regardless of how important it might be, is secondary to that goal. Instituting a system to ensure success will help teachers be the best teachers they can be, but even more importantly will give students the best possible instruction they can receive.”*

– **Greg Hurley, Malden Public Schools**

We envision leadership opportunities as a way to recognize great teachers. At different career stages, teachers should be offered additional leadership roles that acknowledge their accomplishments. For example, teachers in the first two years with Provisional status should be sheltered from too many responsibilities and should almost solely focus on their classroom instruction. Teachers who have been acknowledged with Professional status should be able to join school-wide improvement teams and should be able to lead student extracurricular activities and teams. Master teachers should be tapped for leading professional development, mentoring Provisional or struggling teachers, and leading teacher teams. Master teachers should be offered the most challenging teaching assignments and leadership roles that allow them to have greater input into school-based decision-making. Teachers and administrators must work to ensure that teachers are ready to take on these various roles, feel supported in doing so, and believe that the role will contribute to sustaining them in the profession.

## **Maintaining Fairness**

Since teacher evaluations would be linked to compensation in our proposed model, it is imperative that evaluations are fair and unbiased depictions of

a teacher’s abilities and growth areas. The purpose of evaluations must be to give all teachers specific and actionable steps for improvement. We advocate for a district-level External Review Committee made up of union members and district representatives who would collectively decide if teachers are eligible to move up to the next step. In addition to annual evaluations, teachers should present a portfolio that shows:

- proof of lesson-planning and curriculum design;
- student work at a range of levels of mastery;
- proof of contributions to school or district improvement; and
- proof of eligible coursework that is aligned with areas of need.

There are some aspects of the current step-and-lane model that we would like to retain. Fair cost of living adjustments should remain in place for all teachers on an annual basis. Salary increases should still be outlined in a transparent way which will allow teachers to understand what, specifically, they can do to move up to the next step. Also, there should be an appeals process for teachers who feel they have been unfairly judged.

Finally, we, as teachers, are the first to recognize that we are advocating for a significant change. It is critical to keep teachers well-informed through implementation and to create avenues for teacher feedback and for questions to be answered. A joint committee of district and union representatives should be formed to guide implementation. At least at first, current teachers should have the choice to opt in rather than being forced to adopt the new model. When transitioning from the current schedule to a new model, teachers should be reviewed by the External Review Committee to determine their proper placement. We want to be clear: teacher salaries should not be lowered from where they are now. Under this new model, a fraction of teachers will earn more than they currently earn.

## **Why this time will be different**

When the single salary schedule was introduced in the early 1900s, it was customary in many industries and bureaucracies to pay employees incrementally larger salaries with each passing year of employment. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, districts across the country began experimenting with merit pay or career

ladders tied to differentiated pay in recognition of the fact that the broader economy around the teaching profession had changed. Many of the programs that were implemented in the 1980s and 1990s did not succeed. In part, this is because they often drew from a limited pool of funds, meaning that only some teachers or some schools were eligible for bonuses. In cases like these, an element of competition is introduced, which

### **Union Leaders Recognize Need for Change**

The American Federation of Teachers believes the decision to adopt a compensation system based on differentiated pay should be made by the local union leaders and district officials who know best what will work in their schools. Systems must be locally negotiated, voluntary, schoolwide, and must promote a collaborative work environment. Well-designed compensation systems based on differentiated pay for teachers must include the following elements:

- Labor-management collaboration
- Adequate base compensation for all teachers
- Credible, agreed-upon standards of practice
- Support for professional development
- Incentives that are available to all teachers
- Easily understood standards for rewards
- Sufficient and stable funding
- Necessary support systems, such as data and accounting systems

Read more about the AFT's view on differentiated teacher pay at <http://www.aft.org/issues/teaching/diffpay/index.cfm>

runs counter to what we now know helps schools improve: collaboration. Additionally, career ladder opportunities for teachers often reduced the teaching load for a limited number of teachers and, instead of providing differentiated roles within teaching, ended up being a ladder out of the classroom altogether. Other limitations of failed systems include doling out bonuses so uniformly across a school that even poor performing teachers benefit or allowing principals to select which teachers do or do not receive bonuses.

Right now, we are in a time of immense change within the teaching profession. Reimagining the

teacher compensation system is only a piece of broad, comprehensive change that is needed to truly modernize and professionalize our profession. We are shifting from identifying highly *qualified* teachers to highly *effective* teachers as we move from focusing on *processes* to focusing on *outcomes*. A reformed teacher compensation system that credits teachers for strong outcomes with students must have a robust evaluation system underlying it that accurately and fairly ties teachers to measures of learning growth. While we do not yet have such a system in Massachusetts, we know that our state is heading towards a teacher evaluation model that will more reliably allow teachers to track their contributions to student learning growth and will therefore enable teachers to move up a new pay scale more quickly.

