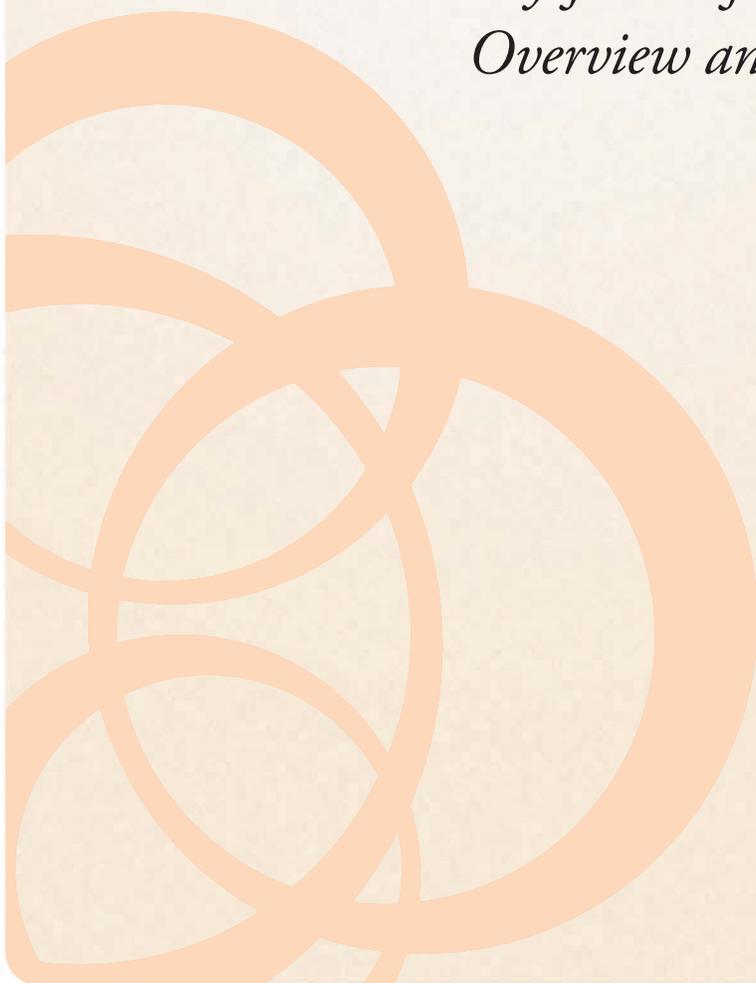


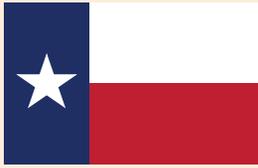


Center for
Educator Compensation
Reform

Case Summary

*Texas State-Level
Pay-for-Performance Programs:
Overview and Discussion*





Texas State-Level Pay-for-Performance Programs: Overview and Discussion

September 2011

Introduction

Although district pay-for-performance programs in education have increased in recent years, states have been experimenting with them for many years. Approximately 13 states have launched such statewide initiatives. Each state's performance plan caters to its own labor market and demographic challenges. Goals may include staffing high-need schools, retaining highly effective teachers, shrinking achievement gaps, or raising overall achievement, and these priorities vary by state. Rather than operating in a vacuum, states creating and refining these programs can learn from each other about how to create buy-in, finance the initiative, communicate effectively with stakeholders and support schools and districts in their reform efforts. Texas provides an array of lessons about developing, implementing, and sustaining a state-based pay-for-performance initiative from which other states can learn when planning their own initiatives.

As part of its mission to raise national awareness of effective alternative strategies for educator compensation, the Center for Educator Compensation Reform (CECR) developed this case summary to share the story and lessons learned about alternative teacher pay. This case summary updates a previous version with more current information gathered from the field. In addition to synthesizing the latest literature in the field, it includes additional interviews with some of the key players in Texas's pay-for-performance initiatives. The interviews used a semi-structured protocol to acquire relevant information about the programs of interest.

