



Teacher Attitudes on Pay for Performance: A Pilot Study

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Researchers at the National Center on Performance Incentives recently examined teacher attitudes towards pay for performance policies in education, and how these views vary by teacher experience, subject area specialization, grade level taught, educational background, personality characteristics, risk and time preferences, and feelings of efficacy.

The research project, “Teacher Attitudes on Pay for Performance: A Pilot Study,” took place in Florida’s School District of Hillsborough County (SDHC) and was conducted using a voluntary electronic survey instrument designed to elicit teacher attitudes on pay for performance (PFP). The principal investigators, Brian Jacob and Matthew Springer, created the survey to answer five research questions:

1. How do teachers view PFP in general?
2. How supportive are teachers of different methods that could be used to identify high-performing teachers in a PFP program, including student test scores, peer evaluations, and involvement in professional development activities?
3. To what extent do teachers understand how the state of Florida’s two most-recent PFP policies, the Special Teachers are Rewarded (STAR) program and the Merit Award Program (MAP), operate?

4. To what extent do teachers support STAR and MAP?
5. How are teacher attitudes on rewarding individual teacher performance related to teacher and school characteristics such as teacher experience, subject area specialization, grade level(s) taught, educational background, personality characteristics, risk and time preferences, and feelings of efficacy?

Teachers in this study expressed moderate support for PFP. The highest level of support was voiced for incentive pay for individual teacher performance, as opposed to school or group performance, though only 50% of teachers agreed that incentive pay based on individual performance would be a positive change in teacher compensation policy. The study found 56% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that incentive pay would threaten the collaborative culture of teaching, and only a modest percentage of teachers believed PFP would cause teachers to work harder (34%) or together more often (24%).

As for the particular programs in Florida, 79% of teachers assigned high or moderate importance to rewards based on advanced degrees and 86% assigned high or moderate importance for awards based on time spent in professional development. The researchers found teachers were generally less supportive of awards based on student test results.

Only 35% of teachers believed awards were merited for high scores by students on standardized tests. The researchers found 46% of teachers thought student gains on Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) were of moderate or high importance, and 54% believed student gains on standardized tests other than FCAT should be considered moderately or highly important in determining awards.

In regards to the STAR program and MAP, 49% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "I have a clear understanding of what STAR would have measured and rewarded," with 61% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the same statement about MAP. Despite a limited understanding of these programs, the researchers found teachers had strong opinions about each. Approximately 80% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that STAR would have distinguished effective teachers from ineffective, while 75% did not believe STAR would benefit teaching and learning in their school. At the same time, 57% of teachers disagreed that MAP would distinguish effective from ineffective teachers in their school, and 50% did not think MAP would have beneficial effects on teaching and learning.

The authors also examined the impact of various teacher and school characteristics on perceptions of PFP. The authors found associations between several teacher demographics and views on incentive pay. New teachers, or those with 1-3 years experience, showed substantially more support for PFP than those with more than 20 years experience. Teachers who expect to teach longer are more supportive of incentive pay, as are those teachers in schools that do not contain elementary grade levels.

Specific teacher characteristics are strongly related to support for incentive pay. Teachers who expressed a positive view of their principal's leadership ability were more supportive of incentive pay as well as teachers with higher self-efficacy. Also, teachers that are more risk-seeking and more impatient show greater support for incentive pay. Race and gender were not correlated with support for incentive pay, though previous studies have documented a positive association between race and gender.

Florida's Merit Award Program (MAP) replaced the Special Teachers Are Rewarded (STAR) program in March 2007. Under MAP, top performing instructional personnel and administrators in participating districts are eligible for bonuses of 5-10% of their district's average teacher salary. Bonuses may be awarded to individuals or instructional teams, but they may not be distributed to whole schools. MAP calls for 60% of the bonus to be based on student learning gains and/or proficiency on statewide standardized tests (predetermined assessments are used for non-state tested grades), with 40% determined by supervisor evaluation. Districts are required to submit MAP plans to the Florida Board of Education for approval, and all plans are subject to collective bargaining laws.

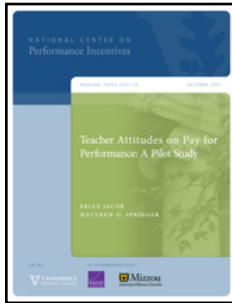
Policy Recommendations

The authors offer several policy recommendations for Florida based not only on their findings, but research from other studies and locales. The authors suggest:

- The general lack of support for performance pay indicates a need for state authorities to work collaboratively with teachers and districts to build "grass-roots" support for MAP. State and local leaders should work with teacher leaders rather than mandate program participation and formal requirements from the top down.
- Consideration should be given to allowing veteran teachers to opt-in to the program.
- Pay for performance programs should be coupled with leadership reforms, including more targeted initiatives, such as developing and implementing principal professional development programs.
- The apparent role of teacher self-efficacy suggests the importance of professional development, and supports tying incentive pay to "improvement" in teacher performance as an alternative to static performance levels or absolute benchmarks.

The authors caution against broad generalization of the survey results without consideration of their limitations. The authors are careful to note the results were generated from a survey that was in the field for a very short period of time. The response rate was

20%, which can be a problem if selection into the study is non-random. Finally, the authors solicited responses from teachers in a single district with past experience in the design and implementation of PFP programs.



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