### **Conclusion**

As with any large-scale reform that stands to overhaul our profession in a major way, we know that implementation will be key. As teachers, we feel the effects of reforms that have been designed by policymakers at 30,000 feet above what actually occurs in our classrooms and schools. Therefore, we believe it is imperative to include teachers in the design and implementation of new salary structures. This will increase teachers' faith in the system and help to preempt unforeseen complications.

Additionally, a complex undertaking like revamping an age-old structure must be viewed as a work in progress, something that will be revisited and improved over time. Again, teachers themselves must be included in this ongoing review.



## Perspectives from the Classroom

*“When I first became a teacher, I spent a lot of time grappling with the idea that I was putting in significantly more effort than some of my colleagues. I believe my students were also making more progress, yet my colleagues were receiving satisfactory evaluations and making significantly more money than I was. It left me tempted to leave, similar to many of the other early career teachers who leave within the first five years of teaching. It also made me feel unprofessional, as though the outcomes I was working so hard to get with my students meant little or nothing when it came to my paycheck.*

*When I worked in a district school, I, like so many teachers, worked far more hours each day than what was contractually expected. I worked tirelessly to refine my practice so that my students would make progress. But I would witness other teachers – some of whom were earning twice what I was earning – who were simply not helping their students grow. It was disturbing and infuriating.*

*If more teachers worked in a district that valued the hard work that they put in and the progress that their students are making, more effective teachers might stay in teaching, and the status of the profession might rise.”*

– Judy Fahey,  
Boston Collegiate Charter School

*“I want to stay at my current school, work with these same students, and help our school improve. But, with each passing year, my own future weighs on my mind. I am a single woman who needs to know how and when I can reach my target salary: \$70,000. Other schools and districts will tell me, which will help me plan for my future. I want to buy a house and have a child, which should not be out of my reach as a highly educated and successful professional.”*

– Laura Fleming, Community Charter School of Cambridge

*“As a high school history teacher, I have taken some excellent classes. For example, a class called “Immigration in a Changing World: Identity, Citizenship and Belonging” helped me to build a unit that relates late 18th century immigration to current immigration trends. This really improved my teaching and knowledge about immigration. While this class was extremely useful to my teaching, it was not recognized in terms of “professional development points” or salary. However, a graduate class on human behavior that was completely useless counted towards getting additional pay. This makes no sense!”*

– Brinda Tahiliani, Boston Public Schools

*“Reforming the current compensation system will have a greater impact on the teaching profession’s ability to recruit and retain future teachers. As a result, I am definitely in favor changing our current system to one that rewards teachers proportionately to their effectiveness. The possibility of earning a more attractive salary coupled with working alongside other strong teachers and visionary school leaders would do a better job retaining great teachers, though. We need to think of this only as a piece of the puzzle.”*

– Adam Gray, Boston Public Schools

## Endnotes

1. Celine Coggins & Heather Peske, 2010. "New Teachers Are The New Majority." Education Week Vol. 30, Issue 17: 21-23.
2. There are a few notable exceptions, such as Baltimore Public Schools, Denver Public Schools, and Eagle County, Colorado, and schools and districts participating in the Teacher Incentive Fund.
3. Alan Odden & Carolyn Kelly, 1995. CPRE Finance Briefs: Reinventing Teacher Compensation Systems.
4. Respondents are urban Greater Boston teachers who attended a T+ Network event on January 20, 2011 and used live polling technology to respond to the question. The data reflects the responses of 52 teachers.
5. Respondents are urban Greater Boston teachers who attended a T+ Network event on January 20, 2011 and used live polling technology to respond to the question. The data reflects the responses of 52 teachers.
6. Charles T. Clotfelter, Helen F. Ladd, and Jacob L. Vigdor, 2007. How and Why Do Teacher Credentials Matter for Student Achievement? Also see: Kate Walsh & Christopher O. Tracy, 2004. Increasing the Odds: How Good Policies Can Yield Better Teachers. and J.K. Rice, 2003. "The incidence and impact of teacher professional development: Implications for education productivity" In M. Plecki & D. Monk (Eds.), School finance and teacher quality: Exploring the connections, 2003 Yearbook of the American Education Finance Association (pp. 111-136). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
7. Goldhaber, Dan and Brewer, Dominic. (1997). "Evaluating the Effect of Teacher Degree Level on Educational Performance." In William Fowler (Ed.), Developments in School Finance 1996 (pp. 197-210). Washington, DC: NCES.
8. The Boston Teachers' Contract does give the district some management of the courses teachers can take: "The School Department reserves the right to disapprove for salary credit courses that are unrelated to the field of education in the Boston Public Schools, or to subjects taught therein, or which do not enhance advancement up the educational career ladder." Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Boston Teachers Union and the Boston School Committee, effective 2006-2010, page 139.
9. At the time of publication, the state of Massachusetts is still working to finalize new regulations that will guide teacher evaluation. Based on the preliminary regulations drafted by the MA Commissioner of Education (April 16, 2011), we believe that the new evaluation system will allow for high-stakes decisions to be made based on a teacher's impact on student learning.

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