Information in this case summary on Texas's pay-for-performance initiatives may help Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees and other education compensation reform stakeholders develop new programs and refine existing ones.

Case Summary at a Glance

This case summary has four primary parts:

- Basic demographic information about Texas students and teachers.
- An overview of education reform related to teacher quality and teacher pay in Texas.

Case Summary at a Glance continued

- A more detailed discussion of the three specific programs that constitute the performance-based pay effort in Texas, including information about their design, implementation, and sustainability.
- A synthesis of the main lessons learned from all of the state-level performance-based pay programs in Texas.

Profile of Texas Students and Teachers

Texas has approximately 1,200 school districts, 8,600 schools, and 333,000 teachers (Texas Education Agency, 2010a). Over the last two decades, student enrollment in Texas public schools has steadily increased from 3.3 million to its current enrollment size of over 4.8 million students. Exhibit 1 displays the most recent data from the state's department of education, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), on the racial and ethnic breakdown of students in Texas public schools. Nearly half of students are Hispanic. Over the past decade, white student enrollment has decreased from 43.2% to 33.3%; African American student enrollment has remained stable at or near 14.0%; and Hispanic enrollment has grown from 39.5% to 48.6% (TEA, 2010a).

Approximately 16.1% of Texas public school students receive English as a Second Language (ESL) services, and 9.0% receive special education services (TEA, 2010b). In addition, the state classifies more than 59.0% of students as “economically disadvantaged.” The percentage of economically disadvantaged students has been steadily increasing in the last decade from 48.9% to nearly 59.0% (TEA, 2010a).

Exhibit 1. Racial and Ethnic Make-Up of Texas Public School Students, Texas Education Agency 2009-10

Race or ethnicity	Student count	Percent
African American	679,351	14.0
Asian/ Pacific Islander	180,008	3.7
Hispanic	2,354,042	48.6
Native American	18,984	0.4
White	1,615,459	33.3
Total	4,847,844	100.0

Thus, an increasingly large number of Texas public school children are Hispanic and/or economically disadvantaged. These changes have increased demand for teachers able to effectively serve students with a variety of needs, particularly English language learners (ELLs) and other students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

In particular, special education, economically disadvantaged, ELL, and racial/ethnic minority students have lower standardized test scores than white, Asian, and more socio-economically affluent students. Results from the 2009–10 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the standardized state test for Texas (TEA, 2010b), highlight this phenomenon (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Percentage of Students Meeting 2010 Standards on TAKS Across Grades for Reading and Math, Texas Education Agency 2009–10

	State	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	Special education	Economically disadvantaged	Limited English proficiency
Reading	90%	87%	87%	96%	97%	66%	86%	73%
Math	84%	74%	81%	91%	96%	55%	79%	74%

More than 333,000 teachers teach the public school students in Texas. Nearly a third of these teachers (31.0%) are relatively new to the profession, with fewer than five years of teaching experience. The overall teacher turnover rate in Texas is 11.8%, and the average number of years a teacher stays with any given district is 7.6 (TEA, 2010b). Teacher turnover and shortages in Texas reflect those prevalent across the nation—the state is in need of many quality teachers in the areas of mathematics, science, special education, and especially ESL.

Overview of Teacher Quality and Teacher Pay Initiatives in Texas

The state of Texas and its districts have been working to address teacher quality issues such as recruitment and retention for many years. One early plan, available from 1984 to 1993, was the Texas Teacher Career Ladder, which offered bonuses to eligible teachers based on classroom performance (evaluated through the Texas Teacher Appraisal System), professional development participation, and years of teaching experience. However, the Legislature abolished the Career Ladder before any teachers reached the highest “rung” (Strayhorn, 2004). The Legislature may have cut the program short because of inadequate funding, a negative atmosphere of competition rather than collaboration among teachers, and questions about teacher performance appraisals (Davis, 2004). An evaluation of the Texas Teacher Appraisal System revealed that the process showed little to no variation in teacher performance and consequently

generated no support for keeping the Career Ladder in place in its then-current form (TEA, 1991). A second plan, the Texas Successful Schools Award Program, operational from 1992 to 2001, gave out awards to schools rather than to teachers. The program based awards on several student outcome measures, including performance gains on state assessments (Springer, et al., 2010).

