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KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

SNAPSHOT

Improving Teachers' Pay, Investing in the Future

USAID supports the Kyrgyz government's efforts to strengthen high-quality education, which is one step toward ensuring democratic reform



Photo: Quality Learning Project

Kanybek Tentimishev, a former teacher in Kyrgyzstan, has been working as an electrician since he stopped teaching one and a half years ago. Now he hopes to return to teaching.

“Sometimes when I’m going home from work, children – my former pupils – meet and ask me, “Teacher, when will you return to the school?” If the Government cared for teachers, I would work at school with pleasure, to help educate children... But I have to take care of my father, three sisters, and my pregnant wife.”

Kanybek Tentimishev

The end of 2010 was marked by teachers' strikes in Kyrgyzstan, as the nation's educators took to the streets to protest their miserable wages. The average monthly salary was \$75 despite the fact that, by Kyrgyz law, the minimum teacher's salary should be no less than the average national salary of \$144 per month. International assessments have shown that low teacher pay and low motivation correspond with poor student achievement. It became clear to the Kyrgyz government that drastic measures were needed to increase the status and salary of teachers in order to improve the quality of education.

The Ministry of Education and Science asked USAID for help. USAID had already been supporting the Ministry to improve teaching practices and reform how schools are financed and managed. Together, they devised a new model for paying teachers. The model increases teachers' salaries to be in line with legislation, introduces performance incentives to attract young teachers and motivates all teachers to produce results. New salaries consist of three parts: a base salary for teaching and out-of-classroom work, which includes lesson preparation; pay adjustments for rural and mountainous regions; and bonuses of up to 10% to be paid based on performance. On average, monthly salaries now range from \$150-\$185.

The new remuneration system started in May 2011. It has already found broad support across the country and especially amongst teachers, who returned to their schools even before the system was formally launched. “Since the day the Government's Decree on the new teacher remuneration was published, three young teachers have come to me asking to work at our school,” said the Aralsky school principal in Chui region with satisfaction. It is hoped that higher wages will bring back former teachers, many of whom are homemakers, work in the bazaars or have left Kyrgyzstan. There remains a critical shortage of teachers - 3,160 more are needed this school year just to fill the current classrooms.

According to Kanybek Tentimishev, a former teacher, “Now I earn more than \$200 per month as an electrician, but at school I earned only \$40. I started as a young specialist and the local government promised me a lot. But I got nothing... and I left after two and a half years because I had to take care of my family.” Now Kanybek is waiting for the new school year to start and hopes to return to teaching. “I want to transfer what I've learned to children in order to benefit my village,” says Kanybek. By investing in its teachers, Kyrgyzstan invests in a brighter future for generations to come.