

TEACHER PAY-FOR-PERFORMANCE IN TEXAS: AN ANALYSIS OF  
TEACHER INVOLVEMENT IN AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE  
GEEG PROGRAM AND ITS SUBSEQUENT IMPACT ON TEACHERS

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Leadership and Policy Studies

December 2009

Nashville, Tennessee

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All praise be to God, without Whom I would have been ill-equipped to pursue a doctorate and forge ahead in all efforts dissertation related. I am forever indebted to my wife, Zakia, and daughters, Iman and Noor, for their patience throughout this process. Many more hours than anticipated were spent away from them, and their forbearance sustained me during the highs and lows of this research. I have always been blessed to have wonderfully supportive and loving parents, Roy and Ann, whom I hope that I have made proud.

Prior to even considering this dissertation work, I spent numerous hours navigating a doctoral program. Without Dr. Joseph Murphy's assistance, I surely would have drowned in those waters. I never could have envisioned an advisor, mentor, leader, and dissertation chair so passionate but pragmatic in my development as a researcher and person. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to the rest of my doctoral committee – Dr. Matthew Springer, Dr. Mark Berends, and Dr. Deborah Rowe. Each of you played integral roles in my development throughout the program and offered the level of insight and feedback during the process that I had expected you would.

I would also like to thank the National Center on Performance Incentives and those affiliated with it. The Center's gracious funding of my work and other forms of assistance made this dissertation possible. More specifically, I would again like to thank Dr. Matthew Springer, as well as Dr. Susan Burns, Alicen Hatter, and Dr. Jessica Lewis.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Interest in teacher performance incentive pay has waxed and waned since at least the 1950s (Burgess, et al., 2001), with a significant number of public school districts considering merit-pay as an alternative or supplement to the single salary schedule after the National Commission on Excellence in Education's (1983) publication of *A Nation at Risk* (Podgursky & Springer, 2007). Seldom have such plans been executed in their proposed entirety due to lack of funding or all-too-simplistic designs. For example, South Carolina attempted to implement pay-for-performance plans in the late-1970s and early-1980s, but these attempts failed to yield meaningful insight due in large part to limited funding that ended the plans prematurely (Clees & Nabors, 1992; Cooper & Cohn, 1997). Still, interest in teacher pay-for-performance plans has gained popularity in recent policy discussions as a means to improve instructional effectiveness, enhance student achievement, and increase organizational productivity.

Increasing interest in pay-for-performance plans stems in large part from a growing belief that the single salary schedule is no longer an appropriate pay system. The single salary schedule is a system of uniform pay steps that ensures teachers with the same years of experience and levels of education receive the same salary (Podgursky & Springer, 2007). As a teacher gains experience (by year) or education (by degree or complete classes), he/she receives increased pay. This system was established to "create pay equity, professionalism, and employee satisfaction across grade levels, political

wards, districts, and disciplines and to displace prior pay systems negotiated between individual teachers and local school boards” (p. 912), but it has often attracted criticism.

Recently, Eric Hanushek and Steven Rivkin (2004; 2007), among others, contended that teacher education and teacher experience have little to do with student achievement gains. In their research, a master’s degree has no systematic relationship to teacher quality as measured by student outcomes (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2004). Moreover, although teacher experience appears to have a positive relationship with student achievement, the overall picture is not strong. Most studies on the effects of teacher experience on student outcomes are not statistically significant, and many of them are complicated by concerns about the underlying estimation.

Pay-for-performance design, piloting, and/or implementation has occurred or continues at the federal, state, and district levels. Established through a major research and development grant from the Institute of Education Sciences, the National Center on Performance Incentives (NCPI) conducts independent, scientific research on the role of performance incentives in education. The Center for Educator Compensation Reform (CECR) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education to support Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees with the design and implementation of their educator compensation reforms. At the state level, Florida, Minnesota, and Texas provide over \$550 million combined yearly to reward high-performing educators (Taylor, Springer, & Ehlert, 2008). Denver’s prominence as a leading district in teacher pay reform has been well documented following the piloting and adoption of an alternative teacher pay plan linking pay bonuses to student achievement and professional evaluations (Community Training and Attention Center, 2004; Podgursky & Springer, 2007). In addition, other reform

models are promoted by national foundations such as the philanthropic National Institute for Excellence in Teaching's (NIET) Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) found in at least nine states (Podgursky & Springer, 2007).

Early empirical work suggests that incentive plans can increase student achievement or other goals of schooling, but much of the research in the United States is limited in scope and methodological rigor. Some of the most insightful studies are restricted to a few schools (Eberts, Hollenbeck, & Stone, 2002; Winters, Ritter, Barnett, & Green, 2007) or districts or based on aggregated or limited data (Ladd, 1999; Clotfelter & Ladd, 1996). More broadly, Figlio and Kenny (2007) supplement two national datasets with their own survey data to determine whether teacher merit-based pay schemes improve student achievement. Although the studies mentioned above are limited in their ability to generalize, collectively they indicate that performance incentive plans increase student achievement unless another goal is explicitly stated as the intended outcome (as shown in Eberts, Hollenbeck, & Stone, 2002).<sup>1</sup>

More rigorous studies using experimental or quasi-experimental research designs have been conducted internationally. Victor Lavy conducted two studies of performance tournaments in Israel, one examining school-level rewards (2002) and the other individual teacher-level rewards (2004). In each case, winning and losing participants (whether schools or teachers) improved student test scores more than non-participants did. In 2004, Glewwe, Ilias, and Kremer conducted a study of randomly assigned rural schools in Kenya where they found evidence of increased student pass rates in participating schools on district exams. However, improved student achievement did not persist after the end of the program. More recently, Muralidharan and Sundararaman

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<sup>1</sup> Increasing student attendance rates at an alternative high school was the plan's primary goal.

(2006) assigned 500 rural schools in the Indian state Andhra Pradesh to four treatment groups and a control group. Their individual teacher bonus group significantly increased mathematics and literature scores in comparison to the control group while exceeding the improvement of the other treatment types.

Still, funding of pay-for-performance plans rests more on the hopes of theory than on empirical results. Teacher pay-for-performance plans can serve at least four distinct but related purposes. First, they encourage teachers to focus more on metered, rewarded activity, which often centers on increased student performance. Second, such plans encourage higher teacher retention rates, specifically among highly-effective teachers since these teachers are rewarded monetarily and may be recognized publicly. Third, they induce potentially high-quality candidates to enter the profession by offering wages that are more competitive with other occupations. Finally, they provide a signal to low-performing teachers to improve or possibly exit teaching for more remunerative opportunities outside of education. If successful in accomplishing these four goals, teacher pay-for-performance could become a significant way of improving the K-12 public education system. In the Texas GEEG program studied for this dissertation, the state's emphasis was on improved student performance exclusively (Texas Education Agency, 2005).

### Setting the Stage

In compensation literature, a distinction is made between base pay and variable pay. Compensation founded on base pay guarantees a wage that is typically paid as a salary, hourly, or piece rate wage. Variable pay, however, is riskier in that it is associated

with a bonus or performance component of pay that is “contingent on discretion, performance, or results that comes in the form of an individual bonus, a group bonus or some combination of the two” (Podgursky & Springer, 2007, p. 913). Pay-for-performance programs are designed to measure employee performance while increasing pay commensurate with employee performance (Cannon, 2007), seemingly making it “a given that paying on the basis of output will induce workers to supply more output” (Lazear, 2000, p. 1346).

Although there is a large literature on the effects of incentives in the private sector (Atkinson, et al., 2004), only a small proportion of jobs appear to be based explicitly on rewarding individuals for individual performance (Ballou & Podgursky, 2001). Indeed, “private sector companies prefer to reward individuals based on discretionary subjective measures of performance or to follow bureaucratic rules that establish job grades and promotion criteria” (Eberts, Hollenbeck, & Stone, 2002, p. 914). According to Goldhaber (2006), salaries in the private sector also tend to center on job attributes, including measures of academic competency such as an individual’s performance on standardized tests or selectivity of college from which he/she graduated.

Growing competitiveness throughout the corporate world has amplified pressures within organizations, increasing the frequency in which pay-for-performance programs are being implemented (Cannon, 2007). One trend indicates that more corporations are advancing a pay-for-performance platform in the hopes that incentive bonuses will lead to more desired behaviors and performance outcomes. Studies of private sector performance incentive programs suggest that the programs are frequently linked to improved organizational performance (Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2002). For

example, one assessment of corporate pay-for-performance programs conducted by Beer and Cannon (2004) indicates that employee production increases in approximately two-thirds of organizations using such programs, yielding a rise in average output per worker (Lazear, 2000).

In organizational cultures where trust and commitment are perceived as crucial components to long-term success, monetary incentives might undermine capacity (Beer & Cannon, 2004). A small but growing body of evidence about incentives in the public sector indicates similar effects as in the private sector (Atkinson, et al., 2004). These effects include behavior change and gaming responses (Burgess, et al., 2001). For example, Kahn, Silva, and Ziliak (2001) studied the impact of the introduction of an incentive scheme for Brazilian tax collectors. Fine collections per inspection rose by approximately 75 percent more than usual. Accounting for deviant behavior, substantial evidence across sectors and occupations exists indicating that performance pay programs do “contribute to improved performance of individuals or organizations” (Milanowski, 2006, p. 3).

In education, the language of incentive pay has been one of the most debilitating factors to its successful implementation. Potentially incentivized groups are not always delineated clearly, and incentive plan types are sometimes unclear, mixing language that generally should be reserved for specific incentive interventions. From the teacher incentive literature, I resolve these issues first by describing three types of teacher incentives (i.e., shortage areas, skill- or knowledge-based pay, and career-ladder systems). At most, these incentive schemes are only partially dependent upon teacher performance. Then, I discuss teacher pay-for-performance or merit pay plans in some detail before addressing an important caveat.

*Shortage Areas.* These plans offer incentive pay for working in high-need schools or subjects. High-needs areas are typically urban districts<sup>2</sup> that have difficulty fielding a completely certified faculty. High-needs subject areas include English as a second language, special education, and math and science – subjects that are less likely to be filled by certified or capable teachers due to shortages caused in part by few trained teachers (Glazerman, 2006) or better pay outside of teaching (Hoxby & Leigh, 2004). Although these incentives can stand alone or be part of a larger incentives program – including pay-for-performance ones – they are not types of merit or pay-for-performance plans themselves since the bonuses are not based on performance (Goldhaber, 2006).

*Skill- or Knowledge-Based Pay.* These pay plans reward teachers for developing core competencies in their specific field or in pedagogical knowledge or action. Teachers who demonstrate higher proficiency levels on various tests or through various tasks are rewarded with higher salaries (Odden & Kelley, 1996; Ballou, 2001). These plans tend to avoid difficult issues such as the perceived fairness of determining who is/should be rewarded. For example, some states and school districts are adopting incentive packages based upon teachers gaining National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification (Goldhaber, 2006). “North Carolina...provides teachers a 12 percent salary increase for being NBPTS-certified, representing an average bump in salary of more than \$5,000” (p. 15). This input-based model is not controversial, but this form of differentiated pay does not necessarily correlate with increased student learning.

*Career-Ladder Systems.* The career ladder allows teachers to progress through stages and responsibilities with add-ons to their base pay (Darling-Hammond & Barnett,

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<sup>2</sup> Rural schools are also candidates for this but appear to have been less likely to pursue performance pay schemes, perhaps due to more limited financial abilities and geographical spread.

1988). Although eligibility may be based on years of service, advancement is determined at least in part by merit (Ballou and Podgursky, 1993) since high-quality teachers should have shown some teaching and/or leadership skills prior to their advancement. As teachers move up, “they are supposed to receive work that is progressively more enriching and challenging” (Firestone & Pennell, 1993, p. 511). Thus, ideally, only teachers who have shown dependability and/or adequate levels of competency are rewarded with additional responsibilities and the pay that comes with them.

*Pay-for-Performance/Merit Pay.* Pay-for-performance or merit pay is perhaps the most controversial teacher incentive plan (Goldhaber, 2006). “The principle underlying merit pay is that some teachers earn more for doing the same work as others only better” (Firestone, 1991, p. 269), so outstanding teachers are rewarded for doing their jobs well (Darling-Hammond & Barnett, 1988).

Throughout the 1980s and much of the 1990s, teacher pay-for-performance plans relied heavily on subjective evaluations of principals, lead or mentor teachers, or outside evaluators, leading to considerable teacher frustration over issues such as perceived flawed evaluations and no clear paths for improvement (Azordegan, et al., 2005). Gratz (2005) suggests that more recent pay-for-performance programs are built on rigorous, valid, and reliable assessment of student achievement. In addition to increasing achievement scores on standardized tests or having more students reach attainment thresholds, indicators such as student and/or teacher attendance and graduation rates can be used to measure performance (Ballou & Podgursky, 1993).

Pay-for-performance policy money can be additive or redistributive in nature. The majority of teacher pay-for-performance plans are additive, meaning that the



compensation system uses a salary schedule but supplements higher-performing teachers with additional pay. Murnane and Cohen (1986) suggest that this could remain the norm since teachers expect and depend on their base pay and incremental increases in it. Redistributive policies, however, typically reduce base salaries across the board. Teachers must meet bonus expectations to earn the financial difference between what would have been their base and what is currently their base. In these plans, teachers usually have an opportunity to exceed – perhaps greatly – what would have been their base salary. The modifications in the existing salary system are often designed under the assumption that new pay systems will be more costly than more current ones (Firestone, 1994). District board members in Denver openly discussed an interest in establishing base salaries for teachers regardless of experience, degrees, or other input measures (CTAC, 2004) that could escalate drastically if teachers were to meet many bonus targets (Blair, 2003).<sup>3</sup>

Teacher pay-for-performance/merit pay literature has grown considerably in the last 25 years, spurred on in the mid-1980s to the early-1990s by *A Nation at Risk* and stimulated again in 2001 by *No Child Left Behind*. Much of the literature has emphasized

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<sup>3</sup> The focus of this research proposal is on teachers, but pay-for-performance in education exists on at least three other levels. Remuneratively rewarding students for their performance on standardized tests or for excellent attendance rates is perhaps the newest and least explored pay-for-performance option. Exploration of this idea in New York (Medina, 2007) and Coshocton, Ohio (Viadero, 2008) are two notable cases to date.

Similarly, school-based schemes are considered only occasionally (for example, Honawar, 2007), and findings for schools and/or school-level improvements remain limited. At least one study indicates that school-level rewards must be clear in advance. Kentucky teachers indicated that they would like bonus pay to improve their school facilities and conditions, but when they were allowed to vote for reward dispensation, they overwhelmingly voted for personal bonus awards (Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2002).

Pay-for-performance can also be linked to individual administrators. Financial rewards for administrators are often based on academic indicators aggregated to the school level. Perhaps because administrators are considered more responsible for managing and leading teachers and not for teaching (Murnane & Cohen, 1986), research on the impact of pay-for-performance plans on principals and vice-versa remains limited.

pay based on individual teacher success, but recently, group-, team-, and school-based schemes for teacher merit pay have emerged. Group- and/or team-based pay-for-performance teacher schemes can be grade-based, subject-based, or interdisciplinary.<sup>4</sup> School-based teacher schemes reward all teachers evenly if the school meets its performance criteria. These collective schemes appear less controversial (Goldhaber, 2006) than individual ones, as competitiveness and divisiveness are usually avoided (Firestone, 1994).

Individual teacher pay-for-performance plans have been the most implemented and the most studied plans, but holes in the research knowledge base remain. Moreover, the creation and “hybridizing” (Goldhaber, 2006) of teacher pay-for-performance plans in the forms of group-, teacher-, and school-based schemes, as well as combinations of them with individual teacher schemes creates an even larger knowledge void. The terms and possibilities listed above are all important in establishing the setting and informing this research on teacher pay-for-performance. Discussed in more detail below, the flexible parameters of the Texas incentive plan of this study allows for the incorporation of many of the aspects mentioned above, but at its heart, the Governor’s Excellence Educator Grant (GEEG) program remains a teacher-based pay-for-performance scheme.

GEEG is one of the more prominent teacher-based pay-for-performance schemes in American public education. As Podgursky and Springer (2007) report in some detail, other substantial teacher pay programs are also under way nationally. Denver’s Professional Compensation Systems for Teachers (ProComp) might be the most recognized. Piloted from 1999 through 2004, ProComp was scaled-up to district-wide

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<sup>4</sup>For example, a math teacher, English teacher, history teacher, and science teacher, etc., who all teach the same set(s) of students. These teachers collectively win (or not) rewards based on the performance of their students only.

implementation in 2005. It is weighted toward a knowledge- and skill-based model with variable pay possible through measures of student growth or market incentives. In total, ProComp consists of ten elements that fit within four bonus types: knowledge and skills, professional evaluation, market incentives, and student growth. Bonuses range from just over \$300 to about \$7,500.

In the spring of 2007, the state of Florida replaced its Special Teachers Are Rewarded (STAR) program with its teacher and administrator award program – Florida’s Merit Award Program (MAP). Rewarded teachers receive at least 5% but not more than 10% of the average teacher salary for the district. Awards are distributed as flat payments to all qualifying teachers within the district as individuals or in teams, but bonuses are not provided at the school level. At least 60 percent of MAP awards are based on student performance.

In Texas, GEEG is only one of three major initiatives in the Texas Governor’s Educator Excellence Award Program (GEEAP) and will be discussed in detail in the next section. GEEAP is the single largest performance-related pay program in United States public education, providing approximately \$330 million per annum to high-performing, high-poverty schools in Texas. The three programs combined will include about 1,300 schools yearly, awarding them with school-based awards ranging from \$40,000 to \$290,000 yearly dependent upon school student enrollment.

The Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG) – the second of three Texas state initiatives – is similar to GEEG in most respects, with only two significant differences. First, participating schools must be in the top half of Texas schools in terms of percent of economically disadvantaged students enrolled, whereas GEEG schools were limited to

the top third. Second, since many more schools are eligible to participate in TEEG, \$100 million is made available for bonus dispensation whereas GEEG funding was \$10 million per annum.

