

NATIONAL CENTER ON
Performance Incentives

Governor's Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG) Program: Year One Evaluation Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings stemming from the first-year evaluation of the Governor’s Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG) program, one of several statewide performance incentive programs in Texas. In the fall of 2006, the GEEG program made available non-competitive, three-year grants to 99 schools ranging from \$60,000 to \$220,000 per year. Grants were distributed to schools that were rated as high performing campuses in addition to having high proportions of economically disadvantaged students. More specifically, this report provides an overview of GEEG programs in 99 schools; the strategies used by schools to reward the performance of teachers and staff; and the apparent impact on schools’ organizational dynamics, teachers’ attitudes, and teachers’ professional practice.

Overall findings about GEEG programs seem to abate the traditional critiques raised against performance incentive programs. Specifically, performance incentive programs appear to be having an encouraging impact on schools’ organizational dynamics, teachers’ perceptions of performance incentives, and teachers’ instructional practice. Nonetheless, it is too soon to conclude that these outcomes are attributable to the inception of GEEG. Additionally, there is still much to be learned about the quality of schools’ program designs and the impact of program characteristics on outcomes of teacher behavior, school culture, teacher workforce trends, and student achievement.

The following sections provide an overview of key policy points and questions addressed by this first year-evaluation of GEEG.

Key Policy Points

This report highlights and expands upon the following key policy points.

- Recently, Texas education policy efforts have focused on improving teaching quality throughout the state, culminating in the creation of the nation’s largest statewide performance incentive system.
- The direct evaluation literature on performance incentives is slender; nonetheless, it is sufficiently promising to support extensive policy experiments in combination with careful follow-up evaluations.
- The Governor’s Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG) program is the first of several multimillion-dollar statewide programs committed to the development of performance incentives for high-performing educators.
- In many respects, schools participating in the GEEG program were similar to other schools throughout the state, with the exception of being rated as higher performing campuses and serving higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students – two explicit objectives of the program.

- The majority of proposed and distributed teacher awards (i.e., Part 1 funds) were less than the minimum amount of \$3,000 recommended by statute.
- While GEEG schools tended to use similar program criteria for the determination of Part 1 teacher awards (i.e., measures of student performance, measures of teacher collaboration), there was greater variability in the specific indicators being used to measure teacher performance.
- Overall, there was a good deal of uniformity among GEEG schools' program designs, especially related to the structure of performance thresholds and the entities (e.g., campus, teacher teams, individual teachers) held accountable for determination of Part 1 teacher awards.
- GEEG schools overwhelmingly used Part 2 funds to distribute additional incentive awards to school personnel who were ineligible for Part 1 awards (i.e., school personnel other than classroom teachers) as opposed to other potential uses such as professional development.
- Year 1 survey findings suggest that most teachers held favorable views of their schools' GEEG programs; moreover, they tended to disagree that the performance incentive programs were deteriorating collaboration among teaching staff.
- During the first year of GEEG, teachers receiving GEEG awards had a greater tendency to use desirable instructional practices than their non-recipient peers; however, some of these differences could be explained by recipients having more years of teaching experience.

Overview

The chapters of this report address the following questions.

- What is the landscape of public education reform in Texas and what have its implications been for the development of a statewide performance incentive system?
- How does performance incentive policy in Texas fit within the national education policy landscape and how is it framed by existing research literature on teacher pay?
- What were the key components and common characteristics of campus GEEG plans?
- What were schools' experiences with developing, approving, and managing the implementation of their GEEG programs?
- In what ways did teachers believe GEEG programs were impacting the organizational dynamics at their schools?

- Did teachers in GEEG schools adapt their professional practice? If so, in what ways, and did award recipients behave differently than their non-recipient counterparts?

Based upon the findings detailed in this first-year evaluation report, it is advised that policymakers in Texas allow the GEEG program to maintain its course. Not only did the GEEG program appear to have encouraging results during its first year of inception, but the program also provides a unique opportunity to learn about the differential effects of locally designed GEEG programs on teacher quality and student achievement. In fact, second- and third-year evaluation reports will focus further on outcomes of teacher workforce trends, teacher quality, and student achievement.