



NEWSBREAK

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What’s New?

Research Syntheses Available on CECR Website

The Center for Educator Compensation Reform (CECR) announces the release of its first round of research syntheses. These syntheses (available online at <http://cecr.ed.gov/guides/research.cfm>) answer the most fundamental questions associated with the conceptualization, design, implementation, and management of educator compensation reform initiatives.

In each of these brief documents, CECR poses a question related to educator compensation reform. Relevant information and research-based studies inform the responses. Each response provides clear, concise

information in nontechnical language to TIF grantees, policymakers, and others interested in designing alternative forms of compensation.

CECR groups the research syntheses into five categories. One sample question from each of the categories is provided below:

- **General Compensation**

Does evidence suggest that some teachers are significantly more effective than others at improving student achievement?

http://cecr.ed.gov/guides/researchSyntheses/Research%20Synthesis_Q%20A1.pdf

- **Compensation for Teachers of Hard-to-Fill Subjects and Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools**

Does evidence suggest that some groups of teachers are more sensitive to differences in pay and working conditions than others?

http://cecr.ed.gov/guides/researchSyntheses/Research%20Synthesis_Q%20B6.pdf

- **Performance Pay**

How large do performance incentives need to be in order to be effective?

http://cecr.ed.gov/guides/researchSyntheses/Research%20Synthesis_Q%20C12.pdf

- **Measurement**

How well do principals' evaluations of teachers predict student achievement outcomes?
http://cecr.ed.gov/guides/researchSyntheses/Research%20Synthesis_Q%20D20.pdf

- **Building Teacher and Community Support for New Compensation Systems**

What factors affect teachers' perceptions about the fairness of performance-based pay?
http://cecr.ed.gov/guides/researchSyntheses/Research%20Synthesis_Q%20F22.pdf

Hot Off the Press

Superintendent Contract to Be in Class by Itself—*Knox News*, March 30, 2008

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2008/mar/30/contract-to-be-in-class-by-itself/>

The former superintendent of Boston Public Schools will join the Knox County School system as the new superintendent with an unprecedented contract: the opportunity to receive, in addition to his base salary, numerous bonus incentives based on student achievement in high-poverty, low-performing schools.

District Wants to Change Salary Method—*East Valley Tribune*, March 23, 2008

<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/112010>

The Kyrene Elementary School District in Phoenix, Arizona, argues for moving away from traditional salary schedules based on seniority toward a more flexible system of performance pay for teachers.

Teacher Pay Hike Plan Gains Attention—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 21, 2008

<http://www.stltoday.com/stltoday/news/stories.nsf/missouristateneews/story/F28985B5DDEC678386257413000F6ED5?OpenDocument>

A state representative introduces a plan with numerous incentives for teachers in the St. Louis public school system, including bonuses for increased student test scores, staffing for high-needs subjects such as mathematics or science, recruitment and retention bonuses for hard-to-staff schools, and several other rewards.

Overhaul Ahead for Teacher Pay in Eagle County?—*Vail Daily*, March 20, 2008

<http://www.vaildaily.com/article/20080320/NEWS/4548466/0/FRONTPAGE>

Teachers call for a redesign of the Teacher Advancement Program in Eagle County, Colorado. The requested changes emphasize more transparency, collaboration, and awarding performance incentives to a district or school instead of an individual teacher.

Grantee Spotlight: Amphitheater Unified School District

The Amphitheater Unified School District (AUSD) spans 100 square miles and consists of both urban and rural communities, including the city of Tucson, Arizona, and rural stretches of Pima County. The district serves approximately 17,000 students, many of whom are minority and/or English language learners, qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and have high rates of mobility.

What need is the project trying to address?

AUSD designed Project EXCELL! to address some of the aforementioned issues by ensuring that all students have access to the highest quality teachers. Specifically, the project works to deepen and expand its existing efforts to improve student achievement through its longstanding commitment to differentiated compensation.