In addition to the school-level programs GEEG and TEEG, the District Awards for Teacher Excellence Grant (DATE) district-level program began in 2008. This program, at \$230 million annually through 2010, is eligible to all districts. Sixty percent of funds are to be directly awarded to classroom teachers while the other forty percent can be used for additional personnel awards or other teacher/professional development.

#### Texas Governor's Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG) Program

The GEEG program has been described at length in various reports and studies (Jacob & Springer, 2007; Lewis & Springer, 2008; Podgursky & Springer, 2007). For the purposes of creating a clear and fairly concise understanding of GEEG, I draw heavily from Springer, et al. (2007) and Taylor, Springer, and Ehlert (2008).

The GEEG program was designed to identify and award block grants to the 100 highest performing, highest poverty schools across Texas. Eligible schools had to be in the top third of Texas schools with respect to the share of economically disadvantaged students during the 2004-05 school year as measured by free- and reduced-priced lunch. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) then stratified the distribution of schools by type, so elementary schools had to be in the top third of the poverty distribution for elementary schools, middle schools had to be in the top third of the distribution for middle schools and so on. The identification strategy resulted in economically disadvantaged student thresholds of 81.3 percent for elementary schools, 65.4 percent for middle schools, 55.8

percent for high schools, and 70.5 percent for schools that serve mixed grade configurations. Because one school never finalized the design of its GEEG plan with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), a total of 99 schools participated in the GEEG program

Eligible schools also had to be identified as either high performing or high improving. High performing schools attained one of the two highest ratings in the Texas Accountability System, either Recognized or Exemplary. A Recognized rating meant that for every subject at least 75 percent of the tested students passed the state's high-stakes assessment, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). An Exemplary rating elevates the standard to at least 90 percent of the tested students in each subject tested passing the TAKS. Ultimately, all public schools with an Exemplary rating in the 2004-05 school year and in the top third with respect to student poverty were GEEG eligible, as were the Recognized schools with the highest shares of economically disadvantaged students in each grade type.

High improving schools had to be in the top quartile on either the Comparable Improvement (CI) math or CI reading/language arts rankings. The TEA determines the CI rankings by matching each Texas public school annually to 40 other Texas public schools on the basis of student demographics. The TEA then calculates the average change in student test scores from one year to the next. This means a school in the top quartile of CI has one of the ten largest average gains in TAKS scores among the 40 schools in its reference group.

TEA established a set of guidelines for participating schools to reference when designing their pay-for-performance plans. TEA guidelines divided GEEG program funding into two parts. Part 1 funds were designated as awards paid directly to teachers

who taught four or more hours during the typical school day (full-time teachers). Part 2 funds could be used to provide awards to other school personnel (e.g., administrators, librarians, teacher assistants, custodial staff, and cafeteria staff), or to fund professional growth opportunities, including professional development programs and teacher induction programs. Seventy-five percent of the total GEEG award was dedicated to Part 1 incentives. The remaining 25 percent was dedicated either to funding Part 1 or Part 2 activities.

TEA guidelines stipulated that Part 1 fund awards be based on a teacher's success improving student performance as evidenced by an objective performance measure as well as on a teacher's collaboration with faculty and staff. Although both student performance and collaboration are required criteria of a school's GEEG plan, schools defined the performance measures and benchmarks to evaluate a teacher's performance. According to Springer, et al. (2007), the most common measures of student performance are student assessments, and most schools elected more than one indicator to evaluate job performance (i.e., multiple assessments).

Two optional criteria for evaluating teacher performance also existed. First, Part 1 funds could have awarded a teacher's on-going initiative, commitment, and professional involvement in activities that directly impacted student achievement. Second, Part 1 funds could have awarded a teacher for working in a hard-to-staff subject area defined as an area experiencing a critical shortage of teachers or had a high teacher turnover rate. Forty-five of the ninety-nine schools developed GEEG plans based exclusively on the required criteria, while thirty-nine schools used a measure of teacher initiative in addition to the two required performance criteria (Springer, et al., 2007). The remaining schools

proposed plans that relied on some combination of the two required performance criteria and teacher initiative and/or working in a hard-to-staff area.

In NCPI's initial review of GEEG applications, 64 schools indicated that they intended to use the same plan for all three years of the program while the remaining 35 schools intended to modify their plans in future years – another flexibility of GEEG. In the original plans, school levels of accountability were distributed at school, team, and individual teacher units, especially for the student achievement criterion. In fact, some schools maintained accountability measures at multiple levels.

In total, the GEEG program made funds available in the fall of 2006 to 99 schools (including elementary, middle, and high schools proportionate to statewide figures). Funds offered ranged from \$60,000 to \$220,000 per year based on school enrollment. Nearly 60% of the GEEG schools were awarded \$90,000 or less.

TEA guidelines recommended that Part 1 fund awards should be at least \$3,000 and no more than \$10,000 per teacher. However, eligible-schools could opt out of this proviso by offering a brief justification in their grant application in favor of an alternative award distribution plan. The majority of GEEG schools designed and implemented pay-for-performance plans that offered both a maximum award and minimum award of less than \$3,000 per teacher.

The \$3,000 minimum suggested by the state encouraged a more competitive approach because fewer teachers were to receive bonuses. When the school average bonus per teacher was less than the suggested minimum, more teachers were receiving rewards in those schools than the state suggested originally. This indicates that most schools engaged in an egalitarian model of pay-for-performance that is characterized by a

low-stakes approach in which nearly all (if not all) teachers in a school received a reward similar in size to everyone else regardless of an individual teacher's performance, as reflected by student achievement measures.

GEEG program guidelines also stipulated that Part 2 funds were to be used as incentives for school personnel who did not receive Part 1 awards but contributed to improving student performance. In addition, Part 2 funds could have been used for professional development activities, signing bonuses, teacher mentoring programs, new teacher induction programs, funding for feeder schools, or any other professional program that directly contributed to improving student performance. Fifty-seven GEEG schools used some or all of their Part 2 dollars to provide awards to teachers eligible for Part 1 bonuses, thus making available a larger pot of award money to eligible teachers.

### Focusing This Study

Despite significant growth and interest in teacher pay-for-performance programs, the knowledge-base is virtually silent on the process of designing performance programs. This is a particularly salient issue considering the increasing roles teachers and other school personnel have in determining performance program structures in their schools, as seen in Denver and in Texas. This recent transition to include teachers in the design process could yield dual rewards. First, assuming a significant role in the design process might lead to greater teacher buy-in. As early as 1986, researchers asserted that teacher or staff acceptance of merit pay systems is a fundamental issue to its succeeding (Hoogeveen & Gutkin, 1986), and Firestone and Pennell (1993) contend that participation in incentive program design should increase teacher commitment.



In addition, greater teacher participation in the incentive design process could lead to greater teacher understanding of the performance plan. Several recent studies conclude that teacher understanding of their local- or state-designed incentive plan is limited (for example, Heneman, Milanowski, & Kimball, 2007; Jacob & Springer, 2007), a finding that seems to coincide with negative teacher opinion of pay-for-performance plans. As such, Ballou and Podgursky (1993) argue that teacher participation and understanding are crucial components to the successful implementation of teacher pay-for-performance plans.

Without substantial teacher input into and understanding of teacher pay-for-performance plans, significant principal-agent problems are likely to arise. The principal-agent problem highlights the difficulty of aligning agent (teacher) interests with those of the principal (plan designers, not necessarily the school principal). This problem usually occurs when the principal compensates the agent for performing acts that are useful to the principal but potentially costly to the agent, who maintains some noteworthy level of risk aversion (Holmstrom & Milgrom, 1991). If risk aversion is too great, agents could emphasize only those aspects of performance that are rewarded, leading to “dysfunctional behavioral responses” (Prendergast, 1999). Courty and Marschke (2003) highlight the dynamic learning context of incentive systems outside of education, directly influencing Podgursky and Springer’s (2007) contention that experimentation, trial and error, and iterative processes are necessary components to improve teacher pay-for-performance planning and implementation.

Performance incentive plans are theorized to induce change within a school context to meet the measurable goals established within the plan’s framework more

effectively: “That is, monetary rewards will generate specific behavior” (Firestone, 1991, p. 280). Much of the incentives literature focuses on teacher behavioral change – specifically, increased teacher effort, strategic teacher pedagogical change, and increased or dissolved teacher collaboration depending upon the incentive design. In conjunction with the accountability literature, there is also a noteworthy body of literature regarding unethical teacher behavior. Although each of these is important, they do not capture the complete array of potential changes possible in schools participating in performance incentive programs. Kelley (1999) and Kelley, Heneman, and Milanowski (2002) note that successful schools in Kentucky offered rewards such as extra field trips to students if scores were met. Still, there is very little systematic research conducted to understand what changes actually do occur within schools participating in performance incentive plans.

This study bridges the existing knowledge gap by studying teachers’ roles in and responses to a pilot pay-for-performance program implemented in 99 traditional public and public charter schools in Texas during the 2006-07 school year. More specifically, this study addresses the following three research questions:

1. To what extent were teachers involved in the development of their school’s incentive plan?
  - a. What roles, if any, did teachers play in designing their school’s pay-for-performance plan?
  - b. How were decisions about the school’s plan determined?
  - c. What processes were in place to disseminate information about the plan?
2. To what extent did teachers understand the pay-for-performance process of which they were a part?
  - a. To what extent did teachers understand the state’s program?
    - i. Were some aspects more understood than others? Why or why not?
  - b. To what extent did teachers understand their school’s specific plan?

- i. Were some aspects more understood than others? Why or why not?
  - c. What individual and school-level factors contributed to teachers reporting greater or lesser understandings of the program and their plans?
3. In what ways were teachers and schools impacted by their participation in the program?
  - a. How did teacher attitudes toward teaching changes, if at all?
  - b. To what extent did teacher pedagogical and other practices change, if at all?
  - c. To what extent were professional learning communities impacted?

This study focuses on elementary school teachers of grades one through five in eight of the 99 schools that participated in the GEEG program. School study sites were selected based on how they proposed to divide their teacher bonus pay, as defined in Taylor, Springer, and Ehlert (2008), and their location. I then systematically reviewed the selected schools' state-approved incentive plan applications. At each school, I conducted semi-structured interviews with four or five full-time instructional personnel who had been teaching at the elementary school site since its selection into the GEEG program, as well as an administrator at each school. Survey data collected by the National Center on Performance Incentives supplemented this research.

Focusing on elementary schools had important advantages. First, there were more schools from which to select study sites. Elementary schools formed about half of the schools participating in the GEEG program while middle, secondary, and nontraditional grade-configured schools made up the remainder. This is particularly important given that the schools were divided into categories based on their proposed award distribution strategy. Elementary schools are clustered in major urban areas at higher rates than middle and secondary schools, which facilitated the practical elements of reduced travel and expenses.

Second, public elementary schools are typically smaller than secondary schools. Small schools may lead to greater teacher involvement in the designing of the school performance incentive plan. Similarly, organizational and other changes might be more evident to teachers in smaller schools. In other words, smaller schools could (and probably should) lead to increased communication between teachers and between teachers and administrators as well as increased teacher participation in organizational processes and decisions.

The purposive selection of these elementary schools should have captured much of the available range of elementary school teacher responses and experiences implementing GEEG. Although GEEG instructional personnel were demographically similar to the rest of the state of Texas, the student population was not. GEEG school students were approximately 88% Hispanic and 10% African-American, which was substantially higher (Hispanic) and lower (African-American) than the average Texas school (Springer, et al., 2007). Although many of the GEEG schools were rural and located near the American-Mexican border, the schools selected for this research were limited to urban areas. Since incentive plans were finalized locally, there was considerable difference in the amounts and frequencies of incentive payment distribution. In other words, some school plans provided a majority of teachers with minimal incentive payments while other schools rewarded few teachers but with larger incentive payments.

There are some significant costs in choosing elementary school sites only. Since elementary schools are usually smaller than middle and high schools, the selected sites had considerably less GEEG funding, as the state offered schools lump sums based on student enrollment. Fewer total dollars offered could have led to less collective teacher

interest in meeting established goals. In addition, since fewer teachers work in elementary schools, it could have been the case that one person (e.g., principal or teacher-leader) took charge of or was nominated to determine the details of the school pay-for-performance plan. If this occurred, the design phase of the GEEG program, which encouraged wide-scale teacher involvement, would have been restricted.

Elementary school teachers could have been less likely than middle school and high school teachers to change their lesson design, subject focus, or pedagogical approach. Elementary schools have been held accountable to the Texas Education Agency in reading and mathematics since the mid-1990s, so an emphasis on these two subjects has existed for some time prior to the genesis of the GEEG program. Since elementary school teachers are responsible for teaching all core subjects, they might have already been emphasizing these subjects disproportionately. However, history, science, and other non-math and non-English teachers in middle and high schools could have significantly altered their teaching methods in order to assist their colleagues in raising student scores in tested subjects and bringing rewards to the school/faculty.

There are other important limitations worth highlighting. First, schools were invited to participate in the GEEG program, so there is no illusion of a random process. Only high-performing, low-income schools were invited to submit a GEEG plan, so findings should be bounded to schools that have shown some academic success already. Second, many teachers have left the profession or the GEEG school in which they taught, which could bias data analysis. Third, the fact that the process to determine the incentive plan for a given school occurred a few years ago prohibits substantial researcher observation and could hinder teacher recall of events. Last, the fact that Texas is a right-

to-work state and not subject to the same collective bargaining laws as some states with a strong union presence shapes this research and its implications significantly, especially when one considers the potentially debilitating nature of strong teacher unions on pay-for-performance implementation success and longevity (Ballou, 2001).

This dissertation is as follows. I conduct a review of all relevant education merit pay literature in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology employed for this research. In Chapters 4 and 5, I relay my findings on teacher involvement in the design process and teacher understanding of the GEEG program and school plans, respectively. I consider the impact of the program on teacher perceptions and behaviors and school professional learning communities in Chapter 6. I end this dissertation with conclusions, implications, and recommendations in Chapter 7.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter I review six strands of relevant teacher pay-for-performance literature. Initially, I report the documented pay preferences of educators. Second, I analyze empirical studies on the effects of teacher pay-for-performance initiatives on student outcomes. Third, I explain potential unintended consequences of teacher pay-for-performance plans. Fourth, I describe potential organizational and individual teacher changes as responses to teacher incentive plans. Fifth, I report teacher understanding of pay-for-performance programs. Finally, I consider teacher roles in designing pay-for-performance plans.

#### Pay Preferences of Educators

Teacher attitudes toward teacher performance pay plans are difficult to interpret. Public school teachers and teacher unions are often mischaracterized as opponents of compensation reform (Goldhaber, DeArmond, & DeBurgomaster, 2007), yet, “teachers do not seem to have rushed to embrace the concept” (Milanowski, 2006, p. 3). National polls conducted from the 1980s through the early 2000s indicate mixed teacher reaction, often depending on the specifics of the compensation reform or the wording of survey items. For example, as reported in Goldhaber, DeArmond, and DeBurgomaster (2007), a poll conducted by the National School Board Association found that 63 percent of teachers supported merit pay (Rist, 1983), but a poll conducted by the Gallup Organization Phi Delta Kappa found that 64 percent of teachers opposed merit pay

(Elam, 1989). Langdon and Vesper (2000) point out that a majority of teachers responding to Phi Delta Kappa's 2000 teacher poll were in favor of trying pay-for-performance although hardly any wanted to have student test scores included as a determining factor. A few early studies have highlighted teacher resistance to pay-for-performance plans and the ultimate failure of those plans (Darling-Hammond & Barry, 1988; Hatry, Greiner, & Ashford, 1984; Middleton, 1989; Murnane & Cohen, 1986). More recently, Farkas and team (2003) found that about 70 percent of teachers favored higher pay for teachers teaching in poor and/or low-achieving schools and approximately 63 percent supported tying pay to student performance.

In their study of the 1987-88 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), Ballou and Podgursky (1993) report descriptive statistics chiefly comprised of full-time teacher respondents' attitudes toward various types of merit pay. A majority of teachers responded favorably ("strongly favor" or "mildly favor") to the following three survey items (combined percentage of positive responses in parentheses):

1. Salary increases as part of career ladder in which teachers progress through several promotional levels based on their performance. (71.3%)
2. A merit pay bonus for exceptional performance in a given year. (55.2%)
3. A schoolwide bonus for all teachers in a school that shows exceptional performance or improvement in a given year. (65.2%) (p. 53)

Ballou and Podgursky (1993) also developed two OLS models to measure factors contributing to teacher attitudes toward merit pay<sup>5</sup>. They found many noteworthy results. District-level pay appears to have no effect on teacher attitudes toward performance pay.

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that merit pay is loosely defined in this early study. The dependent variable for their OLS models is an index consisting of six survey items, including the three provided in the text above. However, it is important to note that the other three survey items measure teacher attitudes toward merit pay and hard-to-staff schools instead of pay-for-performance.



Teachers who have been part of a performance-pay program but did not receive any awards are more positive toward pay-for-performance than those teachers who have not participated in a program before. In addition, teachers in large urban areas maintain more favorable views of performance pay than their counterparts away from cities. However, urban teachers are only slightly more favorably inclined toward teacher performance pay than are suburban ones.

Attitudes toward merit pay are independent of student, class, and/or school income, as measured by free- and reduced-priced lunches. Teachers of traditionally high achievers and low achievers are above average in their support of incentive pay. Teachers with greater experience are less likely to view performance pay favorably, but having a master's degree appears insignificant. In addition to experience, teacher attitudes toward pay-for-performance are also divided demographically. Women are less likely than men to be proponents of teacher incentives. African-Americans and Hispanics favor teacher performance pay more than whites do.

Goldhaber, DeArmond, and DeBurgomaster (2007) employed stratified random sampling in Washington state to obtain survey data on just over 3,000 teachers (response rate between 60 and 75 percent). Of the four teacher-pay constructs, only one measures merit pay as framed in this proposal.<sup>6</sup> Only 17 percent of respondents to the Washington State Teacher Compensation Survey (WSTCS) favored teacher performance pay. It is important to note here, as the authors do, that the phrasing of the survey item is crucial. On the WSTCS, performance pay was directly tied to increased student test scores while the SASS survey utilized by Ballou and Podgursky (1993) did not define nor explain

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<sup>6</sup> For this one teacher-pay construct, they asked teachers how they felt about extra pay for “teachers whose students make greater gains on standardized tests than similar students taught by other teachers” (p. 9). The other three constructs focused on shortage areas (subjects and location) and certification incentive.

