



Center for  
Educator Compensation  
Reform

## Case Summary

*LEAP Academy University  
Charter School's Performance-Based  
Compensation Program*



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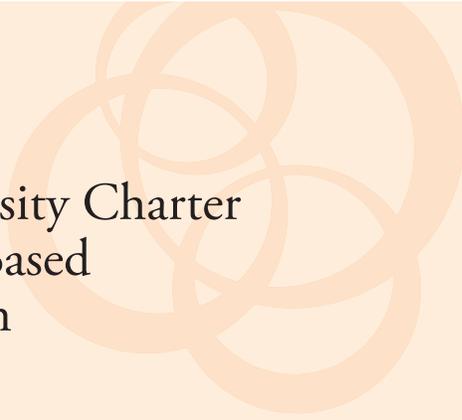
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# LEAP Academy University Charter School's Performance-Based Compensation Program

## Introduction

Leadership, Education, and Partnership (LEAP) Academy University Charter School, a K–12 public charter school located in Camden, New Jersey, has experienced remarkable success despite being located in one of the poorest cities in the country with one of the lowest percentages of adults with a college degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This case summary discusses the performance-based compensation system (PBCS) at LEAP Academy, which is the first unionized public school in New Jersey to have such a system. LEAP Academy's PBCS has three main components:

- A system to evaluate teacher professional practices
- Professional development aligned to that evaluation system
- A compensation system based on teacher evaluation ratings and responsibilities, which rewards teachers individually or collectively for academic gains of students

## Case Summary at a Glance

- The following case summary provides an overview of LEAP Academy and identifies the structures, initiatives, and supports that have allowed its students to succeed. This case summary provides:
  - A history of LEAP Academy
  - The history of LEAP Academy's performance-pay program
  - An overview of how teachers are evaluated and compensated
  - A look at the pay program's programmatic successes and impact on student achievement and teacher quality
  - Lessons learned from LEAP Academy's implementation of its performance-pay program

The evaluation system includes multiple measures such as teacher classroom instructional practices, leadership and professional contributions, and student achievement gains. The evaluation system aligns with the school’s system of professional development, which provides each teacher with an individualized professional improvement plan. As for the pay component of the system, teachers at LEAP Academy have the opportunity to receive salary increases and/or bonuses based on performance (i.e., their performance in the classroom or their students’ performance on local and state assessments) and on their contributions to the school and district.

## Demographic Information

LEAP Academy founders sought to provide educational opportunities to students and families of Camden. The school draws a student population that is at high risk for low school performance. According to the latest available year of Common Core of Data for public schools in the nation, of the 824 students enrolled in this Title I school, more than 75 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 100 percent are African American (43 percent) or Hispanic (57 percent) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Despite these statistics, student achievement exceeds that of the local public school district, Camden City Public Schools (CCPS). In comparison to CCPS’s 65.9 percent graduation rate, LEAP currently graduates 100 percent of its students, and since 2006, 100 percent of LEAP Academy students attain college acceptance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Schools self-report graduation rates, which is not usually viewed as a reliable reporting method; however, much school data are self-reported, and it is the best way to gather information about student performance in schools.

Tables 1 and 2 illustrate how LEAP Academy students outperform their CCPS counterparts on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) and the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). The NJ ASK tests grades 3–8 in language arts literacy and mathematics and eighth-grade science. The HSPA assesses language arts literacy and mathematics. Students take the exam as 11th graders, but they have until their senior year to pass the test.

**Table 1. Percentage of Students at Proficient or Advanced Levels for Language Arts Literacy, LEAP Academy and Camden City Public Schools, 2009–10**

	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	11th/ 12th
<b>LEAP Academy</b>	27.1	18.3	33.3	30.5	40	61	67.8
<b>Camden City Public Schools</b>	17.1	18.7	15.2	17.3	19.5	34	43.1

**Table 2. Percentage of Students at Proficient or Advanced Levels for Mathematics, LEAP Academy and Camden City Public Schools, 2009–10**

	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	11th/ 12th
<b>LEAP Academy</b>	59.4	46.7	43.3	39	38.4	43.1	41.4
<b>Camden City Public Schools</b>	36.9	31.7	30.7	22.5	14	17.5	16.9

Source: State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2010.