Eleven schools are currently implementing Project EXCELL! Nine of these schools are urban schools serving students in kindergarten through high school, one is a rural elementary school, and one is a rural school serving students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Of the students enrolled in Project EXCELL! schools, 31 percent to 93 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Project EXCELL! schools also experience a higher than desired teacher turnover rate.

Overall, Project EXCELL! confronts the existing disparities in student achievement levels in the participating schools by working to recruit and retain the highest quality teachers. To achieve this goal, the district included principals in the program and set a standard to compensate both teachers and principals who take on added leadership responsibilities, participate in meaningful staff development, and meet schoolwide achievement targets.

What are the goals of the project?

Project EXCELL! strives to improve student achievement in the following ways:

- Recruiting, developing, and retaining high-quality teachers and leaders in each of the 11 participating schools
- Designing and implementing an effective and innovative differentiated compensation system
- Offering increased leadership roles for teachers and administrators
- Encouraging and expecting participation in high-quality staff development
- Developing and supporting a classroom observation tool
- Implementing a new data system capable of meeting the current project needs as well as short-term and long-term district improvement efforts

Moreover, AUSD leverages these strategies to meet its overarching goal of improved student learning.

How much are the incentives?

Project EXCELL! provides educators with the opportunity to earn up to \$10,000 in additional compensation. Three performance objectives determine award recipients: student achievement, leadership, and participation in professional development activities. To obtain the maximum award, educators must fulfill each of the three performance objectives successfully. Project EXCELL! assesses educators using a comprehensive documentation system and direct observations.

What are the recent highlights of the project?

AUSD spent the first semester of the 2007–08 school year designing the system and recruiting participants. The district gave detailed presentations about the newly designed system at every school site. By December 19, 2007, 90 percent of the eligible teachers had signed up to participate in Project EXCELL! Shortly after the enrollment period ended, program participation dropped slightly to 85 percent after some teachers realized they simply did not have adequate time to participate in Project EXCELL! during the 2007–08 school year. Teachers who remained in the program submitted Individual Leadership and Professional Development Plans outlining objectives they would complete in each of these components. By March 13, 2008, all participants submitted documentation to support their progress toward their objectives. Teachers and administrators enrolled in Project EXCELL! must participate in a collaborative group at their school site as a portion of their plan. In addition, all participants must focus on increasing their skills, developing awareness, or implementing strategies in the area of 21st century teaching and learning.

Project EXCELL! requires each teacher to select or create a classroom assessment, with the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement. In addition, data analysts for AUSD have developed a value-added data analysis model to look at student growth on standardized assessments at the school and classroom levels.

The first payout date will occur on April 25, 2008. Eligible participants will receive half of the available stipend for this payout. They will receive the next portion of the payout in early summer, after the district receives and analyzes additional data.

AUSD already sees encouraging signs of increased collaboration among teachers and administrators toward solving the challenges of high-needs schools as a result of Project EXCELL! In addition, participants are stepping up to leadership roles in greater numbers than in previous years. Although it is still too early to detect increases in student achievement, school administrators note a change in the day-to-day “water cooler” conversation. Instead of focusing on professional challenges, teachers now talk openly about student achievement and what each collaborative team will address next to ensure that all students are achieving their potential.

Contact Us

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The Center for Educator Compensation Reform (CECR) was awarded to Westat—in partnership with Learning Point Associates, Synergy Enterprises Inc., Vanderbilt University, and the University of Wisconsin—by the U.S. Department of Education in October 2006.

The primary purpose of CECR is to support the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees with their implementation efforts through the provision of ongoing technical assistance and the development and dissemination of timely resources. CECR also is charged with raising national awareness of alternative and effective strategies for educator compensation through this newsletter, a Web-based clearinghouse, and other outreach activities. We look forward to an exciting partnership with the TIF grantees as we embark together on blazing a new path for education reform.

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