“exceptional performance.” WSTCS respondents also indicate that out of the four options listed, teacher performance pay is clearly the least popular (ranked fourth of four on over half of the surveys).

Using an ordered probit model, Goldhaber and colleagues (2007) examined similar individual and workplace factors as Ballou and Podgursky had done with a nationally representative dataset more than a decade before. Their results are similar. Women and teachers with more experience are less supportive of teacher performance pay, while Hispanics are more supportive than whites. The coefficient for African-American teachers was also positive in comparison to whites, but it was not statistically significant. Members of teacher unions were less favorable of performance pay.

Teachers in schools with a large percentage of students receiving free lunch were more supportive of teacher performance pay in their parsimonious model, but this effect disappeared when district effects and within-school clustering were controlled. High school teachers appear more favorably inclined than do elementary teachers. Finally, two trust measures were incorporated, indicating that teachers who felt higher rates of trust of other teachers were less inclined to support performance pay, but teachers who felt higher rates of trust in their principal were more supportive of teacher merit pay.

Jacob and Springer (2007) administered an online survey to full-time instructional personnel in 199 traditional public and public magnet schools in Florida’s School District of Hillsborough County (SDHC) as part of a pilot study.<sup>7</sup> Teacher respondents in SDHC indicate only moderate support for incentive pay. Of the performance pay options, these teachers were favorably inclined toward individual teacher performance than school or

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that Jacob and Springer obtained a response rate of only 13.7 percent, and 23 of the schools had no respondents at all.

group performance. Like teachers in Denver's pilot study (CTAC, 2004), SDHC teachers express concern over maintaining a collaborative environment while about half contend that performance pay will not increase teacher effort. Similar to Goldhaber and team's (2007) findings in Washington, Jacob and Springer (2007) report that few teachers (35%) believe awards should be based on high student test scores on standardized tests.

Jacob and Springer (2007) also find that relatively inexperienced teachers (1-3 years) are much more likely to support teacher performance pay than are veterans (20+ years). Teacher race was not a significant predictor, but the study's statistical power was notably weak. In addition, teachers who either have a positive view of their principal, high self-efficacy measures, or are more risk-seeking and/or impatient are more likely to view performance pay positively.

In Texas, teachers responding to a survey conducted by the National Center on Performance Incentives as part of the year one evaluation of GEEG overwhelmingly identified student achievement gains as an important feature of teacher performance pay evaluations (Springer, et al., 2007). Over 1,600 teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools responded for a 62.4 response rate. More than 90 percent of them indicated that improving student test scores is of either moderate or high importance for evaluating teachers in incentive pay plans. In fact, student assessment ranked as the number one indicator out of the 17 provided in the survey.

This review of the pay-for-performance literature highlights some of the inconsistencies on teacher attitudes. Some of this variance is undoubtedly attributable to teacher background and contextual effects. Moreover, as discussed in chapter 1, incentive pay is a broad concept that encompasses a variety of programs. Survey items frequently

refer to merit pay in the abstract. When such items are specific, it can be difficult to compare teacher attitudes on various performance pay plans or types meaningfully.

### Effects of Teacher Performance Pay on Student Achievement

The research literature on pay-for-performance program goals or outcomes focuses primarily on improved student achievement, which typically is defined as increased test scores. With such goal conformity across plans, it is somewhat surprising that empirical evaluations of teacher pay-for-performance plans remain thin. The evaluation literature that exists does suggest that implemented merit pay plans at least correlate with higher student scores, but questions remain about how meaningful and/or lasting these increases are (see Glewwe, Ilias, & Kremer, 2004, as an example). I turn now to studies employing conventional treatment and control evaluation design, sequentially reviewing the studies based on their perceived rigor as delineated by Podgursky and Springer (2007).

In their experimental study on teacher performance pay in India, Muraldhararan and Sundararaman (2006) randomly sampled 500 rural schools in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Then, they assigned the schools to four treatment groups and one control group with each group comprising 100 schools. Two of the treatment groups had pay-for-performance systems tied to student test score gains: One group had an individual teacher pay bonus system while the other had a school-wide pay bonus system. The other two treatment groups received additional resources (teacher aides or an extra block grant). For the performance pay treatment groups, maximum rewards were substantial (an additional 14 percent of base pay for group rewards and 29 percent for individuals), but

the average bonus payments for both groups (4-5 percent) were relatively small. The researchers estimated incentive effect sizes of .19 in math and .12 in languages, respectively, relative to the control group. Moreover, by attempting ex ante to hold incremental spending across treatment groups the same, they report that performance incentive pay increased student scores significantly higher than resource treatment groups did. There was no significant difference between the individual and group-based pay-for-performance schemes. All results are based only on data from the first year of the study.

Glewwe, Ilias, and Kremer (2004) randomly selected 50 of 100 rural Kenyan primary schools (grades 4-8) for participation in a teacher bonus experiment. Rewards were spread school-wide and tied to student pass rates on district exams that test multiple subjects, including but not limited to English, Swahili, math, and history. The bonuses were sizeable (21 to 43 percent of one month's pay) and similar in scope to many offered in the United States. On most observable and measurable characteristics (such as the amount of homework assigned or teacher absenteeism rates), the teachers in the selected schools did not appear to change. The one noticeable exception was their increase in after-school test preparation. Glewwe, Ilias, and Kremer (2004) did find that students in the treatment schools passed the district exams at a higher rate than their peers in year one of the study and significantly higher in year two. However, non-incentivized exams showed fewer differences in student achievement during the same time period. Moreover, from study year one to study year two, the researchers found evidence of increased gaps in exam participation rates, test preparation sessions, and achievement scores between students in treatment and comparison schools. However, those achievement gains did not persist once the program ended.

Victor Lavy (2002, 2004) carried out two studies of performance tournaments<sup>8</sup> in Israel. In both of these studies, the program was designed to raise pass rates in low-socioeconomic high schools. Both programs used three formal assignment rules: grade range, past performance, and matriculation. These rules allowed for a rigorous regression-discontinuity study or “natural” experiment.

In the first study, Lavy (2002) inspected school-based competition<sup>9</sup> centered on year-to-year improvements in test scores for 62 non-randomly selected secondary comprehensive schools (grades 7-12) in Israel’s Jewish secondary state school system. The total sum of awards available to the schools was about \$1.4 million to be distributed to teachers and staff as merit pay as well as a portion earmarked for upgrading the general work conditions of the schools. Schools received awards ranging from approximately \$13,000 to \$105,000, and teachers from winning schools received equal awards ranging from \$250 to \$1,000, depending on the school. The program targeted schools that were the only one of their kind in a local area,<sup>10</sup> so Lavy employed a natural experiment technique by matching selected schools to similar ones in local areas that housed two such schools. He utilized panel data from 1993-1997 with the first two full academic years of implementation being 1995-96 and 1996-97). Lavy found a positive effect for participating schools in comparison with nonparticipating schools in the following ways: an increase in average test scores, an increase in the number of credit units of high school

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<sup>8</sup> Schemes in which prizes are paid to the winners of a contest based on the order of the winners. Therefore, prizes are not based on an absolute standard but on the basis of relative performance.

<sup>9</sup> In this case, only the top third performing schools – based on value added after controlling for demographics – received awards.

<sup>10</sup> School types include separate religious girls’ schools and boys’ schools and religious and nonreligious coeducational schools.

graduates, a higher proportion of students gaining the matriculation certificate and a reduction in the middle-to-high school dropout rate.

In the second study, Lavy (2004) examined teacher-based competition also run as a tournament but centered on student exit exam scores. The teacher participants were ranked on the basis of the value they added to their students' performances, with almost half of the 629 participating teachers receiving some type of financial bonus. The bonuses were substantial, ranging from \$1,750 to \$7,500 on an average base pay of \$25,000. Lavy also found a positive effect in this study, as the performance of participating teachers (regardless of bonus standing) rose relative to a comparison group of nonparticipating teachers. Specifically, student pass rates and test scores increased.

Merging data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) of 1988, their own survey on merit pay conducted in 2000, and the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), Figlio and Kenny (2007) compare the academic performance of schools with various types of merit pay plans versus schools without any such plans. Using the variation in performance pay bonuses, they constructed a school-level measure of the strength of the teacher incentive "dosage." They came to two conclusions. First, regardless of the size or strength of awards, schools that utilize performance incentive plans significantly increase school-level achievement. Second, higher levels of performance incentives result in greater achievement gains than do lower levels. As pointed out by the authors, these findings must be considered with some hesitation. Schools that are more effective in other hard-to-measure ways might be more likely to adopt an incentive plan, implying that results could be spurious. Because the data are

cross-sectional, Figlio and Kenny are unable to say with certainty whether or not the positive relationship is due to performance incentives or unobserved school quality.

Ladd (1999) and Clotfelter and Ladd (1996) examined the effect of a school-wide incentive scheme implemented in the Dallas Independent School District from 1991 through 1995. The Dallas Accountability and Incentive Program was created with the intention of increasing student achievement across all Dallas schools by providing a modest award to teachers in high-performing schools. Using multiple regression, the district ranked schools (i.e., a tournament) based on the “magnitude of the contribution the school made to the learning of its students” (Ladd, 1999, p. 2). Approximately 20 percent of schools received an award each year, with teachers and administrators in each winning school receiving \$1,000. In each study, the researchers consider the district as the treatment group, comparing pass rates in mathematics and reading on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) with those of five other large urban districts<sup>11</sup> in Texas. Findings from both papers are suggestive, as achievement in Dallas increased relative to the comparison districts.<sup>12</sup> However, the researchers also noted that a positive difference for Dallas was estimated a year prior to the scheme’s initiation, which raises concerns about the actual value of the Dallas initiative.

In an evaluation of a teacher performance-based management scheme in the United Kingdom, Atkinson, et al. (2004) studied the change in pay practices and student achievement for high school teachers who applied for and were considered performance-

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<sup>11</sup> Those districts are Austin, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio.

<sup>12</sup> That is, pass rates for seventh graders were significantly better in Dallas than in the other districts, with the exception of El Paso, which employed a similar reform effort. For high school students, drop out rates declined more rapidly in Dallas than in other districts. However, third grade results did not yield positive findings. In addition, improve test scores and drop out rates were significant for Hispanic and white students but not African-American students.



award eligible from 1999-2002.<sup>13</sup> This new pay system allowed teachers to earn an increase of up to 9 percent in salary base pay. Nearly all of the teachers who submitted an application were approved (97 percent). Even with such widespread approval, Atkinson and colleagues found that the introduction of the payment scheme increased student achievement in English and science considerably in eligible teachers' classrooms, although no significant improvement in mathematics was observed. Overall, the researchers state that the introduction of the payment scheme improved test score gains by approximately half a grade per pupil relative to ineligible teachers. It is important to note, however, that the authors were forced to rely on a small sample of schools for which linked student-teacher data were available.

Winters, et al. (2006) utilized a differences-in-differences approach and two individual fixed effects models to evaluate the impact of the Achievement Challenge Project Pilot (ACPP) in Little Rock, Arkansas. Participating teachers received a bonus based on the average academic growth of students in their class as measured by a battery of nationally normed standardized tests, the Stanford Achievement Test, and the number of students in the class. Depending on the level of student gains, teachers could receive bonuses of 50, 100, 200, or 400 dollars per student, which yielded a possible maximum of a little more than \$11,000. At the time of their analysis (2003-2006), only two elementary schools were participating in this program. Three schools with similar demographics were selected as the control group. One of the intriguing features of this study is the use of two assessments, one of which was not tied to bonus distribution. Students at schools where teachers were eligible for bonus pay performed significantly

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<sup>13</sup> Teacher data for the 1997 and 1998 academic years were also included in this study to ensure data for a two-year period before and a two-year period after the onset of the policy.

better in mathematics on both assessments than did their peers at the three control schools.

In one case where the outcome goal was not increased student achievement, Eberts, Hollenbeck, and Stone (2002) studied an alternative high school in Michigan in the 1994-1995 academic year through the 1998-1999 academic year. The school introduced a bonus system to reward teachers for raising student course completion rates as a response to a growing dropout rate. Teachers could earn up to 20 percent of their base pay as a bonus. Matching the school to a similar one considered comparable, the researchers found that course completion rates did increase significantly. However, non-targeted variables such as student achievement, pass rates, GPA, and daily attendance worsened as academically marginal students remained in school. Still, the study is important in its demonstration of teachers adapting to meet short-term goals that are tied to bonus pay.

Considered collectively, the evaluation literature reviewed above remains thin, especially in terms of experimental research and longitudinal consideration of performance pay in the United States. Still, the studies do suggest that teacher pay-for-performance initiatives are generally positive in the sense that targeted goals (i.e., increased student achievement) are usually attained to some degree. Moreover, even in studies such as Glewwe, Ilias, and Kremer (2004) and Eberts, Hollenbeck, and Stone (2002) where results are less decidedly positive, teacher behavior still conforms in such a way that “you get what you pay for. Thus, education policymakers need to be careful in designing such programs, and must expect to continually refine the programs as they learn about behavioral responses” (Podgursky and Springer, 2007, p. 941).

### Potential Unintended Consequences of Teacher Performance Pay Plans

To date, little empirical work has been conducted with regards to potential hazards of implementing teacher pay-for-performance plans. Instead, many concerns voiced over potentially perverse effects of teacher merit pay stem from theory, conjecture, and anecdotal evidence. Much of the thin empirical evidence that is included in performance pay debate derives from the growing body of accountability literature, which is closely tied to the evaluation of performance pay programs. From these various sources, I weave together an overview of many of the unintended consequences that have emerged thus far.

The aspect of competition fundamental to many pay plans can have the perverse effect of decreasing the enjoyment of teaching (Shannon, 1986). Opponents of teacher pay plans have often argued that the job itself has intrinsic value that bonuses and competition could upset (Murnane & Cohen, 1986; Darling-Hammond & Barnett, 1988). In a seminal merit pay paper based on their microanalysis of teacher and administrator interviews spread across six districts, Murnane and Cohen (1986) contend that teacher merit pay does not provide a solution to the “problem” of motivating teachers. Instead, they argue that “the nature of teachers’ work” (p. 6) comprises many unmeasured and immeasurable objectives beyond student achievement in certain subjects at certain points in time. Moreover, they argue that the loose relationship between particular teacher actions and student learning cannot be explained away by administrators. In other words, once one concludes that testing is not a sufficient way to reward teachers, there is no suitable way to explain why some teachers receive bonuses and some do not. Moreover,

administrators are typically unable to suggest steps to non-winners on how to become award recipients.

In a similar vein, Firestone's (1991) case study research of two school districts – one implementing merit pay and the other job enlargement – concluded with the suggestion that teacher performance pay could discourage teachers and would-be teachers from continuing or entering the profession as the multiple purposes of an educator become more confined. Through document analysis, district and school meeting attendance and observation, and interviews of board members, administrators, and teachers, he found that enthusiasm for teaching in the Mossville district – where merit pay had been implemented – had declined and pedagogical practices had become more standardized or streamlined. Furthermore, teachers reported that they and their students had grown less engaged as lessons became more rehearsed. These findings should be considered with caution. First, only one district implementing merit pay was evaluated in this study. Second, the questionnaires teachers completed differed considerably between districts: The questions and statements for teachers in the job enlargement district were stated positively while those in the merit pay district were stated negatively.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps more disturbing for teachers, performance pay plans have often relied on subjective evaluations and/or poorly measured outcomes (Cullen, et al., 2006). For example, Firestone (1991) found that teachers were especially worried about the subjective nature of their observers, especially considering different teachers were rated by different observers. Moreover, teachers frequently report four problems with direct observation as an evaluation: 1) interrater reliability; 2) rater knowledge; 3) authority

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<sup>14</sup> For example, in Likert scale format, the job enlargement district teachers responded to the statement “CEP should be continued.” while the merit pay district teachers responded to the statement “TDP should be *retained* but improved.” It seems that these statements were supposed to be comparable.

misuse; and 4) insufficient number of observations (Firestone & Pennell, 1993).

Similarly, through the survey of teachers at three elementary schools, Hoogeveen and Gutkin (1986) found that teachers with better relationships with their principals typically had greater trust in principal evaluations, which indirectly seems to bolster concerns about fairness and objectivity.

When evaluations require principal input, principals find that they must make distinctions among faculty. Some principals would rather avoid the responsibility. They often provide token evaluations that place nearly the entire faculty at the top of the scale (Ballou & Podgursky, 1993; 2001; Ebert, Hollenbeck, & Stone, 2002). Seldom do principal evaluations appear punitive. Instead, it is not uncommon for teachers to wonder aloud how other faculty members received bonus payment (Firestone, 1991). Moreover, if principals can win rewards, they occasionally instruct teachers how to prepare for test formatting and describe the type of students who will affect class averages the most (Shannon, 1986).

Teacher incentives can also lead to teachers shirking their duty to educate all students by cream skimming or focusing their efforts on marginal pupils who are close to reaching targets (Adnet, 2003) at the potential cost of other students (Cullen, et al., 2006). This routinized system of educating can lead to less teacher responsiveness to other student needs, academic or otherwise (Firestone & Pennell, 1993). Teaching to the test can raise student achievement levels, but the learning indicators are sometimes artificial (Lazear, 2003). As discussed above, Glewwe, Ilias, and Kremer (2004) found significant student achievement gains in Kenya during the period of teacher merit pay, but those gains did not last once the merit funding was discontinued. Indeed, “teachers...may focus

on the easiest way to increase the rewarded measure while ignoring measures that schools and parents ultimately want to improve” (Lavy, 2007, p. 92), including shifts from non-tested subjects and subject areas (Klein, et al. 2000).