## History of LEAP Academy

LEAP Academy opened its doors in September 1997 as one of New Jersey’s inaugural charter schools. Four years prior, then Governor James Florio asked LEAP Academy’s founder, Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, to join his transition team to transform public education in the state. Consequently, Dr. Santiago and the Rutgers Community Leadership Center (CLC) created a working group of university administrators, business leaders, teachers, and community leaders to create charter school legislation for New Jersey (G. Bonilla-Santiago, personal communication, January 27, 2012). This group

formed the Rutgers/LEAP Initiative and, with a \$1.5 million planning grant from the Delaware River Port Authority, created a strategic plan for a charter school that Rutgers University would sponsor. Gradually, the university became an integral partner with LEAP Academy.

When presented with the idea of sponsoring a charter school, Rutgers expressed apprehension, unconvinced that the university was in the business of running elementary or secondary schools, including the “community-style” charter school for which Dr. Santiago and the CLC were advocating.<sup>2</sup> Newly elected Governor Christine Whitman intervened and persuaded Rutgers to invite Dr. Santiago to the university’s board of governors meeting to discuss the charter school plan. Dr. Santiago and the CLC garnered university support for the project by arguing that the partnership with LEAP Academy would develop a pipeline of students for the university. The board gave its approval to sponsor the charter school, with some limits about the university’s role. Specifically, Rutgers wanted the CLC to establish a separate funding stream for the charter school but offered to help govern the charter school by having university faculty sit on the school’s board of trustees (G. Bonilla-Santiago, personal communication, January 27, 2012).

Since voting to move forward with the partnership, Rutgers has collaborated with and supported LEAP Academy in multiple ways, including participating in LEAP Academy’s leadership and management; establishing the Rutgers/LEAP Centers of Excellence, a scholarship, and fellowship program; and assisting informally due to geographic proximity. LEAP Academy also has expanded its partnership to include an additional neighboring university, Rowan University.

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<sup>2</sup>A community-style school is one that provides health, social, legal, or other support services to the children and families of children attending the school.

## *Leadership and Management*

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Rutgers University and the CLC provide leadership and management support to LEAP Academy. The school’s board of trustees includes three representatives from Rutgers: the director of the CLC, Dr. Santiago; the chancellor of Rutgers University-Camden campus; and one Rutgers faculty member, appointed by the chancellor. As members of the board of trustees, these Rutgers staff members are involved in policymaking and fiscal responsibility for the school, setting curricular policy and overseeing employment, dismissal, and contractual agreements with staff (LEAP Academy University Charter School, n.d.b). In addition, the partnership between LEAP Academy and Rutgers has generated more than \$75 million in operational support for the school, including \$20 million in support for special programs and \$18 million in capital funding (Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership, 2007, p. 9).

## *Rutgers/LEAP Centers of Excellence*

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LEAP Academy provides a variety of health, social, and educational services to students, families, and faculty through the Rutgers/LEAP Centers of Excellence. These centers provide on-site medical care, counseling, and physical and mental health services. The Centers of Excellence also provide a preschool and a college awareness and readiness program (including academic advising, exam preparation, and education about the college application process.) The Centers include:

- An academy to provide parents knowledge and skills to help with a child’s educational success
- A law clinic that offers pro bono legal services for families

- A teacher institute that offers professional development and training to help improve student achievement
- A College Access center to work with students on college readiness and precollege guidance
- An early childhood program through CLC's Early Learning Research Academy to provide quality education and care for children from birth to age five. (Community Leadership Center Rutgers-Camden, n.d.c).

### *Rutgers/LEAP Alfredo Santiago Endowed Scholarship*

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This scholarship provides financial aid to LEAP Academy graduates who enroll full-time at Rutgers University, with the goal of increasing diversity at Rutgers and helping LEAP Academy alumni pursue college-level studies in business, science, engineering, and medicine. Since 2005, 45 students have attended college with financial aid from the scholarship. In 2002, the former president and chief executive officer of TD Bank donated additional funds to the scholarship program, expanding it to create the TD Bank Alfredo Santiago Scholarship. The new scholarship provides support to students to attend a university other than Rutgers (Community Leadership Center Rutgers-Camden, n.d.a).

