



Teacher Behaviors and Performance Incentives in Texas: Early Reactions to the TEEG Program

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A recent report published by the National Center on Performance Incentives (NCPI) presents findings from the first-year evaluation of the Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG) program, one of several statewide educator incentive programs in Texas. Findings are based on the responses of full-time instructional personnel at over 1,000 TEEG schools to a survey addressing changes in teachers' professional practice during the first year of TEEG program implementation.

The teacher survey was distributed in four types of schools operating locally designed TEEG programs during the 2006-07 school year: regular schools, alternative schools, regular charter schools, and alternative charter schools. The schools also represented four different grade-level configurations: elementary, middle, high school, and multi-grade. For the most part, teachers' responses were the same across school type and grade-level configuration. The results provide baseline information about teachers' attitudes during the first year of TEEG implementation, against which teacher attitudes in future years can be compared.

Changes in Classroom Practice

The survey asked teachers to report on their professional practice during the current school year (2006-07), as well as on how that practice may have changed since the preceding school year (2005-06).

Specifically, survey items captured responses about classroom practices related to curriculum and instruction, assessment data, and parent engagement.

Curriculum and Instruction

Teachers were asked about instructional behavior considered important for improving students' academic performance, namely, alignment of instruction with standards, peer tutoring, individualizing instruction, following a "pacing plan," and analysis of student work. When asked how frequently those behaviors were practiced during the 2006-07 school year, at least 75 percent of teachers reported using them at least once a week or almost daily. The most frequent behavior was aligning classroom lessons with specific curricular standards (92.2%), followed by use of peer tutoring (87.8%).

Survey items also addressed how teachers changed their instructional behaviors from the 2005-06 school year to the 2006-07 school year. The questions focused on teachers' use of assessment data, instructional planning, tutoring, and participation in professional development. Between 40 and 50 percent of teachers reported spending a little more or much more time using each of those practices in the 2006-07 school year than in the 2005-06 school year. Additionally, teachers in regular school settings were less likely than teachers in other types of schools to report such behavioral changes.

Teachers also reported that students spent a little more or much more time participating in hands-on learning activities, group work, and inquiry-based learning activities during the 2006-07 school year than they had in the previous school year. On the other hand, about 40 percent of teachers reported that students spent more time in direct instruction in 2006-07 than in 2005-06.

Use of Assessment

The majority of teachers indicated frequent use of student assessment data for various instructional purposes: identifying students in need of remedial assistance, differentiating instruction, establishing learning goals, developing recommendations for tutoring, and assigning or reassigning students to groups. More elementary teachers than middle-school teachers reported such practices. Middle-school teachers were, in turn, more likely to report these practices than were high-school teachers.

Teachers were further asked how the prospect of earning a bonus might influence their decisions about time allocation to students exhibiting various levels of academic proficiency. More than half of teachers said they focused more effort on students at very low and at moderately low levels of academic achievement than they did on other students. Elementary teachers were more likely than their secondary-level counterparts to report increasing their focus on these groups of students.

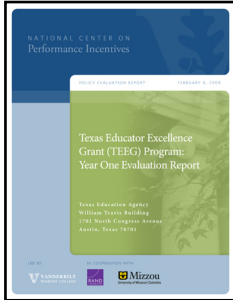
Parent Engagement

Finally, the survey addressed teachers' efforts to engage parents in student learning. The practices they reported most often were direct contact with parents of struggling students (80.2%) and direct contact with parents of improving students (63.1%). Other common practices, reported by almost half of all teachers, included inviting parents into the classroom and encouraging school volunteerism. Elementary teachers engaged in these types of activities far more than other teachers. Additionally, higher percentages of regular school teachers than alternative school teachers reported using these parent engagement practices.

Conclusion

Results from survey analyses suggest that teachers are frequently engaging in professional practices recognized as important for student learning. Additionally, there is evidence that these practices were used more often during the first year of TEEG implementation than in the previous 2005-06 school year. These findings are mostly consistent across school type and grade-level configuration.

It is important to recognize that these are baseline results from the first year of the TEEG program; readers are, therefore, cautioned not to draw conclusions of causality between program implementation and teachers' professional practices. Future reports will further address the relationships between teachers' behavior and their professional background characteristics, their award-recipient status, and the specific design features of their school's TEEG program.



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