Accountability research indicates the existence of more dire strategies on the part of school leaders and teachers to show student gains. Cullen and Reback (2006) examined Texas data from the 1993-1998 fiscal years that covered 88 percent of state public schools and 97 percent of state public school students, specifically focusing on possible exploitation of the structure in the form of administrators exempting students from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills achievement exams in order to increase school ratings. Their analysis led to two important results. First, they found that schools increased exemption rates of students of subgroups most likely to constrain a school from reaching the next highest rating, with exemption rates inflating by up to 7 and 14 percent for Hispanic and African-American students, respectively. Second, such maneuvering appears to have paid dividends, as “strong short-run incentives to exempt additional students are found to raise the likelihood that a school had a one-year increase in the fraction of students classified as exempt by 11 percent” (p. 5). These findings are some of the most recent in a line of research that documents increased special education rates (Haney, 2000; Deere & Strayer, 2001; Figlio & Getzler, 2002) and lengthier student suspensions during assessment periods (Figlio & Winicki, 2005) in combination with new or increased testing/accountability policies.

Jacob and Levitt (2003) developed an algorithm to detect teacher cheating that combined information on unexpected test score fluctuations and suspicious patterns of answers for students in a classroom. Analyzing Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)

achievement data for all Chicago elementary students (grades 3-7) from 1993-2000, the authors found thousands of instances of classroom cheating, representing 4-5 percent of the classrooms each year. The unsophisticated cheating that they unearthed was identifiable through multiple students having similar blocks of answers and/or students correctly answering many difficult questions but missing many easy questions. Because they were searching for the most egregious cases of cheating and their artificially manipulated test for cases of moderate cheating went undetected in their algorithm, the authors also conclude that their findings probably understate the cheating reality. Moreover, teacher cheating appears quite responsive to relatively minor changes in policy changes in accountability and, presumably, various incentive-related changes.

With the ratcheting up of pressures on teachers to increase student achievement – due to accountability measures, performance incentives, or some combination – teacher relationships and the “collegiate ethos” can often become strained (Adnet, 2003, p. 146). Individual teacher merit pay plans threaten to impair teacher cooperation (Ballou & Podgursky, 1993), creating an environment where teachers might hide good ideas for their own success at the expense of other teachers (and students) (Firestone & Pennell, 1993). On the other hand, school-, group-, or team-level plans can lead to free-rider problems where bad or lazy teachers use the success of others to gain unearned rewards (Ladd, 1999). To some extent, all of the potential unintended consequences that have been presented above can contribute to the decay of a school’s professional learning community, and ultimately, the school’s climate.

### Performance Incentive Plans and Professional Learning Community

Concerns centered on the possible disintegration of collegiate ethos, the loss of teacher collaboration in competitive individual plans, and free-rider problems in group or school plans are legitimate. Although little existing research on teacher incentives addresses these concerns during or after incentive programs are implemented, the worries are real in the sense that researchers, administrators, and, perhaps most importantly, teachers often expect them to be real problems. Some of the most telling research on the effects of performance incentive plans on schools' professional learning communities considers teacher perceptions of and participation in plans with regards to collaborative practices. This research often extends to cover shifts (or lack thereof) in organizational goals that often coincide with changes in teacher collaboration.

In one of the first studies to focus on the relationship between bonus pay and aspects of professional learning community, Shannon (1986) assessed teacher and administrator reaction to a reading program that combined merit pay and other business practices to increase student achievement on standardized tests. Using questionnaires, interviews, observation, and district documents, he investigated whether school personnel would constrict their definition of reading to that prescribed by district policy. Although survey and interview data indicate that teachers and administrators accepted the prescribed definition of reading, teacher survey data was inconsistent with teacher interview data regarding the legitimacy of merit pay for teachers and whether or not the merit pay program advanced reading achievement. However, survey and interview data were consistent in response to questions around improved faculty and faculty-



administrator relations: Healthy competition, teacher-teacher encouragement, and teacher-administrator relations did not benefit and potentially were undermined.

Smylie and Smart (1990) studied a Midwestern metropolitan district of approximately 10,000 students (K-12) during the 1986-87 and 1987-88 academic years. The district installed a plan that allowed teachers to participate in either a merit pay program or a career ladder program, with approximately 65 percent of district teachers participating in one of the programs for at least one academic year. Nearly two-thirds of participating teachers responded to the researchers' survey. Perhaps the key finding from this study for merit pay is the association between teacher support for merit pay and its perceived effects on relationships with other teachers. Teachers opposed to merit pay were found to be more likely than their peers to believe that merit pay would have detrimental effects on teacher relationships while merit pay supporters saw the program as an opportunity to enhance their prospects of professional recognition.

In a series of papers, Heneman, Kelley, and Milanowski reported on the impact of school-based performance awards throughout Kentucky and in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina. Some of the first publications focused primarily on interview data – Kelley (1999) in Kentucky and Heneman and Milanowski (1998) in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The authors employed a similar structured interview protocol for select awarded elementary, middle, and high schools. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Heneman and Milanowski (1998) found mixed teacher reviews to items in a category he labeled “enablers,” which included questions on curriculum alignment and the content of achievement tests, teacher collaboration for the improvement of student achievement, and team planning to help meet student attainment goals.

In a more comprehensive study, Kelley (1999) examined interview, document, and survey data from the mid-1990s in those two districts as well as Douglas County, Colorado, and schools in Maryland.<sup>15</sup> In both Kentucky and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, teachers consistently reported feelings of personal satisfaction when their school met goals. Moreover, “the opportunity to work collaboratively with other teachers on curriculum and instruction” (p. 317) was of the most likely positive outcomes of the school-based performance award programs. Two of the most suggestive findings from the study are the potential for alignment of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards through the provision of clear goals and motivations for collaboration around these goals. Approximately half of Kentucky teacher survey respondents indicated that the state was highlighting its real goals by attaching awards to them, indicating that there is a real opportunity for such programs to align organizational goals and complementary ones (e.g., professional development) with student achievement goals represented in the compensation system. As evidence of that possibility, Kelley (1999) relays that approximately 70 percent to 90 percent of responding teachers in Kentucky and in Charlotte-Mecklenburg reported spending more hours on teaching and teaching-related tasks, changed the content of what they taught, and worked together to plan and implement changes in what they taught in order to achieve school accountability goals.

Also using teacher survey data from Kentucky and Charlotte-Mecklenburg,<sup>16</sup> Heneman and Milanowski (1999) conducted a factor analysis that collapsed the measured

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<sup>15</sup> Sample sizes and participants and methods varied by year and across locations.

<sup>16</sup> The survey data from Kentucky and Charlotte-Mecklenburg are the same as the Kelley (1999) study. These surveys serve as the only source of data for Heneman and Milanowski (1999) while Kelley uses it as her primary source of data, although many other sources are cited within her study. The data was attained through a sampling method across state/county that yielded teacher samples of over 5,000 in Kentucky and over 2,000 in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, although the response rate was only 1,748 (31 percent) in Kentucky and 1,150 (39 percent) in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

outcomes into four categories: goal attainment rewards, learning, sanctions, and stress. Although not the priority of their paper, survey responses for both samples ranked working toward school-wide goals and working cooperatively with other teachers very highly. Interestingly, both working toward goals and working cooperatively were clustered under “learning,” which also included participation in education reform, students learning new skills, and additional opportunities for professional development. Like Kelley (1999), the researchers conclude that extrinsic and intrinsic rewards can be combined to advance student achievement, noting that teachers perceive that school-based performance award programs “foster occurrence of several other desirable outcomes pertaining to student and *teacher* learning” (p. 339, emphasis added). The authors reprised many of these issues in a summation piece that compared and contrasted the two projects at length (Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2002).

More recently, Jacob and Springer (2007) conducted an online survey of full-time teachers in 199 traditional public and public magnet schools in Florida’s School District of Hillsborough County (SDHC). Although the response rate was poor overall (approximately 20 percent), the findings are intriguing. Responding teachers’ general view of incentive pay was not encouraging, as over 55 percent agreed or strongly agreed that performance pay would “destroy the collaborative culture of teaching” (p. 43). Nearly two-thirds of respondents did not believe that teacher pay-for-performance would stimulate teacher collaboration. With regards to the politically divisive STAR<sup>17</sup> program,

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<sup>17</sup> STAR (Special Teachers are Rewarded) was the state’s pay-for-performance initiative enacted in 2006 before being replaced by MAP (Merit Award Program) in 2007. The STAR plan was met with much resistance, with opponents arguing that there were too few teacher indicators of teacher performance, no group- or school-based awards, and the state imposed itself into a domain traditionally governed by local school districts. At the time of this paper, it was clear to the authors that MAP was considered an improvement in Florida, but the type and extent of improvement was not yet settled. The significant increase in teacher responses of “don’t know” are indicative of this.

over 70 percent of respondents agreed that the program would have caused resentment at their school while over 75 percent disagreed that the program would have benefited teaching and learning. Survey results in relation to the new MAP program are less decisive, as over one-third of respondents indicated that they did not know in response to the same two survey statements as above. Interestingly, over 75 percent of teachers indicated that teacher collaboration should be rewarded with incentive pay.

Lewis and Springer (2008) interviewed school principals in Texas to better understand why some schools did not participate in the Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG) program. In total, 53 of 1,201 invited schools declined to participate in the state's pay-for-performance program. Of those, 37 principals or other school or district leaders were interviewed. The belief that performance incentives might be detrimental to their school was one of the leading reasons that schools declined to participate. Namely, ten interviewees noted previous experience with a career ladder program<sup>18</sup> that was associated with teacher competitiveness and a declining school culture. Many interviewees noted a difference between the career ladder program and TEEG, but "the shared experience of the career ladder program among senior faculty left lingering disfavor toward performance pay policies in general" (p. 17).

In their evaluation of the first year of the Governor's Educator Excellence Grant program (GEEG), Springer, et al. (2007) provide teacher survey data for two different points in time. Their first set of survey data captures early teacher experiences with GEEG. In January of 2007, they conducted online surveys with the first 74 GEEG schools with approved plans, but many of these schools had very low response rates.

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<sup>18</sup> The Texas Teacher Career Ladder program (1984-1993) was an unsolicited but occasionally mentioned program in these interviews.

Therefore, the first survey data presented was limited to 1,571 teachers (62 percent) at 52 schools. Of these respondents, over 85 percent rated collaboration with faculty and staff as moderate or high as an important measure for incentive pay – the second highest rated measure behind only improvements in student achievement. Almost two-thirds of teachers reported that collaborative change had taken place as a response to GEEG with informal collaboration – discussing and sharing resources and/or materials – being the most frequently cited response (21.4 percent).<sup>19</sup>

In the spring of 2007, Springer, et al. (2007) again conducted an online survey of GEEG teachers, administered to all full-time instructional personnel at all 99 participating schools. The overall response rate was 80 percent, but there were no responses from seven schools.<sup>20</sup> Over 75 percent of respondents disagreed (on a scale of 1/Strongly Disagree through 4/Strongly Agree) that the teacher bonus pay opportunity discouraged teachers from working together. In addition, over 70 percent disagreed with the statement “I have noticed increased resentment among teachers since the start of our GEEG program.” Similar survey results are found for items probing competition versus cooperation and teacher responsibility to one another. These results hold true, too, when they are broken into bonus recipient and bonus non-recipient categories. In other words, merit winners and non-winners had similar overall responses to teacher community and collaboration survey items.

The professional learning community/pay-for-performance literature reviewed above is not complete or conclusive, but it is suggestive. First, contrary to much of the oppositional theory regarding teacher merit pay, performance bonuses do not necessarily

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<sup>19</sup> Approximately 25 percent of responses were not valid, so the percentages reported here are probably low.

<sup>20</sup> Omitting those seven schools yields a response rate of approximately 85 percent.

lead to teacher embitterment nor do they necessarily lead to undesirable competitiveness or conflict. Second, a sizeable portion of teacher negativity toward performance pay, at least in regards to teacher collaboration and community, emanates not from experience but from supposition, although the Lewis and Springer (2008) piece clearly links bad performance pay program experiences to school and district leader pessimism. Finally, as the series of studies conducted by Kelly, Heneman, and Milanowski illustrate, clearly delineated program goals can organize schools and improve collaboration.

### Teacher Understanding of Performance Pay Programs

Perhaps part of the apprehension that many teachers maintain toward pay-for-performance extends from their lack of understanding or knowledge of teacher merit pay programs. As discussed in Chapter 1, merit pay is just one of many bonus pay types. The magnitude of bonus pay types could be overwhelming considering teachers already have many demands. In a similar vein, negative experiences with pay programs can counteract improvements or even considerably different plans, as illustrated by Lewis and Springer (2008). Moreover, since most teacher merit pay plans are implemented from the top (state or district) down, teachers could conceivably spend little time learning the intricacies of another initiative. Some recent studies indicate that teacher understanding of the plans in which they participate is mixed.

Jacob and Springer's (2007) study of teachers in the School District of Hillsborough County appears to illustrate potential teacher confusion when they are faced with multiple or changing pay programs. Specifically, teachers responded to survey items about two different state incentive programs: The STAR program had just ended due to

much political turmoil and the MAP program had just replaced the STAR program. The authors claim that the “most striking feature [of their study] is how little teachers appear to understand how these programs operate” (p. 26). Approximately half of teacher respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “ I have a clear understanding of what STAR would have measured and rewarded.” Regarding the MAP program that was just underway, over 60 percent of teacher respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the same statement. The low teacher response rate (approximately 20 percent) could factor in to the rates we see above if teachers who are opposed to merit pay were more likely to respond to the survey. Still, if this sample is even close to being representative of the population, the suggestion that about half of teachers participating in a performance pay plan do not understand it well seems staggering.

On the other hand, examples of programs where teachers understand objectives exist. In 2004, the Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC) released its final report on the progress of the pay-for-performance pilot in Denver, a program that was ultimately adopted as policy by the city district. CTAC’s ongoing involvement in assisting the district and researching the program allowed them to collect achievement, survey, interview, observation, and document data over four years. Teachers consistently reported maintaining a deep understanding of the district’s program. Much of their understanding appears to follow the logical chain established in the pilot by its creators: Teachers had the option to follow suggested targets or to develop their own. With the

autonomy to develop their own student achievement and other goals,<sup>21</sup> logic dictates the understanding of their own design.

From their series of papers culminating in “Teacher Motivation and School-Based Performance Awards,” Kelley, Heneman, and Milanowski (2002) find evidence that performance pay programs in Kentucky and Charlotte-Mecklenburg were “reasonably successful” (p. 381) in achieving teacher understanding. As discussed above, the researchers found that teachers in both areas generally felt as though the incentive programs helped their schools to organize. In addition, teacher pedagogical strategies and collaboration became more focused, for which an understanding of performance pay plans seems necessary. Indeed, according to surveys with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), teachers in Charlotte-Mecklenburg had a mean of 3.4 and teachers in Kentucky had a mean of 3.6 on the authors’ “goal clarity” scale. Teacher interview data confirm that teachers generally understood the programs in which they participated.

In conjunction with some of her early analysis of Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Kentucky teachers, Kelley (1999) analyzed interview and document data of Maryland teachers and their participation in the Maryland Rewards for Success program established in 1996. Elementary and middle schools that demonstrated two consecutive years of statistically significant improvement on the Maryland state assessment received rewards up to \$51,000 to be used for school improvement but not for salary bonuses for teachers. Thus, there is a critical difference between this program and most performance pay plans considered elsewhere in this literature review. Still, it is important to point out that many teachers in Maryland’s program were completely unaware of its existence. Some others

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<sup>21</sup> The district mandated that self-developed goals be approved by school principals.



were only aware because their school had won a reward, but prior to winning, many of those teachers were also unaware. However, Kelley (1999) determined that principals typically were very aware.

Even principals and other school and district leaders are prone to not fully understanding performance incentive plans, however. In Lewis and Springer's (2008) examination of schools declining participation in TEEG, many interviewees indicated that their schools did not participate due to past experiences with a career ladder program that induced a breakdown of teacher collaboration and trust. However, none of these leaders discussed the merits of TEEG's emphasis on productive teacher collaboration in the form of a mandatory criterion for bonus pay. More importantly, Lewis and Springer (2008) identified three principal or leader misperceptions in the interview data. First, some interviewees indicated that funds could not be given to non-classroom teachers at all when concessions for such actions were evident in state documents. Second, school leaders were concerned that the program could not include teachers of non-core and non-tested grades, which, again, was stated clearly in state documents. Finally, some leaders suggested that no funds could be used for professional development, resources, etc. Collectively, a case can be made that school and district leaders are not always attuned to the details of performance plans even if this study represented the minority of schools that declined TEEG participation.

Although some school leaders do not understand the incentive program in which they participate or in which an invitation to participate has been extended, they are generally more knowledgeable about the plans than are their teachers. If schools are given the choice to participate in such a plan, principals are likely to either be the one to

make the choice or to disseminate the information to the faculty. In some cases, such as Kentucky and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, incentive programs are relayed to teachers in such a way that understanding is nearly universal and schools can collectively move toward goal attainment. In other cases, such as Maryland, performance programs and their details are not clearly communicated to schools.

### Teacher Roles in Designing Pay-for-Performance Plans

The Community Training and Assistance Center (2004) report on Denver pilot schools illustrates a relatively transparent goal-setting process in which the teachers play the lead role. In fact, each participating teacher set his/her own objectives by which he/she would be measured. Early returns indicate an overwhelming success, as approximately 90 percent of teachers met their objectives.<sup>22</sup> However, to date, the freedom allotted to teachers to develop their individual goals in Denver's pilot study appears to be an outlier. The latitude given to teachers in this project appears to be a pendulum shift of considerable proportions.

According to Gratz (2005), teachers in the Denver pilot won the right to set objectives, but these were not originally part of the initiative. However, district teachers had recently undergone years of contentious bargaining and a strike, so they and the district were able to settle on a deal – teacher participation in exchange for some concessions. Those concessions were the teacher-determined objectives noted above, a study conducted by an agency outside of the district to assess the program (CTAC's honors), and the plan would be subject to a vote. As the inevitably of the plan settled on

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<sup>22</sup> As measured by assessment scores and evidence approved by principals. Thus, principals approve teacher objectives and assess them.

the district, teachers felt as though they should be in the process from the start, as indicated by interview data.