### *LEAP Education Fellowship*

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Rutgers graduate students in the Department of Public Policy and Administration's Educational Policy and Leadership Concentration are eligible for the LEAP Education Fellowship. Fellows complete an internship at LEAP Academy and commit to working there for one to two years after graduating as a teacher or administrator. The length of

employment is determined based on the amount of financial assistance received through the fellowship. Fellows receive tuition assistance and a working stipend. This collaboration provides on-site training for Rutgers students and provides a pipeline for high-quality teachers and administrators to LEAP Academy (Community Leadership Center Rutgers-Camden, n.d.b).

### *Geographic Proximity*

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In addition to these structured partnerships, the proximity between LEAP Academy and Rutgers allows for ongoing informal partnerships. The university provided land on its campus to construct the LEAP Academy school buildings, putting LEAP Academy right on the Rutgers campus. LEAP Academy teachers can tap into the university's resources, facilities, events, and activities for their students. For example, a science teacher at LEAP Academy could bring his or her class to work in a lab at the university. LEAP Academy students enroll in college-level courses through a dual enrollment program at Rutgers or Rowan, and the universities absorb the tuition costs. Rutgers students volunteer and mentor students at LEAP Academy (R. Rossi, personal communication, January 31, 2012), and the proximity also fosters a school climate that promotes awareness of and excitement about attending college.

## Creating a Performance-Pay System at LEAP Academy

### *Background of Performance Pay at LEAP Academy*

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LEAP Academy first instituted a performance-pay program in 1999 in an attempt to link teacher pay to the school's instructional mission and to reward teachers for their professional accomplishments and contributions to student achievement. The program originally rewarded teachers based on evidence from classroom observations, student achievement, and professional leadership but did not include the detailed rubrics, training, and ties to professional learning that the current system now has in place. School leaders developed the early iteration of the performance-pay program at LEAP Academy with approval from the board of trustees. The performance-pay program changed over time, most drastically after the school unionized.

### *Unionization and Its Impact on the School*

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The school's first attempt to unionize lost by one vote (Burney, 2004). However, in April of 2004, LEAP Academy's teachers voted 33 to 20 to join the New Jersey Education Association, the largest teacher's union in the state (Graham, 2004). Divisions arose among the teaching staff around whether to join the union, about the PBCS, and about the school's extended day and year schedule. For three years, the teachers and leadership struggled with these issues (Burney, 2007). However, the school's leadership fought to keep the performance-pay system. The administration believed, and continues to believe, that this system is critical to helping improve professional teaching practices as well as educational opportunities for Camden children. In a compromise during the negotiation with the

union, the board of trustees agreed to include a 1.67 percent annual salary increase for all teachers and reserved a possible 2 percent increase to award based on performance. The compromise permitted LEAP Academy to keep the performance-pay program and have it removed from the bargaining agreement (G. Bonilla-Santiago, personal communication, January 27, 2012; H. Redmond, personal communication, January 26, 2012).

### *Changes to the Performance-Pay System*

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The LEAP administration also worked with teachers to redesign the school's performance-based compensation program. Teachers provided input regarding the new system, specifically about how teachers could receive fair evaluations and necessary supports to improve their professional practice. The administration also held several focus groups to solicit additional teacher feedback about the program (G. Bonilla-Santiago, personal communication, January 27, 2012). By incorporating this feedback into the program design, the school was able to keep its performance-pay system, with increased teacher support. Revisions included adding the "in reflection" set of ratings to the evaluation, which encouraged teachers to be more reflective of their own teaching practices; increasing the number of observations for tenured teachers from once a year to four times a year and for new teachers from three to five times a year; and expanding professional development opportunities and aligning the supports to the evaluation system (P. Martinez, personal communication, February, 1, 2012; H. Redmond, personal communication, January 26, 2012).

## Evaluation of Teachers

The LEAP Academy performance-based compensation program awards salary increases and bonuses to teachers based on performance in three core components: *teacher effectiveness*, *leadership and professional contributions*, and *student academic growth and achievement*.

