



Teacher Attitudes about 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 teachers' attitudes about performance pay in general and the TEEG program specifically.

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.

Teachers' Attitudes about TEEG

Teachers' responses indicated that they held primarily positive attitudes about the TEEG programs in their schools. For example, 78 percent of teachers agreed that they understood the criteria required to receive a

bonus award, while 71 percent expressed a strong desire to earn a TEEG bonus award. Additionally, over half of teachers (59.9 %) agreed that the TEEG program did a good job of distinguishing between effective and ineffective teachers. However, 56 percent reported that the TEEG program did not measure important aspects of their own teaching performance.

Interestingly, the majority of teachers (84.9%) reported that they were already working as effectively as they could before TEEG implementation; consequently, the prospect of earning a TEEG award did not affect their work. Consistent with that, only 25 percent of teachers responded that they had changed their teaching in response to the TEEG program, which could be explained by the fact that only a little more than half of teachers (52.5%) agreed that the bonus was large enough to motivate them to try to earn the top award.

Other findings related to type of school include:

- Teachers in charter schools were more likely than teachers in other schools to report that the top award was large enough to motivate them (77% compared with 52%).

- Teachers in charter schools were more likely than teachers in other schools to report that they had a strong desire to earn a bonus (87% compared with 70%).
- Teachers in multi-grade schools (69%) agreed more often than teachers in other schools that TEEG does a good job of identifying effective teachers.
- Teachers in multi-grade schools (16%) reported less often that staff were discouraged from working together than did teachers in other schools.

The survey also asked teachers about the impact of TEEG on school culture. Just over one-quarter of teachers (27.3%) noted increased resentment among teachers since the inception of their schools' TEEG program. Even fewer (23%) indicated that the prospect of earning a bonus discouraged staff from working together in schools.

Teachers further reported that there had been positive changes in the behavior of instructional personnel in their school in 2006-07, as compared to the previous school year. The majority of teachers (80.8%) strongly agreed that they were more likely to encourage students to keep trying when the work was difficult. They also reported that they were more likely to feel responsible to help each other (68.7%) and that they could be counted on to help in areas that might not be part of their official assignment (67.6%).

Half of the teachers expressed greater satisfaction with the way things were run at their school in 2006-07 than in the previous school year. Notably, only 28 percent said they considered transferring to another school or district more than they had in 2005-06. Secondary teachers were more likely than elementary teachers to respond in the affirmative to this survey item; they also reported greater levels of stress and disappointment involved in teaching at their school.

For the most part, however, responses among elementary, middle-school, and high-school teachers were similar, with a few exceptions. Elementary teachers were most likely to report that they understood the criteria for achieving a bonus award (82%, compared with 76% of middle-school teachers

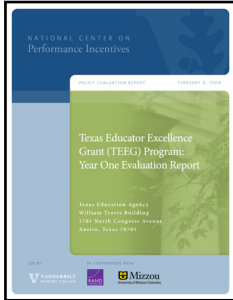
and 67% of high-school teachers). Elementary teachers also most often expressed a strong desire to earn a bonus and agreed that the size of the award was large enough to motivate them. More elementary teachers than middle-school teachers reported such attitudes. Middle-school teachers were, in turn, more likely to report these attitudes than were high-school teachers.

According to survey responses, teachers in charter schools were more supportive of TEEG (higher reports that the program distinguishes effective teachers, lower reports of resentment), made more changes in their instructional practice, and were motivated by the prospect of TEEG bonus awards than teachers in other schools. Eighty-seven percent of charter school teachers, as compared to 70 percent of other teachers, responded that they had a strong desire to earn a bonus. A possible explanation for this could be that teachers at charter schools tended to have less experience and earn lower salaries than teachers in other schools.

Conclusion

Overall, initial survey results suggest that teachers hold favorable attitudes toward the TEEG program specifically and performance incentives in general. These findings are consistent across types of schools and grade-level configurations. Teachers did not regularly report that TEEG had a negative impact on school culture. However, survey results also indicate that the program may not be highly motivating to teachers, as many reported already working as effectively as possible.

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



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