Perceived fairness has been important to motivation in private-sector reward programs and appears so in education programs, too. This seems especially important in the development of goal commitment and clarity of teachers participating in performance incentive programs because “policy implementation research has repeatedly underscored how difficult it is for policy to penetrate teaching practice” (Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2002, p. 382). Smylie and Smart (1990) contend that “as implementors and final arbiters of education policies, teacher opposition can lead not only to political turmoil but also to nonparticipation and subversion of original policy objectives” (p. 141).

Murnane and Cohen (1986) concluded that teachers were legitimated through their participation. In their seminal paper, they speak at length as to why pay-for-performance plans do not work in education, specifically discussing how the “nature of teaching” does not work well with narrow measurement of student achievement. However, they also discuss their findings from interviews of principals and teachers at six districts where merit pay plans were surviving. Legitimizing teachers in the process was one of four themes found across the districts. In all six of the districts, teachers played a significant role in designing the merit pay plans, and in the two districts where merit pay had existed for more than 20 years, teachers had submitted suggestions and filed complaints, frequently leading to program revision. Murnane and Cohen (1986) go on to suggest that teacher participation leads to program longevity for two reasons. First, the process of participation reveals teacher information and preferences that might not

otherwise come to light since teachers would lack the forum to make meaningful contributions. Second, the impression that the system is not thrust upon them but instead one that they helped to create diminishes tensions. Teachers might still ask why they did not receive a bonus, but the intensity with which the question is asked is probably less. Moreover, if any teacher feels as though he/she has been treated unfairly, he/she realizes that there is an opportunity to change or adjust the plan moving forward.

The potentially positive impact of teacher participation has not been lost on academics. The following statements from research and academic papers demonstrate this recognition:

What the research says: When teachers are involved in the design of a program, it maximizes the likelihood of teacher/union approval and often improves the program's effectiveness. (Azordegan, et al., 2005, p. 3)

Merit pay proponents and foes alike have observed that teacher opposition is a fundamental reason for the failure of merit pay plans, and that teachers must be involved in all stages of program design as well as implementation if pay for performance is to succeed. (Ballou & Podgursky, 1993, p. 50)

The general lack of teacher support for PFP indicates that the state needs to work collaboratively with teachers and district officials and to build "grass-roots" support for the program. State and local leadership should focus on developing the program in collaboration with teacher leaders, rather than mandating program participation and requirements. (Jacob & Springer 2007 p. 31)

The first year evaluation of the Governor's Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG) program reveals that high levels of teacher participation is possible if an incentive program is designed to elicit such participation. The Springer et al. (2007) study reports that over 94 percent (80 of 85) of schools indicated that full-time classroom teachers were involved in the development of the school plan, and over 94 percent (64 of 69) of schools indicated that full-time classroom teachers voted on the approval of their school's plan.

Approximately 94 percent of schools also indicated that regular feedback was provided to the faculty and staff regarding program progress and 88 percent of schools conducted meetings to gather feedback from faculty and staff. In the study's first round of teacher surveys in January of 2007, over 75 percent of teacher respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Teachers at my school were involved in the development of this program."

These studies are clearly limited by time, place, and program, amongst other concerns. Still, this thin research literature on teacher participation in performance program design and implementation indicates that value might exist for increased teacher participation in the future. That so very few education pay-for-performance studies seriously consider the importance of teacher participation in program design is somewhat surprising considering how important teacher input is to implementation research more broadly. Recent studies seem more likely to discuss the possible benefits of teacher participation, especially those focused on the various Texas grants that mandate teacher participation.

### Chapter Summary

Teacher preferences regarding pay-for-performance appear to vary from somewhat favorable to not favorable at all, depending on survey type, sample surveyed, and demographic factors. It seems, however, that as survey items more explicitly define pay-for-performance or include student achievement measures, teacher views become less favorable. Still, international and national research indicate that pay-for-performance plans typically yield positive effects in terms of student achievement or other desired

outcomes – at least in the short term. Many potential unintended consequences loom, including cream-skimming or other manipulations, including cheating. Educators and researchers most frequently cite teacher collaboration and other aspects of trust and community to be factors most at risk. Teachers often report that they lack sufficient understanding of the plans in which they participate. Not surprisingly, teachers traditionally have had little input into pay-for-performance planning.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present the various components of my overarching methodology. I first discuss the research design and rationale, emphasizing the study's naturalistic paradigm and explaining how the various research methods unite to form a coherent whole. Then, I detail each method type – survey, document, and interview – in turn. Each method type description accounts for my selection of participants and sites, data collection steps, and data analysis procedures.

#### Research Design and Rationale

This study's research design is a mixed-methods one situated in a naturalistic or constructivist paradigm. My emphasis on a mixed-methods design grows largely from early discussions with my dissertation committee, where we collectively noted how previous National Center on Performance Incentives (NCPI) survey data had only been analyzed in isolation, and that the teacher (and principal) interviews and school documents that I intended to conduct and analyze could present a clearer picture of GEEG if investigated together. In their analysis of nearly 60 empirical mixed-method evaluations, Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) propose five purposes for mixed-method design. Although this study is not an evaluation, the proposed purposes are noteworthy and guide much of my conceptualization behind this mixed-methods approach. The five purposes are as follows:

- *Triangulation*: The corroboration of results to increase the validity of inquiry results.

- *Complementarity*: The elaboration and enhancement of results from one method with the results from other methods, increasing interpretability and meaningfulness.
- *Development*: The use of results from one method to inform another method, capitalizing on methodological strengths.
- *Initiation*: The discovery of paradox and contradiction in order to increase the breadth and depth of inquiry results by examining them from various perspectives.
- *Expansion*: The extension of the range of inquiry through the selection of methodological approaches most appropriate for various data collection.

All five of these purposes are evident in this research, but, admittedly, triangulation and complementarity are probably the two purposes that most guided this research design, as the various approaches were undertaken to confirm the findings emerging from each one as well as increase the detail in which the results could be reported.

Ideally, this study would have included prolonged observations of GEEG teachers prior to, during, and after the implementation of their schools' performance incentive plans. Such observational data would have better informed us of teacher roles in designing school plans, their understanding of those plans, and any collaborative or other individual or organizational changes. Unfortunately, GEEG had already been implemented in the schools for over two years when this research began, and observations would not have yielded substantial information since I would not have been able to compare GEEG observations with pre-GEEG observations. Instead, the primary measure for data collection in this study is the semi-structured interview of teachers who taught in GEEG schools. Given the timing of this study, semi-structured interviews serve as the most logical tool for collecting data. Many teachers have remained in GEEG schools since the program's inception and can best speak to the research questions posed in this study. Surprisingly, few researchers of teacher pay-for-performance have interviewed teachers to date, especially on their roles in incentive plan design and



development. This lack of interview research appears in lockstep with the limited roles teachers have played in performance incentive plans, at least until GEEG (one exception being PROCAMP in Denver – see CTAT, 2004).

In order to make the teacher interview data most meaningful, however, I conceptualized a layered approach to collecting and considering teacher performance incentive data. The systematic process that I assumed began on a broad level and narrowed with each subsequent step. In a sense, the various data collected and analyzed in this study tell their own but related stories. Specifically, I assessed GEEG teacher survey data collected by the NCPI in the fall of 2008.<sup>23</sup> This data provides a sense of the GEEG landscape across Texas schools, including teacher beliefs and attitudes regarding pay-for-performance broadly and GEEG more specifically. I added two survey constructs of my own in the most recent NCPI survey, allowing me to focus survey data on teacher community and other potential individual and organizational changes. I also analyzed the GEEG school plans for each of my interview research sites. Teacher (and principal) interviews were conducted in those schools. In sum, general GEEG storylines emerge from the survey data while more illustrative examples that personalize the GEEG experience emanate from the document analysis and teacher interview data.

In terms of this study being of a naturalistic paradigm, Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide five axioms of naturalistic research that focus this study. I briefly list each of these axioms followed by a concise statement of its applicability to this study. First, naturalistic studies assume that realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic. Teacher interpretation of and response to incentive plans depend on the combination of numerous

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<sup>23</sup> NCPI also conducted multiple teacher surveys prior to the fall of 2008. Descriptive analyses of these survey data are available in various NCPI reports. The fall of 2008 survey is arguably the most reflective of all of these surveys since it was conducted after the completion of the GEEG program.

factors such as the actual plan, grade taught, school and class demographics, teacher philosophy, and other school- or district-level initiatives. Second, the knower and the known are interactive. Indeed, since my primary source of data is interview, the way that I pose questions, interact with teacher interviewees, and conduct myself generally will affect teacher responses. Third, working hypotheses are bound by time and context. The GEEG program lasted only three years, and the generalizability of this study is limited to participating Texas public elementary schools. Fourth, it is impossible to distinguish between cause and effect. Since teachers are reporting their own interpretations and recollections of events, this study moves more toward gaining insight into larger contextual issues than producing concrete answers. Finally, inquiry is value bound. My decisions regarding whom to interview, what questions to ask, and other procedural decisions reflect values that I bring into the research. In their more recent work, Guba and Lincoln (1994) note that constructivist or naturalist research is also subjectivist, dialectical, and relative to local realities.

### Methodology Types

#### Interview

As discussed in chapters I and II, teachers have had limited opportunities to participate in designing and implementing performance pay schemes in their schools. The Texas Education Agency encouraged teacher involvement in the development of school GEEG plans. Prior survey research conducted by NCPI (Springer, et al, 2007) indicates that teachers were more involved in the development than is typical, but that data alone

provided only limited insight into teacher roles, responsibilities, and participation in the actual process. For this research, teacher interviews were the primary source of data.

Principal interviews were also conducted as one way to triangulate data.

### Sites and Participants

*Schools.* This study's focus on urban<sup>24</sup> elementary schools significantly reduced the number of GEEG schools available to study. Still, 40 schools remained. However, in addition to the state-backed GEEG program, the Dallas and Houston independent school districts have had substantial district-level incentive programs in place since before GEEG. Factoring in the possibility that since some teachers in those districts might have difficulty distinguishing between the two incentive programs as well as my having enough other urban elementary schools available to study, all Dallas and Houston schools were dropped from consideration for the qualitative component of this study.

Ten schools in four districts were originally identified based on two factors discussed below. I contacted school administrators by phone and email to inform them of the study and to solicit their participation. Administrators of two of those schools in one district agreed to serve as the pilot sites for this study. Administrators at five other schools also agreed to participate. Of the remaining schools, one school declined my request and one district (two schools) denied access and requested that I submit a proposal for research once statewide testing was finished. I then identified five additional schools and contacted them, gaining access to three of them and rounding out a school

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<sup>24</sup> The focus on urban elementary schools centers largely on convenience. Most of the GEEG schools were located in urban/suburban areas, which reduced travel time and cost greatly. In addition, participating elementary schools were often clustered in city areas. Multiple middle or high schools were seldom located in the same district (or city region).

sample of eight total – spread across four districts and three urban areas – not including the pilot schools.

Prior to requesting permission to conduct interviews at the schools, I weighed two school factors that could potentially contribute to increased variation in teacher responses. First, I accounted for the differences in school plan award schemes by dividing the schools into two groups based on levels of award competitiveness – egalitarian and competitive. In Taylor, Springer, and Ehlert's (2008) ongoing work, the authors calculate Gini coefficients as well as conduct other statistical analyses to separate schools based on the variation in their reward schemes. The Gini coefficient is a common measure of financial inequality where, in their study, a value of zero would indicate a distribution that is perfectly equal. That is, all teachers receive an equal award from a fixed amount. A value of one would indicate a distribution that is perfectly unequal where only one teacher receives an award from a fixed amount. Schools closer to perfect equality are labeled as egalitarian schools since, typically, more teachers are receiving awards and the variation of those rewards is minimal. Schools closer to perfect inequality are labeled as competitive schools, since, typically, few teachers receive awards and the variation of rewards in those schools is typically greater than other schools.<sup>25</sup> For the schools at which I conducted interviews, Gini coefficients range from .01 to .13 (average .06) for egalitarian schools and from .41 to .58 (average .51) for competitive schools.

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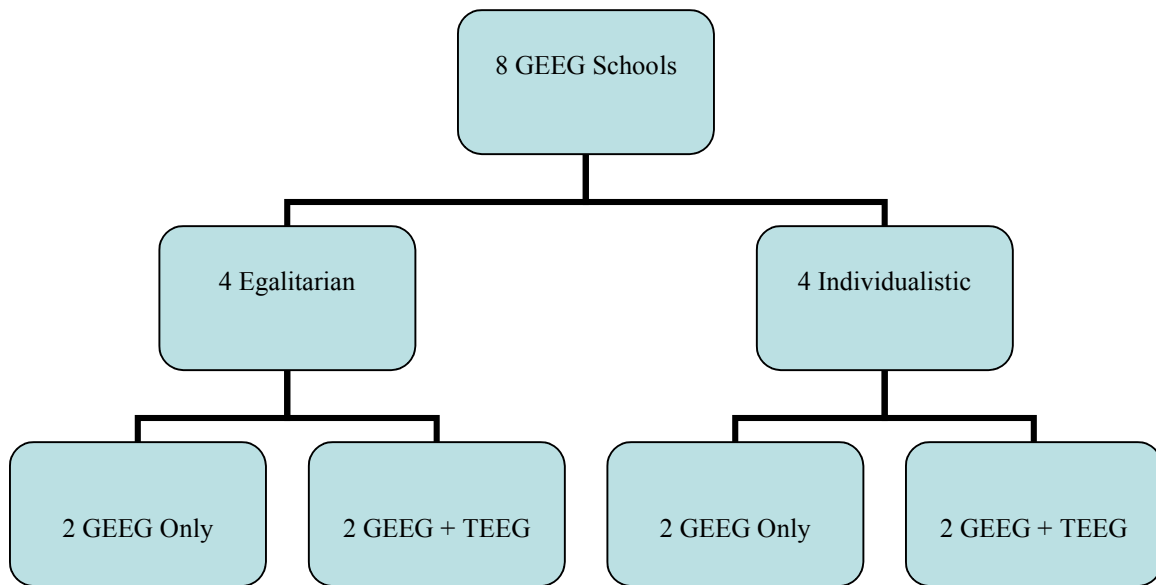
<sup>25</sup> Although the Gini Coefficient provides a scale of 0 to 1, it should be noted that few GEEG schools designed a plan or actually awarded teachers at a competitive level of more than .60. In other words, few schools even approach a most competitive award design or payout. On a typical Gini scale of 0 to 1, the distribution is positively skewed. An important follow-up to that, however, is that if one scans the work of Taylor, Springer, and Ehlert (2008), he/she will find that the distribution approximates normality if the scale is considered from 0 to .60 only.

Second, I considered each school's TEEG status for the 2008-2009 academic year. The Texas Educator Excellence Grant program began after the GEEG program but then ran concurrently with and subsequent to the GEEG. Thus, schools originally participating in GEEG could not simultaneously be TEEG schools, but they could become TEEG schools upon the completion of the GEEG program. In most of its features, the TEEG program is very similar to the GEEG program. Based on school status as defined by TEA, about half of the GEEG schools transferred into the TEEG program upon the conclusion of the GEEG one. Those schools continuing from the GEEG program into the TEEG program could be fundamentally different in a couple of important ways: They could be higher performing schools or consist of a faculty (or administration) more motivated by merit pay.

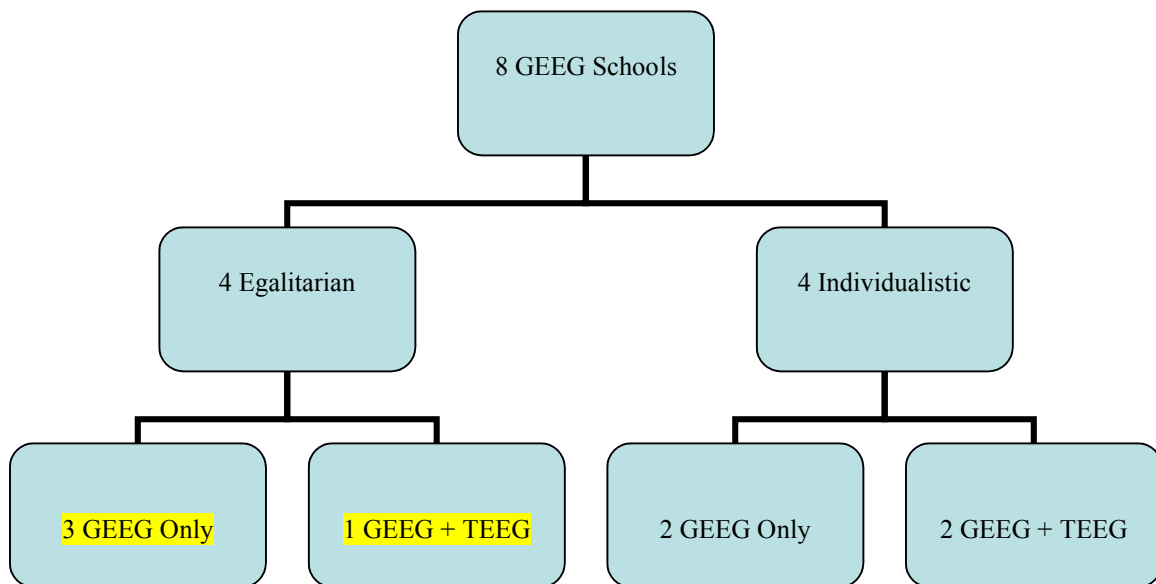
Given the two ways of differentiating the GEEG schools in this study, a representation of the ideal study would include sites that represent the combinations illustrated in Figure 3.1. This would include an even number of plan and school types throughout the sample – four schools with egalitarian plans and four schools with competitive plans. Then, each of these categories would consist of two schools whose merit pay funding end with GEEG and two schools whose funding continues into the TEEG. In this study, however, only one egalitarian school continued on to participate in TEEG. In order to maintain eight study schools total, I elected to pursue an unbalanced model whose egalitarian section is shown in Figure 3.2.