### *Teacher Effectiveness*

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LEAP Academy rates the teacher effectiveness component, focused on teacher knowledge and skills, and teachers in three areas according to the Danielson Framework (2007): planning and preparation, classroom environment, and instruction.<sup>3</sup> The *planning and preparation* rating evaluates a teacher's ability to set instructional goals, develop coherent lessons with activities and materials that engage all students, and design formative assessments that align to teaching standards and are part of planning instruction. The *classroom environment* rating looks at how teachers establish a culture for learning and manage student behavior. The *instruction* rating relates to how teachers use questioning and discussion techniques, engage students in learning, and use assessments in instruction to monitor student learning (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011).

### *Leadership and Professional Contributions*

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Reviewers rate teachers in two domains for this component: *professional responsibilities* and *contributions to the professional development and growth of colleagues*. These domains look at how teachers contribute to the school community beyond their regular classroom responsibilities, such as

communicating with parents about the school's instructional program or student progress or assisting with schoolwide professional development by providing mentoring or coaching to colleagues (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011).

### *Student Academic Growth and Achievement*

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This third core component rates teachers on *standardized assessment performance and improvement* and *local assessment performance or improvement*. Teachers receive credit for meeting performance goals or for significant improvement in student achievement.

Teachers can earn 14 possible points if their students meet or exceed the state or national average for percentage proficient or above as measured by state or national assessments. If the teacher's students do not meet or exceed the state or national average, then the teacher also has an opportunity to earn points for improvement in student achievement. A teacher can earn 7 points if there is a 40 to 50 percent increase. LEAP uses the NJ ASK for grades 4–8 in language arts literacy and mathematics and the HSPA for grade 11 in language arts literacy and mathematics as standardized assessments to determine growth. For teachers of all other grades and subjects, LEAP uses national assessments such as the TerraNova (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011). Table 3 further illustrates how the program determines points based on student achievement on standardized assessments.

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<sup>3</sup>In education research, teacher effectiveness often means teacher contributions to student growth, but LEAP Academy uses the term to refer to classroom observation ratings.

**Table 3. Determining Points for Standardized Assessment Performance or Improvement**

	Goal	Points
<b>Performance</b>	A teacher's students meet or exceed the state (NJ ASK or HSPA) or national (TerraNova) average for percentage proficient or above.	14 points
<b>Improvement</b>	A teacher's students do not meet the performance goal, but there is an increase in the percentage proficient or above from the past year.	50% or greater increase: 14 points 40 to 50% increase: 7 points

Source: Adapted from the LEAP Academy website (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011).

Reviewers also evaluate teachers based on their students' performance and improvement on local assessments, such as end-of-course assessments, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, and Advanced Placement. A teacher can earn 14 points if his or her students meet or exceed the standard for mastery on a school-based assessment. Teachers also can earn 14 points for improvement in student achievement of a 50 percent or greater increase in mastery on the assessment from the previous year. If there is a 40 to 50 percent increase in mastery, then the teacher receives 7 points. For the entire component, a teacher can earn up to 28 points (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011). Table 4 shows how LEAP awards points for performance on local assessments.

**Table 4. Determining Points for Local Assessment Performance or Improvement**

	Goal	Points
<b>Performance</b>	A teacher's students meet or exceed the school's expectations for mastery in this subject.	14 points
<b>Improvement</b>	A teacher's students do not meet the performance goal, but the percentage of students who demonstrate mastery increased from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.	50% or greater increase: 14 points 40 to 50% increase: 7 points

Source: Adapted from the LEAP Academy website (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011).

## Scoring for Evaluations

LEAP determines a teacher's final evaluation score by averaging the *teacher effectiveness* and the *leadership and professional contributions* scores for each observation. Evaluators add the total to the points earned for *student academic growth and achievement*. The overall rating determines teacher financial awards. Note that new teachers receive reviews a minimum of five times a year, while tenured teachers receive four evaluations. Principals, assistant principals, and department heads conduct observations.

