



The Design of Schools' Performance Incentive Programs in Texas: Findings from Year One of TEEG

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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. This report provides an overview of over 1,000 schools' locally designed TEEG performance incentive programs and the strategies used to identify highly effective teachers during the 2006-07 school year.

Findings are based on systematic review of first-year grantees' TEEG applications. Evaluators coded key features of program applications, including the performance measures used to evaluate teachers and the strategies used to disseminate bonus awards to them. Considerable attention was given to how schools used the required 75 percent of their grant to reward teachers for contribution to student performance and collaboration with colleagues.

Designing Performance Awards for Teachers

According to TEEG guidelines, at least 75 percent of a school's grant had to be allocated for performance awards to classroom teachers. Awards could be determined by teacher performance along four broad criteria. The first two criteria were required, and focused on measures of student performance and teacher collaboration. Schools could also determine teacher award eligibility using optional measures of

teacher initiative and commitment, and placement in hard-to-staff areas. Over half of TEEG schools (56%) created plans that utilize only the two required teacher performance criteria. Thirty-nine percent used an additional measure of teacher initiative and commitment, while less than five percent awarded teachers for working in hard-to-staff areas.

Measures of Teacher Performance

TEEG guidelines allowed schools some leeway in determining which indicators would be used to measure a teacher's impact on student achievement, although measures had to identify the impact of an individual teacher or teacher team (i.e., measures could not solely be based upon campus-wide student performance). Most schools (98%) measured teachers' contribution to student performance using a variety of standardized tests, such as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA), the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI), and Tejas Lee, the Spanish counterpart to TPRI. TEEG schools also used a variety of local benchmark and end-of-course assessments. Campus accountability ratings, as determined annually by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), were used by 166 schools (16%) as an additional indicator of student performance. In addition to measures of student academic achievement, a handful of TEEG schools (5.9%) used a non-academic indicator, such as student attendance rate,

drop-out rate, and graduation rate. No matter the type of indicator used, schools had a propensity to use achievement levels rather than achievement gains when determining teachers' impact on student performance.

Schools' measures of teacher collaboration fell within three broad areas: instructional and curricular planning activities, participation in professional development, and participation in staff meetings. Most schools (66%) included instructional and curricular planning with colleagues as an indicator of teacher collaboration. Fifty-five percent of schools used participation in professional development activities, while 44 percent counted participation in staff meetings as an indicator of teacher collaboration. The report noted that some of the responses in this section were difficult to categorize, as applications did not necessarily include information about the nature of staff meetings, such as whether they were used for instructional and curricular planning and whether they were in addition to activities that were already a part of a teacher's duty.

TEEG schools were less inclined to use optional criteria when determining teachers' award eligibility. Overall, 435 schools (42%) included a variety of indicators to measure teacher initiative and commitment, such as teacher attendance rates, tutoring/participation in after-school academic programs, and parent involvement activities. Only 37 schools (4%) awarded teachers for working in hard-to-staff areas — most commonly in locally determined shortage areas, special education, and math.

Award Amounts for Teachers

As stated previously, TEEG guidelines mandate that schools use at least 75 percent of the total grant for classroom teacher awards. In creating their school plans, 79 percent of schools used exactly 75 percent of grant funds for this purpose. Another 21 percent used more than 75 percent, while the remaining schools (only 1%) used less than 75 percent of total grant funds for teacher awards.

TEEG guidelines recommended that teachers receive awards of \$3,000 to \$10,000 in order to make bonus amounts meaningful to recipients. According to state-approved program applications, 79 percent of TEEG schools designed programs in which the maximum award a teacher might earn was below the recommended minimum of \$3,000. More than half of the schools used maximum awards ranging from \$1,000 to \$1,999. The average maximum award amount was \$2,263; the lowest was \$250; and the highest was \$10,000. It is important to note that evaluators could not determine reliable minimum award amounts due to insufficient information in program applications.

Unit of Accountability

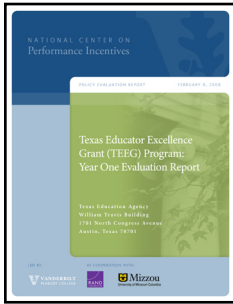
Evaluators also coded whether the school considered the performance results of an individual teacher, a team of teachers (i.e., grade level or subject area), or an entire campus for determining teachers' eligibility for a TEEG bonus award. While schools almost exclusively used individual teachers as the unit of accountability when measuring teacher collaboration and the two optional criteria, they determined teachers' contribution to student achievement using a greater variety of accountability units. Roughly two-thirds of TEEG schools (67.4%) used the individual teacher as the unit of accountability for student achievement, while 32 percent held a teacher team accountable. Slightly less than 10 percent used an entire campus as the unit of accountability when measuring student achievement.

Conclusion

Evaluators' identified several common design features when reviewing first-year TEEG grantees' applications. The majority of schools used 75 percent or more of their overall grant funds for classroom teacher awards. Additionally, schools focused only on the two required criteria of student achievement and teacher collaboration in order to determine teachers' eligibility for TEEG bonus awards. In general, schools provided maximum teacher award amounts below the recommended level of \$3,000.

The authors of the report caution that actual implementation of TEEG programs at schools may vary from the plans as described in the grantees' applications. Future evaluations will address changes in TEEG programs as a result of implementation;

analyses of TEEG's impact on teacher workforce trends and student achievement; and system preferences for specific TEEG program features along with those features' impact on teacher quality and student achievement.



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