*Teachers.* After gaining access to school sites, I requested that administrators provide me with a list of teachers who had been teaching at the school for at least four years and the grade level (or special subject) they taught. Limiting teacher interviews to

**Figure 3.1: Ideal Variation of Interview Sites**



**Figure 3.2: Study's Unbalanced Model**



those teachers with at least four years of experience at the school seemed critical because newer teachers would not be able to speak to the origins of GEEG in the school, the involvement of faculty in plan design, development, and implementation, or the possible individual or organizational change within the school as a result of the program. I avoided interviewing teachers of the same grade level in the same school whenever possible in order to observe greater variation within the school and a potentially fuller account of the GEEG process. If there were multiple experienced teachers in a school teaching at the same grade level, I randomly selected one to interview.

In sum, I interviewed 34 full-time elementary teachers from eight schools.<sup>26</sup> Table 3.1 provides some teacher demographic and other data. Over half of the teachers in the interview sample were Hispanic and more than a quarter were African-American. White, Asian, and multiracial teachers comprised the other nearly 18 percent of the sample. Teachers were typically very experienced overall as well as within their respective schools, which is not surprising considering teachers with zero to three years of experience at the school were excluded from the sample. Nearly half of the teachers were TAKS grade-level teachers – grades 3-5. More than a third served on the school-level committee that was responsible for developing the school’s GEEG plan. Nearly all of the interviewees were female.

*Principals.* I also interviewed the principal of each of the eight schools (do you want to briefly state at this point that they were all there during the program, which would also segue nicely to the next sentence that gives more detail). Six of them had been principal prior to the implementation of GEEG, one entered the school at about the time

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<sup>26</sup> I also interviewed ten full-time teachers at the two pilot schools. The pilot teacher demographics and educational features are comparable to the other teachers with the exception of race, where no African-American teachers were interviewed at the pilot schools.

**Table 3.1: Teacher Interview Summary Statistics**

	Ra ce					Exper ience		Grade Taught			TAKS	Committee	Gender			
	Total	Black	Hispanic	White	Other	Total	School	Non-TAKS			TAKS			TAKS	Members	Female
								K	1	2	3	4	5			
2008	34	26.47%	55.88%	11.76%	5.88%	17.62	13.62	8.82%	17.65%	23.53%	17.65%	20.59%	8.82%	47.06%	35.29%	91.18%

\*Statistics do not include pilot schools.



of notification, and one other entered after the plan had been finalized. Five of the principals were female. Four were African-American, two were Hispanic, and two were white. Of the seven principals who were at their respective schools at the time of notification, five were actively involved in the school-level decision-making committee. The remaining two, who were from the same district, were slightly more removed from the process although they were still responsible for assigning teachers to the school committee.

### Data Collection

I conducted all teacher and principal interviews during one day visits to each school. Teacher interviews were one-to-one<sup>27</sup> semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A) that were approximately 20 to 40 minutes in length.<sup>28</sup> Interviews were conducted during teacher planning periods either in their classrooms or in meeting rooms set aside for the day specifically for these interviews.<sup>29</sup> All teacher interviews were audio recorded and transcribed professionally.<sup>30</sup>

Principal interviews were also one-to-one semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) that were approximately 20 minutes in length. These interviews occurred in

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<sup>27</sup> I also considered conducting focus groups to attempt to gain deeper insight into how GEEG impacted teachers. However, schools initially receptive to the research were skeptical about focus groups and hesitant to participate.

<sup>28</sup> The majority of teacher interviews were approximately 28 to 34 minutes in length. A few teachers who seemed disinterested in or unsure of the GEEG plan in their schools spoke significantly less.

<sup>29</sup> There was one exception to this. One school did not establish meeting times during teachers planning periods but asked me to conduct teacher interviews in the classrooms while students worked quietly at their desks. The noise and misbehavior of a few students in two classes impeded the interview process.

<sup>30</sup> I stopped recording during one interview as the fire alarm rang incessantly in the background. I continued the interview and took notes.

the principal's office or in meeting rooms. I audio recorded seven of the eight principal interviews and had them transcribed professionally.<sup>31</sup>

### Measure Development

Survey items from GEEG and TEEG online surveys were considered as starting points for the development of teacher interview protocols. In addition, I inspected teacher interview protocols developed as part of the Project on Incentives in Teaching (POINT) research project in Nashville, a three-year teacher pay-for-performance experiment of Metropolitan Nashville Public School middle school mathematics teachers and their students and schools. Although my teacher interview questions are generally broader than those asked in the aforementioned protocols, each source contributed to the development of my teacher interview protocol. My principal interview protocol was constructed as a check of teacher interview data and was completed after the teacher interview protocol was finalized.

*Teacher Interview Protocol.* The data that emerged from NCPI-developed surveys as well as the findings of other teacher performance pay studies led to the development of the interview protocols found in this research. Although that work is informative and in some cases suggestive, teacher responses have often been limited to categorical responses that are frequently limited in meaning and difficult to interpret. For example, many of the NCPI survey items limited teachers to four response categories – “Strongly Disagree,” “Disagree,” “Agree,” and “Strongly Agree.” The distinction between levels disagree or agree are not straightforward. Moreover, survey research indicates that respondents frequently avoid the extremes (Nardi, 2006). Since teachers did not have an “I Don’t

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<sup>31</sup> At the eighth school, the principal and I were both short on time, so I conducted the interview over lunch and took notes.

Know” or “No Opinion” response available to them, one must question what these results really mean.

Relying on the guidance of Schensul and LeCompte (1999), I constructed fairly general questions around my four research domains: teacher participation in designing the school plan, teacher understanding of the school plan, possible change in the teacher professional learning community, and program “after effects.” I began the protocol with questions on teacher participation in order to start the interviewees with a concrete topic for which they could give a personal account. I felt that it was important to enable interviewees to respond confidently about their own experiences.

The second interview domain, teacher understanding, was addressed next. This topic is much more abstract and required teachers to grapple with their understanding of GEEG regardless of their actual knowledge of the program. Placing this domain second made sense for a couple of reasons. First, teachers were already speaking freely in response to the participation questions. Second, the ease of responding to the questions in the first domain empowered teachers to discuss the abstractions of pay-for-performance and GEEG more freely. The rest of the interview protocol was sequenced on walking the teachers chronologically through the GEEG process. After discussing their participation in the design and subsequent understanding of the GEEG program, I asked teachers to compare their beliefs and attitudes regarding their school’s professional learning community prior to GEEG with their experience during GEEG. Finally, questions about the “after effects” of GEEG were asked. Demographical questions were asked in closing. (this is gonna be annoying, but do you want to change this paragraph to either all active or passive voice? You switch back and forth)

*Principal Interview Protocol.* The order of questions in the principal interview protocol is similar to that of the teacher interview protocol. Again, as in domains one and three, I asked the principals to discuss their own roles and/or attitudes before asking them about their staff's roles and/or attitudes. In addition to making the principals comfortable answering my questions, their responses were critical to weighing the trustworthiness of teachers' answers. For example, some teachers might have reported that faculty had relatively no input into the program design, but principals could have indicated that only teacher leaders or outstanding educators had serious roles in the designing the school-specific GEEG program.

#### Data Analysis

*Teacher Interviews.* Again, following Schensul and LeCompte's (1999) example, I created code names for the emerging domains, factors, and sub-factors. These were consistent with the interview protocols designed prior to the interviews. Although the semi-structured format of interviewing allowed for follow-up and clarification questions, the majority of the interviews asked the same key questions. Variation in interviews was due more to differing time constraints across and within research sites. I utilized the qualitative software package NVivo8 to assist me with managing, organizing, and coding interview data.

Throughout all interviews, I recorded notes, capturing gestures or other reactions that tape-recorded transcripts did not. In addition, I made methodological, theoretical, and personal notes about the research that informed subsequent interviews and data analysis. These contributions to an "audit trail" (Halpern, 1983) helped greatly in establishing "confirmability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of results.

I also systematically compared teacher interview data to their respective school incentive plans, which highlighted the extent of teacher involvement in plan design. In addition, I compared teacher interview data and survey data within a constant comparison framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This undertaking served as a check of the interview data that I collected.

*Principal Interview.* Principal interviews were analyzed in nearly the same way as teacher interviews were. Although the assumed domains of data were loosely the same, the more general questions asked of principals allowed for greater latitude within the domains already established as well as the materialization of more indirectly related additional domains. Constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was employed primarily to triangulate teacher interview data.

### Document

Although the GEEG was a non-competitive process, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) still required participating schools to complete a formal “Request for Proposal” that would ultimately turn into a binding contract between each school and TEA. Qualifying campuses were required to distribute 75 percent of their funding for teacher incentives based on at least the following two criteria: success in improving student performance using objective, quantifiable measures and collaboration with faculty and staff that contributed to student achievement. A teacher’s assignment in an area or school that has been traditionally hard to staff and/or a teacher’s demonstration of on-going initiative or commitment were optional criteria. According to Springer and colleagues (2007), 45 of the 99 schools submitted plans with only the mandatory criteria while the

other 44 schools designed plans with some combination of mandatory and optional criteria.

In addition, TEA required that each application address the following requirements:

1. The rewarding of teachers for positively impacting student achievement, as approved by both a campus-level committee and a district-level committee.
2. The validation of significant teacher involvement in the development of the incentive plan through attendance records, meeting minutes, or other evidence.
3. The spending of grant money on awarded campuses.
4. The specification in employment contracts or local compensation policy that qualifying employees may receive an incentive payment to the extent authorized.
5. The school's publication of its incentive plan for public viewing.
6. Evidence of the presentation of the incentive program at a regularly scheduled school board meeting.
7. Letters from at least three teachers outlining their (and teacher) involvement in the process as well as their support of the plan. (Texas Education Agency, 2006)

School applications usually consisted of a few noteworthy components, including a narrative<sup>32</sup> of events leading up to plan formulation, a narrative of general school-level committee practices, plan details by criterion, planned bonus pay distribution by teacher grade and expected minimum student achievement levels and/or gains, meeting minutes and/or sign-in sheets, and teacher letters of plan involvement and approval.

### School Sample

The sample of documents analyzed as part of this research stem mostly from the same set of schools that comprise my school interview frame. I analyzed the proposals and related documents (i.e., teacher documentation and letters) of each of the schools where I interviewed teachers, including the pilots. In addition, I analyzed the documents

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<sup>32</sup> It is hard to determine who wrote the narrative for these plans, but they vary considerably in the amount and clarity of information provided. Two principals indicated that they had written them for their schools.

of some other elementary schools in each district where only one school participated in teacher interviews. The analyses of those school documents are not included in this dissertation but contributed to my thinking about broader area and district influences on school-level planning. Documents of schools that declined to participate in teacher interviews were read but not analyzed.

Table 3.2 provides some introductory statistics to the eight school documents that were analyzed in depth. Four of the schools were from the same district while the other four schools represented three districts. Three of those schools, however, were located in two adjacent school districts. Seven of the schools received \$90,000 or less per academic year of participation. Only one school elected to devise a plan that spanned all three years of the program, although about half of all GEEG schools did so (Springer, et al., 2007). Half of these schools opted to include criterion three in their plan for at least two years, but none of them used criterion four (hard-to-staff schools or subjects).

**Table 3.2: School Documents Summary Statistics\***

	Total	Districts	Urban Areas	Size of Grant Awarded			Plan Continuous**	Optional Criteria	
				\$60,000	\$90,000	\$135,000	Years 1-3	Criterion 3	Criterion 4
2008	8	4	3	3	4	1	1	4	0

\*Statistics do not include pilot schools.

\*\*Schools could devise a Year 1 plan and a Years 2 and 3 plan or one plan that would be continuous throughout the GEEG program.

The pilot schools (not included in the table) each received \$60,000 per academic year and included both optional criteria in their applications. One’s plan was continuous while the other’s was discontinuous.

### Data Analysis

I read the performance incentive plans of the two pilot-study elementary schools in order to develop a better sense of the plans in general and to consider how my lines of inquiry were addressed within them. All school pay-for-performance plans included information on the size and dispensation of reward money, notable measures of student achievement, and teacher collaboration requirement. Teacher plan involvement and understanding varied by school. “After effects” were not addressed in any school plan.

In each plan, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that informed critical background information (i.e., how many teachers were to receive bonus X) or addressed my lines of inquiry served as data points that were organized systematically. I then assigned each school plan a number (i.e., School #1, School #2, etc.) before creating brief, coherent case reports (2-4 pages, see Appendix C) for each site. In conjunction with my reflection on the various survey and interview protocols mentioned above, early engagement with these reports informed my teacher and principal interview protocols.

Moreover, familiarity with these plans was essential for a few reasons. First, a review of the plans enabled me to identify holes or discrepancies in the plans. Also, using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I noted similarities and contrasts across plans, emphasizing the school plan relationships across bonus structures. Second, a working knowledge of the plans enabled me to ask more relevant and clear probing interview questions. Finally, the plans were used as a check on teacher participation in and understanding of their school’s performance incentive design. In sum, the analyses of the school plans substantiate the “trustworthiness” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the interview data.



## Survey

The National Center on Performance Incentives administered its final online survey to participating GEEG schools in the fall of 2008. Continuing its general line of questioning from previous surveys, it addressed key concepts related to performance pay generally and GEEG specifically. Early NCPI survey data and the most recent one provide a sense of the GEEG landscape across participating Texas schools, including early teacher beliefs and attitudes regarding pay-for-performance broadly and GEEG more specifically. As part of the Fall 2008 NCPI survey, I added two survey constructs, allowing me to gather survey data focused on my second research question – what happened after the school plan was implemented. Teachers at all 99 GEEG schools were requested to participate in this survey and given two weeks to respond. It is important to note that this survey approach does not ensure a sample of respondents that are representative of all GEEG teachers.

## Sample

Teachers from 97 of the 99 GEEG schools responded to the online survey, yielding an overall teacher response rate of nearly 76 percent. Of those 97 responding schools, 49 were elementary only schools.<sup>33</sup> The NCPI survey was open to all educators at a given school, thus the original sample size of elementary school respondents (1,844) included paraprofessionals and part-time teachers. These employees were removed from the sample, dropping the N to 1,461. Upon further inspection and consideration, I concluded that first year teachers and experienced teachers in their first year at a given school were probably not reliable sources regarding GEEG since they did not begin

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<sup>33</sup> The remaining schools were middle schools or high schools, sixth grade or ninth grade centers, or served in some less traditional capacity such as all grades.

working for the school until after the program had finished.<sup>34</sup> Thus, these teachers were also dropped from the sample, lowering the N to 1,318. Of the remaining sample, data appeared to be missing at random for 27 teachers, which comprised only two percent of the remaining sample. Those 27 teachers were dropped from the sample yielding a final N of 1,291 elementary school teachers.

Table 3.3 provides summary statistics of the elementary school teachers responding to the NCPI survey. Teachers of Hispanic origin constitute nearly two-thirds of the sample, followed by whites (18 percent), blacks (11 percent), and others (5 percent). Most teachers are female (85 percent). Nearly three-fourths have attained a Bachelor's degree as their highest with almost another 25 percent earning a Master's degree. The majority of teachers have between 4 and 14 years of total experience as well as experience at the school in which they are currently employed. A larger percentage of teachers are new to their respective schools than teachers are new to the field, indicating noticeable teacher mobility rates amongst this sample.

Table 3.4 provides summary statistics for the schools with teachers responding to the survey. The 49 schools are located within 20 districts.<sup>35</sup> Over 80 percent of the schools are located in urban areas – either city or suburban locations. When delineating schools by the level of competitiveness of the plans they designed, about 45 percent of the schools opted for a plan that was less competitive and another 33 percent formed a

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<sup>34</sup> In fact, a sizeable amount of the surveys completed by these teachers were missing data not at random. Survey items that sought comparisons by year frequently went unanswered. One has to question the accuracy of those surveys where responses were provided.

<sup>35</sup> The number of GEEG schools within a district ranges from one to five.

**Table 3.3: Survey Summary Statistics - Teacher Level**

		Race			Teaching Experience			Highest Degree			Gender		
					Total			At School					
Total	Black	Hispanic	White	2-3 Years	4-14 Years	15+ Years	2-3 Years	4-14 Years	15+ Years	Bachelor's	Master's	Female	
2008	129	11.23%	65.69%	17.58%	12.01%	51.74%	36.25%	22.39%	60.88%	16.73%	73.35%	24.71%	84.59%

**Table 3.4: Survey Summary Statistics - School Level**

		Plan Competitiveness				Urbanicity		TEEG			
		Designed		Distributed							
Total	Districts	Less Comp	More Comp	Less Comp	More Comp	Rural	Urban	Selected			
2008	49	20	44.90%	22.45%	32.65%	40.82%	34.69%	24.49%	18.37%	81.63%	53.06%

more or most competitive plan.<sup>36</sup> However, once the plans were formalized by the disbursement of award monies, plan competitiveness shifted slightly toward a more moderate level, increasing from about 22 percent in the planned phase to approximately 35 percent in the distributed phase. Also, just over half of the schools were selected to participate in the TEEG performance pay program upon the completion of the GEEG one.

### Measure Development

NCPI conducted its most recent educator survey in November of 2008. Although the survey was adapted to collect post-GEEG teacher data, the core of the survey remained similar to previous ones discussed in detail by Springer and team (2007). In addition, NCPI granted me approximately one page in this survey to collect data more aligned with this study's research questions. With that space, I added two survey constructs to the educator survey – one on teacher professional learning community and the other on changes post-GEEG or program “after effects.”

*NCPI.* Since GEEG's inception, The National Center on Performance Incentives has conducted multiple online surveys of GEEG instructional personnel. The survey constructs and items have remained relatively unchanged, as the center has focused in part on teacher attitudinal and behavioral changes over time. Leading researchers from Texas A&M University, University of Michigan, University of Missouri-Columbia, Vanderbilt University, and RAND Corporation played key roles in developing, editing, and approving the primary survey instrument. The survey addresses the following four key concepts related to performance incentive programs in general and GEEG specifically:

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<sup>36</sup> A more detailed explanation is provided below.