For the teacher effectiveness and the leadership and professional contributions components, teachers receive two sets of ratings, from zero to three, for each domain within the components. The two sets of ratings are "in action" and "in reflection." "In action" is information gained from direct classroom observations, whereas "in reflection" includes evidence obtained from one or more postobservation conferences. During the postobservation conference, a teacher can provide evidence from a portfolio to further illustrate strength in an area or as additional evidence to improve a score (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011). For example, if a teacher believes that he or she deserved a higher score in setting instructional outcomes, the teacher could present his or her lesson in order to explain learning goals and outcomes as well as how all student populations would meet these goals. A teacher can earn 48 possible points for the teacher effectiveness component and 24 possible points for the leadership and professional contributions component. The evaluation rubric includes descriptions and examples for each rating in the scale for both "in action" and "in reflection." Tables 5 and 6 illustrate the point distribution for each component of the evaluation system.

**Table 5. Scoring Rubric for Teacher Effectiveness**

	In Action Possible Points	In Reflection Possible Points	Total Possible Points
<b>Planning and Preparation</b>			
Setting Instructional Goals	3	3	6
Designing Coherent Instruction	3	3	6
Designing Student Assessments	3	3	6
<b>Classroom Environment</b>			
Establishing a Culture for Learning	3	3	6
Managing Student Behavior	3	3	6
<b>Instruction</b>			
Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	3	3	6
Engaging Students in Learning	3	3	6
Using Assessment in Instruction	3	3	6
<b>Total for Teacher Effectiveness</b>			<b>48</b>

**Table 6. Scoring Rubric for Leadership and Professional Contributions**

	In Action Possible Points	In Reflection Possible Points	Total Possible Points
<b>Professional Responsibilities</b>			
Reflecting on Teaching and Student Academic Growth	3	3	6
Communicating With Families	3	3	6
<b>Contributions to Professional Development and Growth of Colleagues</b>			
Contributing to Professional Development	3	3	6
Engaging in and Initiating Innovative Learning Projects	3	3	6
<b>Total for Leadership and Professional Contributions</b>			<b>24</b>

Source: Adapted from the LEAP Academy website (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011).

## *Training for Evaluators*

One of the implementation challenges for LEAP Academy was training its evaluators. Classroom observers attended additional training on how to use the rubric and had to conduct classroom observations in pairs. After each classroom observation, evaluators compared their ratings and discussed their reasoning for each score (P. Martinez, personal communication, February 1, 2012). This further helped evaluators understand the rubric and reliability of the instrument.

## Performance-Based Compensation and Incentives

The revised performance-pay program provides multiple ways to reward teachers for their work. In addition to performance-based pay, LEAP Academy teachers can earn additional bonuses for leadership.

## *Performance-Based Pay*

LEAP Academy teachers can earn salary increases based on their overall teacher rating, which includes a component on teacher performance in the classroom (teacher effectiveness) and student performance (student academic growth and achievement). Teachers receive a salary increase for their evaluation rating, determined by the total number of points they earned from the evaluation. Table 7 breaks down the possible points teachers can earn for each component.

**Table 7. Evaluation Scores for Each Component**

Component	Possible Points
Teacher Effectiveness	48
Leadership and Professional Contributions	24
Student Academic Growth and Achievement	28
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Adapted from the LEAP Academy website (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011).

The number of points a teacher earns from the evaluation determines the salary increase he or she will receive for his/her performance. Table 8 illustrates LEAP Academy’s salary upgrade calculations.

**Table 8. LEAP Academy’s Salary Upgrade Calculations**

Overall Score on Three Evaluation Components	Percent Salary Increase
100–86	2.25–2.34
85–80	2.0–2.24
79–66	1.75–1.99
65–60	1.25–1.74
59–48	0.75–1.24
47–39	0.5–0.76
38–29	0.4

Source: Adapted from the LEAP Academy website (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011).

In addition to performance pay based on teacher evaluation ratings, LEAP Academy teachers can earn a one-time \$5,000 bonus based on grade-level performance on state assessments. For example, if all of the third-grade teachers meet adequate yearly progress, then they all will receive the bonus (H. Redmond, personal communication, January 26, 2012).