Between 2001 and 2005, performance pay continued to be on the state’s policy agenda. Recommendations from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2002) called for the implementation of pay-for-performance or differentiated pay programs to address teacher quality issues. Between 2003 and 2005, the Legislature explored introducing additional pay-for-performance initiatives in Texas (Springer, et al., 2010).

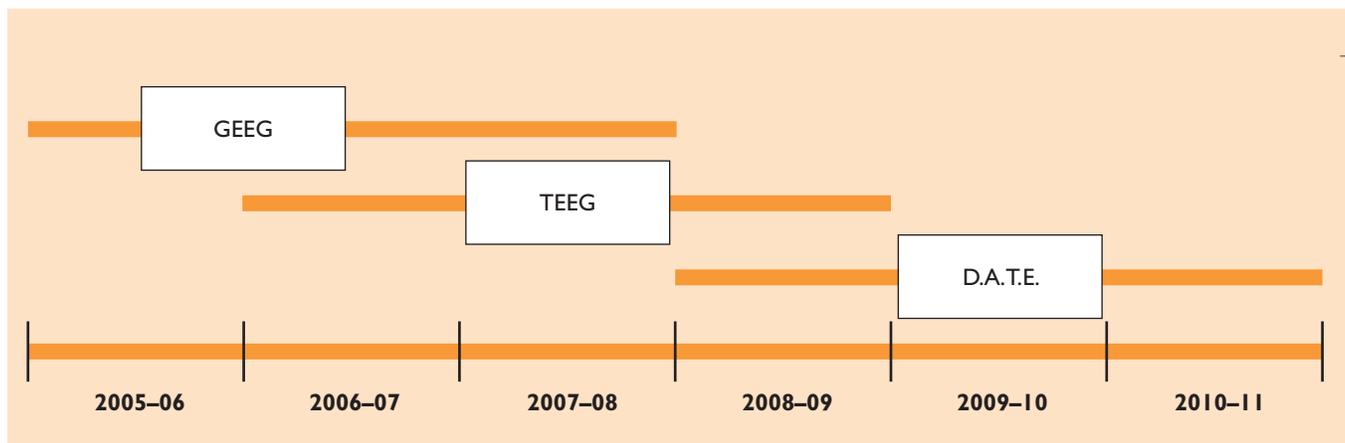
With mounting support for pay-for-performance plans, particularly from Governor Rick Perry, the House Research Organization of the Texas House of Representatives prepared an analysis of teacher performance incentives in 2004. In 2005, Senator Florence Shapiro attempted to attach a pay-for-performance program to the state’s overall finance package, but the school finance bill failed to pass in the second special session (Senate Committee on Education, 2005). Work toward designing and implementing alternative compensation at the state level in Texas did not stop, however, and in June 2006 Governor Perry and the Legislature created the Governor’s Educator Excellence Award Program, which includes the following:

- Governor’s Educator Excellence Program (GEEG)
- Texas Educator’s Excellence Program (TEEG)
- District Awards for Teacher Excellence (D.A.T.E.)

These programs make up the largest performance-pay system in the United States; the next section discusses them in detail. An overview of the Texas teacher incentive programs is available online at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2928&menu_id=949.

The Legislature created GEEG as a three-year program that operated from 2005–06 to 2007–08 and received \$10 million from Title II Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funds during each of the three years (Springer, et al., 2009b). Texas awarded approximately \$100 million each year to TEEG, which existed from 2006–07 to 2008–09. Then, in spring 2009, the Legislature voted to abolish TEEG and shift a portion of funding to D.A.T.E. Texas awarded \$147.5 million to fund D.A.T.E. in 2008–09 and \$197 million each in 2009–10 and 2010–11 (Springer, et al., 2010). Exhibit 3 provides a timeline of these events.