- Teachers' attitudes about performance incentive programs and GEEG specifically;
- Teachers' professional behavior in response to their school's GEEG programs;
- The implementation process of GEEG school programs; and
- Teacher background characteristics (i.e., professional experience, educational background). (Springer, et al., 2007, p. 65)

Each of the constructs was followed by approximately six survey items to which teachers responded by checking the option that best represented their attitude, understanding, or perception.

As mentioned above, my limited input into the NCPI survey restricted my ability to create multiple survey scales.<sup>37</sup> I cannot with confidence suggest that there are constructs in the survey for those domains. Moreover, the “after effects” items are not more than a loosely associated set. Therefore, most of the statistical analyses reported in this dissertation are limited to descriptive statistics. Although these statistics are not ideal, they are suggestive regarding the levels of teacher plan involvement, teacher understanding, and other relevant domains. This is especially true when they are considered in concert with document and interview data. The professional learning community construct, however, has been developed more significantly and is worth a brief discussion.

*Professional Learning Community Construct.* Much of the performance pay literature conjectures and/or suggests that teacher collaboration will be negatively impacted by pay-for-performance. Since teacher collaboration is an integral part of teacher professional learning communities, I originally focused on teacher performance pay studies that examined teacher collaboration and employed survey methods. Although

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<sup>37</sup> Again, the “after effects” scale was designed less as an actual scale measuring a construct and more as separate items that would offer highlights of potential consequences and/or actions associated with the completion of the GEEG program.

these studies (including CTAC, 2004; Kelly, 1999; Springer et al., 2007) informed my early thoughts on professional learning communities, they did not encompass all of the important aspects of professional learning community.

Therefore, I turned to non-performance pay literature that more closely addressed professional learning community. Two of these sources, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993) and *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement* (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) enhanced my understanding of professional learning community and the aspects of it that were necessary to capture through survey. Professional learning communities house teachers who question and challenge one another while respecting creative contributions and investigating new conceptions of teaching and learning (Little, 2002). This requires a significant level of teacher cooperation and respect (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996), which ultimately leads to a sense of community with a coherent focus on school missions and goals (Newmann, 2002).

Goldring and Cravens (2008) employed a “professional learning community” survey construct for teachers of charter schools. The nine items focus on teacher collaboration, but also include measures of teacher respect, teacher openness or freedom to speak, continued teacher learning or professional development, and teacher risk-taking or classroom creativity. This survey construct is rooted in the Institute of Education Sciences’ funded project on the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL). Their Alpha coefficient for the construct was .92. I ultimately adopted their construct for this study.

In this study, principal-components factoring of the 9-item scale yielded one factor with an eigenvalue over one (5.80), accounting for 64 percent of the variance in

respondents' results. Factor loadings ranged from .69 to .89 (See Table 3.X for more detailed information). Scale reliability as measured by Cronbach's alpha was greater than .92.

**Table 3.5: Factor Loadings: Professional Learning Community**

Item Statement	Loading	
1. Teachers respect other teachers who take the lead in school improvement efforts.	0.79	
2. Many teachers openly express their professional views at faculty meetings.	0.68	
3. Most of my colleagues share my beliefs and values about what the central mission of The school should be.	0.81	
4. Teachers at this school trust each other	0.84	
5. Teachers are willing to question one another's views on issues of teaching and learning.	0.81	
6. Teachers are expected to continually learn and seek out new ideas.	0.80	
7. Teachers are encouraged to take risks in order to improve their teaching	0.79	
8. Teachers typically go beyond their classroom teaching to address the needs of students.	0.81	
9. Teachers do a good job of talking through views, opinions, and values.	0.89	
	<u>Eigenvalue</u>	<u>Cum %</u>
	5.80	64.47

### Statistical Methods

The OLS regression models discussed below were developed with the professional learning community construct in mind. However, they are applicable (and utilized) for some singular non-professional learning community survey items. Teacher and school characteristics are based on previous statistical work on performance pay by Ballou and Podgursky (1998), Ballou (2001), and Goldhaber and colleagues (2007). In addition, other factors that could be influential to teacher responses (e.g., teaching at a school that will transfer to the TEEG program and potentially continuing to receive bonus pay versus not) are included in the models. The 2006 Common Core of Data (CCD) was merged with the NCPI survey in order to include important school-level variables such as a poverty proxy (i.e., free- and reduced-priced lunch). In the first model, I examine

teacher characteristics only; then I add school characteristics to the second one; and I insert district fixed effects into the final model.

The first model is limited to teacher characteristics and appears as follows,

$$(1) Y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Exp}_{ijk} + \beta_2 \text{Exp\_S}_{ijk} + \delta_1 \text{Masters}_{ijk} + \delta_2 \text{NCLB}_{ijk} + \delta_3 \text{Male}_{ijk} + \delta_4 \text{Black}_{ijk} + \delta_5 \text{White}_{ijk} + \delta_6 \text{Other}_{ijk} + \delta_7 \text{HSal}_{ijk} + \delta_8 \text{NCLB}_{ijk} + \delta_9 \text{Expect}_{ijk} + e$$

where  $i$  indexes individual teachers,  $j$  indexes schools, and  $k$  indexes districts.  $Y$  is the dependent variable, either the scale measure of professional learning community or an ordinal measure of an independent survey item.  $\text{Exp}$  is a measure of teacher experience and  $\text{Exp\_S}$  is a measure of teacher experience at the school in which they currently teach. The rest of the variables are dummy ones, with  $\text{Masters}$  indicating a teacher with a Master's degree,  $\text{NCLB}$  indicating a teacher who teaches an NCLB-tested grade,  $\text{Male}$  indicating gender,  $\text{Black}$ ,  $\text{White}$ , and  $\text{Other}$  indicating race with Hispanic as the control group,  $\text{HSal}$  indicating teachers with a salary range of \$40,000 to \$59,999 versus teachers with a salary range of \$25,000 to 39,999,  $\text{NCLB}$  indicating the teacher's grade level being an NCLB-tested grade, and  $\text{Expect}$  indicating that teachers expected to receive a GEEG award in fall of 2009 for their performance in the 2008-09 academic year.

I then estimate a model with school characteristics added,

$$(2) Y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \chi_{ijk} + \lambda_1 \text{SchSize}_{jk} + \lambda_2 \text{BlackS}_{jk} + \lambda_3 \text{WhiteS}_{jk} + \lambda_4 \text{PTRat}_{jk} + \psi_1 \text{Urbanicity}_{jk} + \psi_2 \text{TEEG}_{jk} + \psi_5 \text{HisS}_{jk} + \psi_6 \text{CompP}_{jk} + \psi_7 \text{CompD}_{jk} + e$$

where  $\chi$  is a vector of the teacher characteristics listed in Model 1,  $\text{SchSize}$  is school student enrollment,  $\text{PTRat}$  is the pupil/teacher ratio,  $\text{Urbanicity}$  is a dummy variable comparing locale,  $\text{TEEG}$  is a dummy variable where 1 equals a school transferring into the TEEG program,  $\text{BlackS}$ ,  $\text{WhiteS}$ , and  $\text{HisS}$  are the number of students of each race enrolled at the school,  $\text{CompP}$  is a dummy variable with a one indicating a competitive



plan, and CompD is a dummy variable with a one indicating that the distribution of monies to teachers were actually more competitive.

The final model includes a district fixed effects and appears as follows,

$$(3) Y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\chi_{ijk} + \lambda_1Z_{jk} + \text{DistFE}_k + e$$

where  $\chi$  and  $Z$  are vectors for the teacher and school characteristics provided in Models 1 and 2, respectively. DistFE serves to control district fixed effects.

### Chapter Summary

The primary source of data for this research is teacher interviews conducted with four or five teachers at eight elementary schools that participated in the GEEG program. These interviews were semi-structured and conducted face-to-face. Interviews were piloted prior to visiting the research sites. Interview data was analyzed through the ground theory approach where I broke responses down into paragraphs, sentences, or phrases before sorting and synthesizing them categorically. Principals at each of the eight schools were also interviewed with data collection and data analysis following the same procedure. In addition, school GEEG applications that became binding documents for the schools were also analyzed systematically.

Capturing data on a larger scale, an NCPI survey was distributed to teachers at all participating schools in the fall of 2008. In line with the interview focus on elementary school teachers, only elementary teacher survey data was calculated for this study. Although the majority of the quantitative data considered here is descriptive, regression analyses were conducted for an item on teacher understanding and a scale for

professional learning community. Collectively, principal interviews, document analysis, and survey data enhance understanding and triangulate findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### TEACHER INVOLVEMENT

In this chapter, I present my findings on teacher involvement in the planning and design processes of school GEEG plans. First, I present information on the general levels of teacher involvement in plan designing. I then turn to a detailed description of school-level plan development by organizational levels of contributors, e.g., the district, principal, committee members, and non-committee members. Finally, I provide an account of potentially delimiting organizational and personal factors to full teacher involvement in development processes.

#### Overall Level of Teacher Involvement

Teacher participation in teacher pay-for-performance planning has seldom been considered or subsequently measured. This holds true for the GEEG process as well, even though schools were encouraged by TEA to have teachers contribute. Of all of the NCPI surveys, only the first one conducted in January 2007 measured teacher involvement. In this section, I review NCPI's initial teacher involvement findings before providing additional depth from my teacher interview data.

#### NCPI Survey: January 2007

Springer and colleagues (2007) report that over 94 percent of participating GEEG schools involved full-time teachers in their plan development and plan vote.<sup>38</sup> Of the 70 schools undertaking strategies to monitor and manage the implementation of the GEEG program, over 94 percent indicated that regular feedback was provided to faculty and

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<sup>38</sup> These survey results include teachers of all school levels and is not limited to elementary school teachers.

staff and nearly 90 percent reported that they conducted meetings to gather GEEG-related feedback from faculty and staff. It is important to highlight, however, that almost 20 percent of schools responding to the NCPI survey reported that they were not using any such strategies at all.

NCPI's first educator survey, conducted mid-year during the first year of the GEEG program, revealed that over 75 percent of teacher respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the following statement: "Teachers at my school were involved in the development of this program." This perceived level of involvement followed only that of administrators in the development of the program. After considering the portion of teachers who responded that they "don't know," less than 13 percent of teacher survey respondents actually "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with that statement.

#### Teacher Interview Data

A consideration of the 34 teacher interviews (not including teachers at the pilot schools) seems to suggest that the level of involvement reported by teachers in the original NCPI survey is accurate. Admittedly, the interview protocol was not designed to ask teachers to confirm their involvement in plan development or implementation but to gather information on the actions and interactions that they undertook and the responsibilities that they held during the planning process.

In general, the GEEG design forced at least partial teacher involvement. For a teacher to not be engaged in the process on some level, at most schools he/she would have to have no interest, no role, and low intensity. Otherwise, the teacher would be involved in the process – at least to some extent. For example, a teacher could have zero interest in merit pay and/or GEEG, but have a role as a core committee member. Thus, he

or she would be responsible for contributing to the school's plan. Furthermore, I contend that a teacher who had no formal role in the process but who absolutely detests performance pay would usually contribute to the design process by serving as a counterpart to those moving forward in the process. In other words, only teachers who were neutral or disinterested in the program and who were not assigned a role – primary or secondary – to play in designing the plan could avoid or refrain from involvement. Even some teachers who might have believed that they were nonparticipants were actively fulfilling their secondary roles as established by the schools,

I didn't participate but I was represented by a team member who voiced any concerns that I may have had...I shared a few things with her but I personally did not discuss any of these with the team who designed it, so I'm not sure if what I said in any way, shape, or form...was addressed.  
(Teacher 5, P-School 2)

Provided this rationale, it seems as though only four or five teachers (9 to 12 percent) of all interviewed teachers (including pilot schools: 43) could be described as uninvolved. The following teacher quotation illustrates well the kind of response that teachers not involved in the process typically provided:

I think in the beginning [the school plan] was pretty much planned out...I think that pretty much anyone could have their input or give their input, but I don't know. I never did. I just went along with whatever was going on. And then, like I said, I wasn't on the [committee] at the time. (Teacher 3, School 2)

The above response is one of only a handful from grade-level teachers with substantial teaching experience at their current school. About half of the teachers who might not have been involved in their school's planning and implementation process were either fairly new teachers<sup>39</sup> or non-grade level teachers (i.e., they taught special education,

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<sup>39</sup> In fact, including the pilot school teachers, four teachers interviewed were not working at the school when it was invited to participate in the GEEG program. It was, therefore, impossible for them to be

physical education, etc.). Therefore, whether teachers intended or wanted to be involved in the school plan or not, most were active within the parameters allowed them and discussed in greater detail below.

### Description of Plan Development by Level of Influence

TEA suggested heavy teacher involvement in schools designing a GEEG plan, but the program was channeled to teachers through necessary bureaucratic procedures. Although teachers ultimately provided the most man-hours on the plan development, district personnel and school administrators played important roles in the final designs. As such, I provide a basic description of plan development at the four most influential levels: the district, school principals, schools' core committees, and non-committee teachers.

#### District

School application plans and some teacher and principal interviews indicate that district-level personnel usually played the leading role in introducing the GEEG program to schools that were selected to participate in it. Teacher recollection of district roles is sometimes hazy, but principals often remembered district-school interactions more clearly, as noted in the following interview excerpt discussing the introduction of GEEG to schools,

The first stop was through the district where they called together all the schools that were selected. It was brought forth...Secondly, they (district personnel) came to campus as a team and presented to the staff. (Principal 1)

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involved during the planning process. However, whether or not they were involved in subsequent plan alterations or in other ways is debatable and will be discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

In a couple of schools where district interaction might have been more noticeable, teachers did recall district personnel introducing the GEEG program and explaining some of the mandatory components of it but not providing guidance. In a similar vein, some teacher interview data indicates that key members of district grant or similar committees were sometimes responsible for coordinating the school's plan with TEA standards. One veteran teacher remembered district personnel making multiple trips to the school to help explain the program to the few teachers who were immediately against it.

#### Principal

Although district personnel sometimes presented information to school faculty and staff, school principals were informed about the school's acceptance into the GEEG program first. This is not surprising considering the principal's key leadership role at the school as well as his/her primary part in applying for the grant. Indeed, the narratives in the school application documents seem to have been written or directed by principals.

In schools where district personnel did not introduce the GEEG program, principals took the lead in presenting to the staff.

She introduced it to everybody, telling everybody what it was and what it consisted of and, when were chosen to participate and receive money, she told us that we did receive the grant and...how it would be distributed.  
(Teacher 3, School 6)

Essentially principals served as a conduit between the state and district and the school faculty and staff. Even in situations where district personnel did provide information, school principals often expounded upon the presentation and/or provided clarification as questions emerged.

### Core Committee

In nearly all of the schools considered in this study, the responsibility of creating a school GEEG plan resided with a core committee of teachers<sup>40</sup> and the principal or a vice-principal. Typically, each grade level was represented by one teacher, as were specialty subjects or assignments (e.g., special education, physical education, librarians, etc.). Core committee membership was determined in various ways, with the two most common being principal appointment or teacher grade-level voting. With only one exception, these committees were not created specifically for the GEEG program but instead were leadership entities involved with any type of initiative in schools. Developing a school plan for GEEG was originally discussed as just another charge to undertake. In addition to teachers and administrators, school applications and interviews for about half of the school sample indicated that others could be part of the core committee, including parents, students, and influential locals such as judges or business people. None of the interviewees suggested that these outside individuals had significant influence on committee proceedings and/or decisions although they could have votes in a couple of the schools. I now discuss the roles and responsibilities of teachers and principals in these committees.

*Teachers.* The teachers that comprised the core committee were most responsible for creating the school's plan. They often received a limited introduction to the GEEG program in their normally scheduled meetings, prior to the rest of the faculty and staff. Still, complete program description was provided by the district and/or principal not

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<sup>40</sup> Some schools actually used the term "core committee." Other schools used different terminology, but the composition of the group and its responsibilities were similar throughout.



unlike that given to the whole school faculty and staff. In some schools, core committee teachers were informed fully at the same time as the rest of the faculty.

Upon receiving the challenge of designing the school's GEEG plan, the core committees usually worked through the program categorically, starting with broad ideas and narrowing them to plan form. Focusing discussions into manageable pieces were critical in plan development, as explained by a principal who participated on the school's committee,

So for example, we would take every grade level, because there's a difference in area of requirements for every grade level, so we would break it down like that. So when we were addressing seventy people it's a lot more difficult to move forward [than] when you're breaking it down by grade level. (Principal 3)

Similarly, one teacher from a pilot school summed up the process as follows,

Decisions were made; we would kind of come up with a list of suggestions or ideas. We'd post them on big chart paper and then would just skim them down...to one big concept or one big idea, depending on the portion of the grant...we were working on. If we were working on student expectation, we would kind of just come up with a list of ideas, and then we would all kind of agree or vote on which would be best. (Teacher 2, P-School 2)

Discussion until consensus was reached appears to have been the most common method of decision-making within the committee format, although voting was mentioned throughout the interviews.

No teacher indicated that one or two committee members directed discussions or outcomes. Instead, committee teachers collectively reported having the ability to speak freely during meetings and feeling as though their opinions counted.

It's almost like a little council. We all speak freely...it's kind of like, "This is what our grade level thinks, and this is why, and we need to discuss it as a group." And so we discuss it as a group after we lay out our concerns or our suggestions...Those meetings are really productive

because everybody knows...you have a voice and this is where your voice is going to be heard. And then we decide as a committee. (Teacher 1, School 3)

In addition, teacher committee members seldom referenced the inclusion of an administrator – usually the principal – as a member of the committee. When the principal-as-committee-member was raised in interviews, teachers provided a limited description of his/her role in the committee, seemingly adding credence to the collective nature of committee decisions.

The teacher quoted above also speaks on behalf of other grade-level teachers, suggesting that committee teachers were also responsible for disseminating program and plan information to the rest of the school faculty and staff. Teacher committee members across schools in this study noted their additional role as a channel to provide non-committee teachers with reports on committee proceedings, as well as to receive suggestions and address concerns. Of the committee members who addressed this additional responsibility, most indicated that they had done at least a serviceable job of informing other teachers of the proceedings. Fewer discussed their roles in gathering non-committee member suggestions and concerns, but those who did reported sharing and addressing those issues with the committee.