### *Exemplary Leadership Bonus*

LEAP Academy provides opportunities for teachers to earn a one-time bonus for exemplary leadership. The bonus rewards teachers for work that falls outside their typical duties and that contributes to the school’s mission or furthers or initiates innovative projects. These projects may affect a single grade level, the entire school, or the broader LEAP Academy community. Some project examples include organizing a schoolwide conference, publishing an academic paper, presenting at a conference, or organizing a school fundraiser. Teachers use a portfolio to document evidence of their leadership contributions,

which includes collecting evidence of contributions to the school such as extracurricular class activities, serving on committees, developing curriculum, designing learning modules, mentoring other teachers, and participating in professional learning communities. Teachers also can collect evidence of contributions to the community, such as participation in parent–teacher initiatives. Teachers receive up to 5 points for each level of contribution: grade, school building, and district (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011). A principal, assistant principal, or department head evaluates contributions. All teachers are eligible for the award. The maximum bonus is 1.5 percent of a teacher’s annual base salary, and Table 9 breaks down the bonus calculation.

**Table 9. Bonus Amounts for Exemplary Leadership**

Total Points Received	Bonus as a Percentage of Salary
15–10	1.0–1.5%
9–5	0.75–1.0%
4–1	0.5–0.75%

Source: Adapted from the LEAP Academy website (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011)

## Professional Development

LEAP Academy staff evaluations serve not only for accountability purposes but also to help support teachers to improve student achievement, which ties back into the school’s mission. Every teacher develops his or her own Professional Improvement Plan (PIP), and the professional development and feedback opportunities align directly with LEAP Academy’s evaluation system.

After every observation, staff review a teacher’s PIP and record any areas of strength or weakness in the PIP, along with a personalized improvement plan. In each PIP, reviewers develop learning objectives for each domain within the three core components that need improvement. Teachers work with

reviewers to develop action plans for each learning objective, which include identifying the person(s) who will provide assistance in meeting each objective and a completion date. Teachers also can select from a menu of supports to address any areas that need improvement. The following are some of these supports:

- Professional Development Institute—Teachers participate in monthly in-house professional development sessions. Teachers can choose from various topics for supports or request specific assistance to fit their needs.
- Modeling with feedback—A Master teacher models pedagogical techniques in a live classroom of their students and at least one other classroom in the same grade and subject.
- Co-teaching with feedback—With Master teacher, teacher jointly teaches one or more lessons in the same grade or subject.
- Lesson planning support with feedback—teacher jointly plans and constructs a standards-based lesson from start to finish with a Master teacher.
- Direct observation with feedback—Teachers receive feedback from multiple observations using a framework such as Danielson (2007) or CLASS (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2007).
- Evaluation of classroom artifacts with feedback— One or more experts in content and pedagogy examine assignments and related student work; teachers receive feedback on those artifacts using a noted framework such as Newmann. (see Newmann, Lopez, & Bryk, 1998).

- Videotape analysis—An expert videotapes, analyzes, and annotates lessons (LEAP Academy University Charter School, 2011).

For example, if a teacher scores low on Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques in the Instruction domain, then staff update the teacher's PIP to create a plan to improve in this area. The reviewer works with the teacher to create learning objectives to aid improvement and develops an action plan to meet those objectives. This could include completing coteaching, with feedback from a colleague who scored well in this area, within three months of the postobservation conference.

The PIP should provide learning opportunities for teachers at every skill level. If a teacher is strong in a particular component, the teacher shares that knowledge and skill with others by leading a professional development session or by providing coaching or lesson-planning support to another teacher who is struggling in that same area.

## Gauging the Impact of LEAP Academy's Performance-Pay Program on Teachers and Students

While LEAP Academy has had performance pay for 13 years, school leaders continue to make adjustments and improvements to the program. LEAP Academy is currently working on evaluating the effectiveness of its pay-for-performance program. Currently, LEAP does not have any data regarding the impact of its performance-pay program on teacher retention or mobility. However, according to the school's leadership, the program has made an impact on the school's culture and encourages teachers to work hard and strive to perform to the best of their abilities (G. Bonilla-Santiago, personal communication, January 27, 2012). While the empirical data regarding the program's impact are still forthcoming, there are other indicators of programmatic

success. LEAP Academy students are achieving high levels, as indicated by their 100 percent graduation and college attendance rates. LEAP Academy also has maintained fiscal sustainability of its program since the program began 13 years ago. The board of trustees makes budget allowances each year for every teacher to receive the maximum performance awards (G. Bonilla-Santiago, personal communication, January 27, 2012). Clearer data around teacher retention and mobility and student achievement trends, however, would bolster these findings.