Exhibit 3. Periods of Operation for the Three Major Performance-Pay Programs in Texas



The National Center on Performance Incentives (NCPI) has been the external evaluator on all Texas state pay-for-performance programs. In our overview of the three major state programs, we incorporate some of the major points from

NCPI’s reports. The full NCPI reports, along with executive summaries, are located online: <http://www.performanceincentives.org/research/texas-studies/index.aspx>.

Overview of Educator Compensation Programs in Texas

Governor's Educator Excellence Grant

Texas distributed the federally funded GEEG to a small number of high-achieving high-poverty schools. These schools could design their own programs based on a broad set of criteria defined by the state. Schools received GEEG money based on their size and gave out teacher awards based on teacher classroom performance the previous year. The schools selected for GEEG received funding for the duration of the GEEG grant, and the state did not award new schools GEEG money after the first year.

Campus Eligibility. The TEA determined that schools would be eligible for GEEG money if they were in the top third of economically disadvantaged schools and were designated as high achieving or high improving. High-achieving schools were those that met benchmarks for student passage rates on state standardized tests, school completion rates, and school dropout rates. High-improving schools were those in the top quartile of performance for improvement in mathematics and English language arts relative to the improvement at 40 similar schools (Springer, et al., 2009b).

Campus Plans. The state provided a set of program design guidelines for campuses. Program guidelines required success in improving student outcomes using some objective, quantifiable measure (such as student scores on TAKS) and teacher collaboration. Some campus plans measured the improvement of student outcomes by using achievement levels (passing rates), whereas others used measures of student growth, such as value-added scores. Districts could measure teacher collaboration by a teacher's participation in campus-based activities, such as professional development sessions, instructional strategy

meetings, team teaching and observation, mentoring and coaching, and other evidence of sharing across subjects and grade levels to improve overall student performance at the campus. Campuses developed their own incentive plans, which required district approval.

Awards. The program funded 99 campuses over three years—the cohort of participating schools remained the same for the duration of the three-year grant period. Each qualifying campus received an annual grant award between \$60,000 and \$220,000, depending on the size of its student population. Campuses began receiving funds in August 2006. Three-fourths of GEEG funds went directly to eligible classroom teachers (defined in each campus plan) in the form of teacher awards, called *Part I awards*. Schools allocated the remaining 25%, called *Part II awards*, for teacher quality improvement measures such as recruitment and retention, professional development opportunities, and awards for non-classroom teachers, including teacher aides, counselors, librarians, and nurses.

Although there was variability in the range of teacher awards for each GEEG school, in general most GEEG teacher awards fell short of the state-advised \$3,000 minimum/\$10,000 maximum. According to the NCPI Year 3 GEEG report, nearly 80% of GEEG schools set a minimum award of less than \$3,000, and approximately 46% proposed a maximum award of less than \$3,000 (Springer, et al., 2009b). The average Part 1 teacher award was approximately \$2,500 in Year 1, \$2,300 in Year 2, and \$2,200 in Year 3 (Springer, et al., 2009b). Years of experience and highest degree earned did not correlate with a higher likelihood of receiving a teacher award. On average, teachers new to GEEG schools received fewer awards, and if they did receive an award, the amount was relatively less than for teachers who had been at the schools longer. In addition,

teachers in tested subjects and grades tended to receive larger bonus awards, although this trend faded over the three years of the program (Springer, et al., 2009b).

Results. NCPI found that GEEG's effects on student achievement were inconclusive. Results were either weakly positive, negative, or negligible depending on the particular metrics used in the analysis. Additionally, the authors found no significant relationship between the design of the school's plan and student achievement. They noted, however, that measurement problems may have masked some effects in addition to a small sample size (i.e., only a small number of schools represented each possible design feature) (Springer, et al., 2009b). Overall, teacher turnover was lower in the first year in GEEG schools than in nonparticipating schools, although this difference did not appear in the subsequent two years of the program. In all three years, the probability of teacher turnover increased for teachers without awards or with relatively small award amounts, and decreased for teachers with awards or with relatively large award amounts (Springer, et al., 2009b).

Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG)

The momentum created by GEEG helped to generate the TEEG, which was authorized in House Bill 1 in 2006 (see Legislature of the State of Texas, 2006). Campuses that participated in GEEG were not eligible to participate in TEEG until after the GEEG program ended.

Campus Eligibility. Like GEEG, TEEG rewarded teachers in economically disadvantaged, high-performing, or high-improving schools. Campuses that were in the top half of the distribution of economically disadvantaged students and received a rating of "high-performing" or "high-improving" were eligible for TEEG grant funds (as opposed to GEEG, which was for campuses in the top third of the distribution

of economically disadvantaged schools). Unlike GEEG, which was a fixed program (schools identified in the first year were the same schools that received the award funding over the course of the program), TEEG was an annual program in which campuses became eligible on the basis of new data each year. The program based eligibility on data from the previous school year because of the year lag in the school rating system.

Many of the schools that participated in the first round of the TEEG (during the 2006–07 school year) were not eligible for the program during the 2007–08 school year because they did not maintain necessary campus performance ratings ("high-performing" or "high-improving"). Likewise, more than half the schools eligible in 2007–08 were not eligible again in 2008–09. Of all schools that were eligible, less than 12% were eligible in all three years of the program. The volatility of schools' participation was likely to have had implications on the program's ability to incentivize teachers and increase student achievement (Springer, et al., 2009a).

Campus Plans. Similar to GEEG, campuses developed their own TEEG incentive proposal plans, but were required to have district approval of their plan prior to making awards. A majority of teachers at each campus had to approve the incentive plan before seeking district approval. Campuses also had to submit at least three personal letters from teachers that described their participation in the process of developing their campus incentive plan. In addition, they had to submit other documents, including meeting minutes and sign-in sheets, verifying teachers' participation in the development of the plan. Campuses designed incentive plans to reward teachers who demonstrated (a) success in improving student performance using objective, quantifiable measures and (b) collaboration with faculty and staff that contributed to improving overall student performance on the campus.

Starting in the third year of TEEG, districts were required to attend technical assistance (TA) workshops. These TA workshops included conference-style informational events and workshop sessions with district teams to walk them through their performance-pay plans. TA work spanned the entire process from the initial building of a performance-pay plan to helping districts implement and manage the plan, design a payout process, and finalize procedures for the plan. TEA required districts to attend the first set of workshops offered, which successfully gained the trust of the districts, as most continued with TA after the workshops became voluntary (T. Kreuz, personal communication, April 29, 2011).

Awards. Grant awards ranged from \$40,000 to \$300,000. Of the award funds, 75% had to be dedicated to teacher awards and 25% for teacher quality improvement measures, such as recruitment and retention activities. Thus, as with GEEG awards, three-fourths of TEEG money went to teachers for their classroom performance, and districts would allocate the remainder of the funds to keep teachers in hard-to-staff schools and subject areas or for other quality-related strategies.

A small percentage of schools in each funding cycle rejected the grant money because of concerns about the guidelines for selecting schools and teachers for award money and about possible negative impact on school climate (Springer, et al., 2009a).

Results. Evaluations of TEEG conducted by the NCPI found no overall effects of the TEEG program on teacher turnover. Higher awards were related to lower turnover; specifically, the larger the teacher bonus the higher the likelihood of staying at that school. However, for the most part, awards were so low that they did not affect teacher turnover, which even increased in cases where the awards were lowest. Most maximum awards for teachers were less than the state-advised minimum of \$3,000. There was no detected effect of TEEG participation on

student achievement gains (Springer, et al., 2009a). Self-selection by TEEG schools into the program made determining program effects difficult (J. Lewis, personal communication, April 28, 2011).

District Awards for Teacher Excellence (D.A.T.E.)