## Lessons Learned

LEAP Academy has maintained a strong performance-based compensation program with the help of its partnership with Rutgers and Rowan Universities, extensive professional development aligned to the school's evaluation system, and teacher involvement in refining the performance-pay program. However, the school has faced challenges, such as providing sufficient and constant training on the evaluation tool. The following is a discussion of some of the major lessons learned to date.

### *Partner With a Neighboring University or Community Organization*

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LEAP Academy's collaboration with Rutgers and Rowan Universities has provided numerous supports to the school. The LEAP Academy partnerships with Rutgers and Rowan enrich the community of Camden, New Jersey, by providing its students and families with health, social, legal, and academic services above and beyond what a school typically offers.

### *Align Professional Development With the Evaluation System*

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LEAP Academy's system of professional supports for teachers uses teacher evaluation ratings as a basis. Each teacher's PIP highlights areas of weakness and enables him or her to learn from more experienced and skilled peers. As LEAP Academy founder Dr. Santiago (personal communication, January 13, 2012) explains, "The performance-based compensation program must be reflective of the teacher's professional development plan and should also guide the professional development for the entire school." Thus, the evaluation tool serves as a professional growth tool for the entire faculty.

### *Involve Teachers in the Design and Development of the Performance-Pay System*

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To increase stakeholder buy-in to any program, it is important to engage stakeholders in the design and creation of the program. LEAP Academy was able to win teacher support for the redesigned performance-pay program by involving teachers in the program refinement process. As one LEAP Academy teacher described, "If we're part of making something then obviously we're going to be okay with it because we're the ones who came up with the ideas. It was another way for us to buy into it because we created it along with our supervisors" (H. Redmond, personal communication, January 26, 2012). The teachers at LEAP Academy encouraged the administration to add elements to the evaluation system that would help teachers improve their teaching practice, such as including the "in reflection" piece and having additional professional development supports. Some LEAP Academy teachers perceived the previous evaluation system to be somewhat subjective, and

the school's leadership incorporated this feedback into the program redesign by including a detailed observation rubric and additional evaluation training and by increasing the number of observations and feedback sessions for teachers (P. Martinez, personal communication, February 1, 2012; H. Redmond, personal communication, January 26, 2012). Giving teachers a voice in the process made teachers more invested in the program's success.

### *Continuously Train Supervising Staff on the Evaluation Tool*

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Initially, LEAP Academy struggled with inconsistent use of the observation tool by observers. As a result, the administration developed a rubric that gives clear examples of skills and behaviors that observers should see in the classroom, with explicit examples for each rating level. Supervisors received professional development training on this rubric and regular training on the tool to ensure consistent use. School leaders encouraged supervisors to conduct classroom observations in pairs and then to compare and discuss scores. A consistent rating demonstrated that the evaluation tool was a reliable measurement of teacher performance.

## Conclusion

Many states and districts struggle to engage all stakeholders in implementing a performance-pay program and particularly in gaining the support of teacher unions. LEAP Academy's situation was unique in that its performance-based compensation system was already in place prior to joining a union. This gave the school's leadership an advantage in negotiations that most schools or districts looking to adopt alternative compensation do not have.

LEAP Academy has spent 13 years gradually developing and adjusting its performance-based compensation system. While the full impact of its latest program has yet to be determined, this school's story sheds light on important considerations for others looking to implement similar programs. Some of LEAP Academy's successes may be difficult to replicate, such as a strong partnership with a local university that offers such a multitude of supports to students, families, and school faculty or involving all teachers in the refinement of the performance-pay program. However, much of what LEAP Academy has done well is fairly common among successful charter schools: finding community partners, creating wide-ranging supports for students, soliciting feedback from teachers about how they will receive evaluations and compensation, and making sure the evaluation system is objective and can serve as a professional growth tool. All of these lessons learned are worth sharing with other schools hoping to implement similar programs.

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