D.A.T.E. is a district-based program (as opposed to campus-based programs like GEEG and TEEG). Grants are for districts wanting to establish a local incentive program, and the state awarded the grants based on student enrollment. Participating districts must match at least 15% of D.A.T.E. funds for the first two years.

Campus Eligibility. Unlike GEEG and TEEG, there are no eligibility restrictions for D.A.T.E. participation, which is voluntary. Districts also may choose whether their incentive programs will target only high-needs schools or all schools within the district.

A total of 203 districts participated in 2008–09 (Cycle 1, Year 1), the first year of the program's implementation. The following year, 191 of those districts participated (Cycle 1, Year 2), and for the 2010–11 year, 184 of the original 203 districts participated (Cycle 1, Year 3). Those districts that participated in the first year represented 16% of all public school districts in Texas. In the 2010–11 year, another cycle began (Cycle 2, Year 1), and 112 districts are expected to participate (P. Flores, personal communication, April 15, 2011).

Campus Plans. As described previously, districts can include all campuses in their program or target certain schools. They may also implement the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP). Districts that do not include all campuses in their program are required to target more than half of schools within the district. Additionally, the target campuses must meet two of the following criteria (Springer, et al., 2010):

- Have an “unacceptable” academic rating (2007 accountability ratings)
- Perform lower than the district’s average proficiency on TAKS (by subject, by grade, and/or by campus to be determined by the district)
- Receive comparable improvement ratings in the bottom quartile relative to other campus types in the district
- Experience above-average dropout/non-completion rates relative to other campus types in the district
- Rank within the top quartile of campuses enrolling high percentages of economically disadvantaged students
- Have other academic or nonacademic indicators, such as experiencing high rates of teacher migration and attrition, free and reduced-price lunch, etc.

In Cycle 1, Year 1, 53% of the participating D.A.T.E. districts implemented district-wide programs. In the following year, 64% of districts chose to implement district-wide programs (Springer, et al., 2010).

Awards. Average daily attendance determines district award amounts. The state divides the total amount among participating districts based on that number. Districts must match D.A.T.E. funds at least 15% for two years with Federal, state, or local funds (Springer, et al., 2010).

The state requires that districts use at least 60% of total D.A.T.E. funds for teacher awards and sets a teacher award minimum at \$1,000 but suggests \$3,000. Districts can use the remaining 40% of funds for other incentives (Springer, et al., 2010). In contrast to GEEG and TEEG requirements that 75% of funds go toward teacher awards, the 60% requirement allows districts greater flexibility in allocating funds. Strategies for the non-teacher award funds mainly revolve around professional development and mentoring (P. Flores, personal communication, April 15, 2011). However, funds also go toward bonuses for non-teaching positions, principals, assistant principals, bus drivers, and paraprofessionals (T. Kreuz, personal communication, April 29, 2011).

In the first funding year, 2008–09, district award amounts ranged from about \$4,000 to more than \$13 million. About two-thirds of districts received less than \$200,000. Approximately 70% of participating districts proposed that they use more than 60% of the district award for teacher awards. Teachers in districts with district-wide programs tended to receive smaller teacher awards than teachers in districts with targeted school programs (Springer, et al., 2010).

In comparison to their non-D.A.T.E. counterparts, districts that participated in the first year of the D.A.T.E. program tended to have higher percentages of economically disadvantaged, ELL, and minority students. In addition, D.A.T.E. districts had relatively lower district wealth and larger numbers of students and teachers. Participating districts were more likely to have taken part in GEEG and TEEG and were more likely to have received more money from GEEG and TEEG grants than non-D.A.T.E. districts (Springer, et al., 2010), probably because of the larger school enrollments for D.A.T.E. districts.

Results. The NCPI D.A.T.E. final evaluation report captures data from the first two years of Cycle 1 of the grant, for years 2008–09 and 2009–10. Student achievement improved, and teacher turnover declined in schools participating in the D.A.T.E. program. D.A.T.E. awards were associated with significantly lower teacher turnover rates. In districts with district-wide plans, this meant a decline in the turnover of teachers to other schools within the district. The probability of turnover increased among teachers who did not receive a D.A.T.E. award and decreased among teachers who did receive an award (Springer, et al., 2010).

For students, the gap in TAKS passing rates between D.A.T.E. and non-D.A.T.E. schools declined, and TAKS gains were higher for D.A.T.E. schools than non-D.A.T.E. schools. Students had higher TAKS gains in districts with a targeted schools plan than did students in districts with district-wide plans and in districts with higher proposed award amounts (Springer, et al., 2010). Of the 11 districts that implemented the TAP program, 100% met or exceeded expected student growth levels (T. Kreuz, personal communication, April 29, 2011).

Moving Forward, Lessons Learned

Performance-Pay Plans Must Be Adequately Funded

State and Federal sources seem to adequately fund the state-level performance-pay programs in Texas. However, it is unclear how well the state distributes the funds to districts. More investigation at the district level could help ascertain the efficacy of fund distribution in Texas for the D.A.T.E. program.

Flexibility in Program Requirements Can Help Districts Succeed

The state made two major changes in the D.A.T.E. requirements that may have helped districts do a better job of creating and sustaining effective programs: The state changed its eligibility criteria to be more inclusive and allowed districts greater flexibility with fund allocation. Part of the difficulty with the TEEG program was that eligibility requirements were such that districts often went in and out of eligibility during the duration of the program. This made it difficult to create cultures of change in districts and also conduct meaningful external evaluations of the impact of the program on teacher turnover and student achievement. D.A.T.E. participation was open to all public schools in Texas. In addition, the state seemed to have taken a positive step forward with D.A.T.E. by giving more flexibility to districts in terms of funding allocation. In contrast to GEEG and TEEG, in which 75% of funding was required to go toward teacher awards, only 60% of funds must be directed to teacher awards under D.A.T.E. It is unclear exactly what impact this may have had, but it likely allowed districts to use the funding in a way that would be most beneficial for teachers and students.

Programs Are Only as Effective as the Data Systems on Which They Rely

Most of the campuses base plans for compensating teachers and other staff as a part of these programs on student standardized test scores on TAKS, a strategy that is dependent upon a data system that can link student performance data with teachers. Texas is developing such a system, which will be a large step forward. Currently, however, the state's data system is not equipped to show student growth (i.e., how much impact one teacher had on a particular student over time) with TAKS. Some districts have the ability to measure student growth. However, schools and districts without this capability may need assistance designing an award system that uses data. Given that some districts have more advanced data capacity, it may be beneficial to have cross-district learning tools that include examples of how districts can use data effectively and fairly in the pay-for-performance system.

Teachers Need to Believe in the System in Order for Performance-Pay Programs to Work

Texas has shown that it is determined to find a pay-for-performance program that works, and it has abandoned programs that had serious design and implementation flaws. However, the constant flux of programmatic changes may have undermined teacher buy-in. Involving teachers and administrators in the policymaking process may help to facilitate great teacher support for the pay-for-performance programs. Although Texas does not have collective bargaining, including representatives from teachers' associations can ultimately help to secure a fair design and effective communication to stakeholders in order to facilitate buy-in.

It Is Important to Learn from Previous Attempts

Overall, these lessons have a common theme: the importance of learning from previous pay-for-performance efforts. In some ways Texas is learning from and improving on its past program attempts, as evidenced by the changing eligibility guidelines, increased technical assistance component, and more flexible award guidelines. However, some of the weaknesses of the programs have yet to be addressed. For example, NCPI evaluations have repeatedly shown that districts are setting award amounts that are far below the recommended minimum of \$3,000.

In summary, Texas has been and will continue to be an informative example of how a large state implements a state-level framework for locally driven pay-for-performance programs.

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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 a 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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Center for
Educator Compensation
Reform

Allison Henderson, Director

Phone: 888-202-1513

E-mail: cecr@westat.com

Website: cecr.ed.gov