*Principals (or Vice-Principals).* Teacher committee members had little to say about the principals who served on the core committee, but the school application documents and principal interviews show that a principal or his/her assistant was on each school committee. According to the principals, their roles on the committees varied greatly by school. For example, one principal asserted that she was the leader of the committee, another suggested that she was the final authority but attempted to remove

herself from committee debates and decision-making as much as possible, and a third one did not want to appear to be influencing teacher committee members at all and assigned the vice-principal to head the committee. However, further consideration of in-group dynamics and principal statements indicate that each intended to be viewed as part of the team.

My role was basically facilitator...And one of the things that I wanted to make sure that people understood is [that] I was just one of the group. It wasn't my decision; it was the group's decision. (Principal 5)

### Non-Committee Teachers

Teachers who were not part of the core committee still had opportunities to participate in the development of the school GEEG plan, although on a more limited basis. In fact, the most common ways that non-committee teachers influenced plan development were in the form of responses to core committee proposals, decisions, and actions. I discuss those opportunities to participate as enacted in schools – faculty and staff voting, school meetings,<sup>41</sup> and committee/non-committee teacher interaction.

*Faculty and Staff Voting.* According to the TEA application process, participating schools were required to hold a school-wide vote weighing the faculty and staff's interest in pursuing the grant. In the early stages, schools conducted an online survey, usually consisting of only one question – should we pursue the grant or not? Over 90 percent of teachers voted to pursue the grant in the majority of schools. In general, teachers did not articulate why they were voting to continue with the GEEG plan, but they appeared to have only a few details about GEEG and even more limited access to potential school plans, which is not surprising considering the vote was whether or not to pursue the grant.

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<sup>41</sup> Voting opportunities and school meetings were available to all faculty. I include these two subsections under the umbrella of non-committee teachers because these were two of the three key ways that they could be involved in the planning process.

Teachers at two schools, however, indicated that multiple surveys were conducted before obtaining at least an 80 percent rate of approval. Some teachers who originally dissented appeared to be swayed by peer pressure,

I remember we had two times to vote and now that I think about it I voted “no” the first time, and then what was it somebody told me, “Oh, you know, think about it, you can get money you don’t have...” Then I voted “yes” cause...I think they needed a certain amount that weren’t voting “yes” and I wasn’t one of the ones the first time. (Teacher 3, School 2)

The weight of teacher expectations might be even more noticeable when considering the following teacher’s decision to vote “yes” even though she professed not to believe in teacher performance pay:

Well, I changed because I thought that, from talking to other teachers, I felt like the teachers should be rewarded if they were doing a better job. But, I kind of voted because I knew that the other teachers wanted it. (Teacher 3, School 4)

In addition, teachers at about half of the schools indicated an opportunity to vote on the actual plan or aspects of the plan as designed by the committee. At one school,

There was a voting process. After we got all of the different steps and all of our changes were made, it went to open staff...After it went to open staff, it went back for changes because there was going to be a voting process. Everybody had agreed; I think we had to have 80 percent and we didn’t get 80 percent because lower grade teachers thought they should get more money. (Teacher 1, School 1)

Besides the quotation provided above, few teachers supplied detailed descriptions of plan voting processes. Rather they simply stated that a vote was offered at their respective schools to decide whether A) the plan was acceptable or B) certain plan features were acceptable.

*Faculty and Staff Meetings.* At some point in the process, school faculty and staff convened at least one time at each school to discuss the school’s response to GEEG. The

frequency in which school-level meetings were held varied, ranging from one meeting – either early or late in the planning process – to “numerous faculty meetings” (Teacher 4, School 5). Individuals or small teams who were more informed about the GEEG program and school plan proceedings – including committee teachers, the school principal, or support staff – were responsible for the presentation. If a school held just one meeting and it was early in the process, it consisted only of an overview of the GEEG program and a vote to decide whether or not to continue with the program.

Most schools elected to hold their meeting or series of meetings later in the process. These meetings consisted of a presentation of the school’s plan and an opportunity for non-committee teachers to raise questions about or offer criticism of the plan. In schools where multiple meetings were held, the voices of non-committee teachers appear to be significant regarding the school’s final plan. For example, regarding the feedback loop between the committee’s plan presentation and non-committee teachers, this non-committee teacher had the following to say:

[The plan] has to be very detailed because sometimes they need to change different parts or something wasn’t agreed with them so they go back, the committee, to the meetings and they come out with a new resolution they express to the faculty again, and vote again. (Teacher 3, School 5)

Some school presentations included more than a power point or overhead, also utilizing bulletins, flyers, and other handouts with plan details. Teachers in these schools typically reported having fewer GEEG-specific meetings - sometimes only one. In those schools, teacher feedback at meetings seems more limited based on teacher interview data that either A) paints a portrait of passive acceptance,

The plan was designed, and then we had a faculty meeting and it was explained to us...how the different grade levels were going to

be...monitored – what their benchmarks were going to be in order to get the pay. (Teacher 3, School 2)

or B) illustrates an overabundance of information that sometimes lacked clarity,

When they gave us the plan it was done in a format that was hard to read and hard to understand. You couldn't, even though we held a meeting and said what was going to be [in it], it wasn't very clear. It was a table of [whether] you were going to be rewarded for gain, what gains a student had made, and a certain percentage of this and a certain percentage of that. It was just too hard to follow; it was just difficult to understand it. And a lot of people looked at it; they put it down; they were just frustrated. (Teacher 3, School 4)

For teachers at most of the schools in this sample, relatively little opportunity to provide meaningful feedback into plan development existed in these meetings. In general, by the time the committee presented the plan to the rest of the faculty, it was considered to be near completion if not finished. Non-committee teachers' best opportunity for influencing the plan needed to occur prior to the school-level meeting.

*Committee/Non-Committee Teacher Interaction.* Teachers on the core committees were responsible for informing non-committee teachers of the proceedings. The extent to which they did so varied and will be covered in the following chapter on teacher understanding. More to the point, core-committee teachers were grade-level representatives that spoke on behalf of their colleagues, and conceivably, listened to and passed on the questions, concerns, and suggestions of their non-committee colleagues. So the question here is, "To what extent did non-committee teachers attempt to participate given the parameters of the system in place?"

Unfortunately, this question is difficult to answer given the data. However, it appears as though non-committee teachers were given ample opportunity to participate, even if in a limited capacity. Principals clearly believe that non-committee teachers could

be involved in the process – one noted how her committee solicited input from teachers (Principal 5) and some had teachers break into small groups led by committee teachers (Principal 4). Non-committee teachers from each school believed that they were able to speak freely in the process to both committee teachers and administrators, but a few questioned what it did or would have accomplished. Therefore, it seems as though non-committee teachers were encouraged to participate in the process, but their actual engagement and the impact from it remain uncertain.

#### Potential Delimiting Factors to Teacher Involvement

The level of teacher involvement in the development of the school GEEG plan appears to differ by district, school, and possibly grade level. In addition, individual teacher predisposition toward teacher performance pay could directly impact how much teachers want to participate in the process. Still, the GEEG program was designed to garner (or at least offer) high levels of teacher involvement. However, it seems as though teacher involvement is potentially more limited than a first glance at the program and proceedings would suggest. GEEG information appears to be distilled as the program makes its way to the teachers. District and administrative personnel see the program criteria and options before the faculty and staff do, and interview evidence indicates that the entirety of the program is not always disclosed to the core committee. Moreover, the core committee teachers do not necessarily transfer all of their knowledge of the GEEG and/or school plan to the remaining teachers. Next, I highlight how complete teacher involvement was limited by the district and school principals; how non-committee

teacher contributions were potentially restricted further by core committee teachers; and how some other more general influences constrained teacher participation.

### District Factors

District personnel were sometimes responsible for presenting the GEEG program to participating school faculties, and in some cases, were responsible for coordinating school plans. Teachers in multiple schools reported district grant coordinators as playing an important role between the district and school. One teacher from a pilot school recalls personnel from the district providing

an overview of what was going to be happening and then another person came in [telling] us that we would probably...be meeting with another group of people from a school who was going to be going through the same process, and I think that they were going to be collaborating at some time...to share ideas or concerns. (Teacher 5, P-School 2)

The district where I conducted my pilot and another district studied with two schools had plans that were quite similar within the districts but noticeably different across them. Moreover, the four schools in this study that were from the same district had very similar school applications. In fact, parts of the summary sections were identical across the schools, and the original school name was visibly marked out with the appropriate one written above it.

In the same district, one committee teacher repeatedly discussed the desire to have more district guidance on the front end of the plan development, but within the same school, another committee teacher pointed out that at the end of the planning process, the district contact person

came in, looked at our plan, decided it wasn't what our district thought it should be and then helped us make changes. (Teacher 1, School 1)



A non-committee teacher at another school located in the same district stated the following regarding district involvement:

I felt that maybe from up above...there was a format or a path they wanted us to take...like we were catted into a certain type of format. (Teacher 1, School 4)

Via grant writers or coordinators, suggested forms of school collaboration, and significant say in school committees' final plans, district personnel appear to have influenced school plans at all of the schools in this study.

#### Principal Factors

Principals played an important part of the whole GEEG process once the program reached the school-level. They were responsible in part for introducing it and disseminating information, participating in or contributing to the proceedings of the core committee, and approving the school's plan before sending it for TEA's endorsement. The level of direct principal participation in the designing of the school plan varied, but nearly all principals seemed to limit teacher autonomy in the process. Whether influenced by district personnel or not, some of the principals sought collaboration with other principals and/or schools participating in the GEEG.

Although nearly all of the principals viewed themselves as facilitators, some of their decisions regarding the core committees might have posed greater limitations on teachers than did between-school collaborations. Some principals were assertive in their roles as school leaders, including asking the core committee to "rethink" some of their decisions (Teacher 2, School 6). Indeed, that principal acknowledged wanting the committee to have a large part in the planning process and felt as though issues were

worked out as a team, but she was also clear that in her role, she had “the last say” (Principal 6) regarding the plan.

One principal declined being on the core committee in order to empower the teachers. However, in that school, not all of the GEEG program information was actually made known to the committee. When asked about the rationale of ensuring all teachers received some bonus as opposed to TEA’s suggesting a minimum award of \$3,000 per teacher, he said,

Well, it didn’t come up too much because we stopped that before we took it to the teachers because...money causes problems and it falls back in my lap. So we figured that was the minimum. Everybody on this campus provided some input in these children’s achievement. So I didn’t want anyone to end up with nothing. And I wanted to be fair across the board.  
(Principal 7)

Committee and non-committee teachers at this school and others were often unaware of many of TEA’s suggestions, such as the bonus size mentioned above.

#### Core Committee Factors

As mentioned above, committee teachers were responsible for disseminating information to and acquiring feedback from non-committee teachers. The frequency of these conversations and the likelihood that committee teachers would relay non-committee teacher concerns back to the committee seem to be crucial factors to non-committee teachers’ ability to participate in a meaningful way. The schools that held multiple faculty meetings and seemed to welcome non-committee teacher input also appear to have had lines of open communication on a more micro scale. One teacher in School 5 reported that non-committee teachers and their opinions were well-represented in committee meetings. Another teacher in the same school attests that

[The committee members] did ask our input... They would bring the information back to the teams; we would discuss it; they would go have another meeting. So our input was asked for and I believe it was taken back to the committee. (Teacher 5, School 5)

Again, high levels of non-committee teacher participation were limited to only a couple of the schools in the sample. A committee member at one school acknowledged that if non-committee teachers had a suggestion, committee members “might” let the rest of the committee know about the suggestions (Teacher 1, School 6). In the same school, a non-committee teacher noted that she had a role in the process only through the vote.

Variation in teacher involvement opportunities also existed within schools. In School 3, a grade one teacher reported a fair representation for everyone, noting that some grade levels (and presumably, hers) met off campus on occasion to discuss the grant and school plan. However, a grade two teacher in the same school felt differently,

I guess I could have been able to ask anyone, but now if those questions were able to be answered is a different story. A lot of times we’d have questions – it’ll be “we’ll get back to you” and it was never really...gotten back to us. (Teacher 3, School 3)

Multiple factors could be involved in the differences found within schools. Committee grade representatives could vary in skills, attentiveness, or other key factors. In addition, teacher experience and years in the school could play an important role. For example, Teacher 3 at School 3 was relatively inexperienced and new to the school, and perhaps that limited her ability to learn and add more to the process. In addition, the ability to identify key players on the committee could be important. A second grade teacher at School 2 emphasized going to a fifth grade teacher who was “instrumental” in the planning.

In nearly all of the non-committee teacher interviews where sufficient depth on this issue was provided, teachers had far less to say regarding their input into the process than did committee members. Instead, they focused heavily on their ability to gather information or have questions answered by committee members. In other words, the committee teacher/non-committee teacher interaction was usually unequal in the sense that committee members gave information but more rarely received suggestions. Moreover, it is unclear as to whether or not teachers at participating schools fully recognized this knowledge disparity. Many of the committee teachers seemed unaware of the disparity, with only a few speaking of receiving feedback. On the other hand, non-committee teachers spoke more often of their ability to “speak freely,” but none provided an example as to how their or someone else’s input affected the committee or impacted the plan. Perhaps, as the following quotation illustrates, teacher friendships and community as well as the fact that in some schools committee members were elected influenced non-committee members’ level of participation.

You know, the committee members are, well they’re our friends; they’re our peers...If there was anything we didn’t like...we were given the opportunity to voice our concerns while they...presented...what they were gonna do. But everybody was pretty much in agreement...I don’t remember anybody saying that something was wrong...I felt very comfortable with the criteria that they used. (Teacher 4, School 8)

Regardless of the reason, committee and non-committee interviews suggest limited non-committee influence on school plan designs.

#### Other Factors

Some teachers raised other potentially delimiting factors to their plan involvement that did not stem directly from the interview protocol but are worthy of a brief discussion.

Although they did not directly connect their concerns with less involvement in

developing the school plan, the possible link between these factors and less teacher involvement are potentially substantial. The three factors raised most often were limited time, personal aversion, and existing pressures.

*Limited Time.* Multiple teachers on the core committee noted the short turnaround time that they had to get a plan in place – about two months from the time the GEEG program was introduced. Some teachers felt as though they lost instructional time, but none specifically commented on a potential loss of interest or involvement in developing the school plan. However, a significant increase in responsibilities for some would appear to limit the involvement of others. For example, as one principal recalled,

There were three or four of us... We spent a lot of time grant writing and addendum writing and just different things... These were all people that were not in the classroom but pulled out from their normal duties, sometimes after school, sometimes during the summer. (Principal 5)

Therefore, it seems plausible that as the plan became more refined, fewer (and more trusted) committee teachers were actually involved in the process. For example, another principal discussed having a trusted teacher accompany her to all of the meetings and playing a very significant role in plan development.

*Teacher Beliefs.* Indicated in much of the previous teacher incentive pay literature, many educators have traditionally maintained misgivings regarding pay-for-performance. In this sample, however, a significant portion of teachers could be categorized as pro merit pay. Still, many teachers – committee and non-committee alike – expressed disinterest or ambivalence toward teacher pay-for-performance. For example,

It isn't important to me. If I get it fine, if I don't it's okay. (Teacher 3, School 2)

It's important but if we don't receive it, we didn't receive it before. It's not going to change my mind about what I do or will do in the future...I'm not going to dwell on whether or not I get it. (Teacher 5, P-School 2)

Committee teachers, perhaps because of their primary role in plan development, did not express reservations about teacher performance pay. A few non-committee teachers, on the other hand, retained strong aversions to teacher performance pay schemes, including the GEEG.

Personally, I don't believe in it. I don't believe in merit pay. I don't...Like I said, I'll take the money but I don't believe in it...I really don't think it's a fair system. (Teacher 4, School 5)

Clearly, none of the examples above indicate that these or other teachers did not or would not participate less in the development of the school plan, but individual teacher perspective regarding merit pay could limit their interest in and effort to participate fully.

*Existing Pressures.*

Some of the teachers that appeared to lack interest in merit pay or were ambivalent towards it also noted that they already felt high levels of pressure in the form of high-stakes testing. Texas has long been a leader of teacher accountability, and a few of the teachers in this research seemed to suggest that that pressure could trump interest in performance pay for them.

I'm not too crazy about [merit pay] honestly. I mean...it puts more pressure on the teacher; TAKS<sup>42</sup> is enough. I did TAKS for many, many years and it was stressful...I would rather them just keep the money and give us a raise instead of trying to do this carrot thing. (Teacher 1, School 4)

This year the pressure [still] there because the scores that we've seen from the beginning of the school year until now don't match what we saw last year with a different group of students, so there is a lot of pressure...I doubt that it's tied to the grant; it's tied to keeping the status of recognized

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<sup>42</sup> Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills – The state student assessment by which school status is determined.

and not going down or especially down to low-performing. (Teacher 5, P-School 2)

With the pressures of maintaining school status and raising student achievement already in place, teachers not committed to the idea of merit pay might find other mechanisms already in place to be more incentivizing.

### Chapter Summary

Over 75 percent of teachers responding to a survey conducted in the middle of their first year in the GEEG program indicated that teachers were involved in the development of their school's plan. Teacher interview data seem to confirm this, as the majority of teachers indicated that they were involved in the planning process. However, the process of plan development was not always clear to teachers. District personnel and school principals often played a more significant role in shaping school plans than teachers realized. In some districts and/or schools, not all of the options as listed in TEA's notification to awarded schools were explained or even outlined to teachers. Eventually, all teachers were notified of the program and the details of the school plan through informal channels and/or information dissemination in the form of discussion, presentation, and/or networking. However, teachers who were not part of their schools' core committees seemed to be considerably less involved in the process than those colleagues who were on the committees. Therefore, although most teachers indicated that they had been involved in (and perhaps throughout) the process, nearly all of them were restricted by one or more delimiting elements, including district-level personnel and/or decisions, school principals, and/or other teachers who served on the school core committee.

## CHAPTER V

### TEACHER UNDERSTANDING

In this chapter, I present my findings on teacher understanding of the GEEG program and their school plans. First, I present some general survey information on teacher understanding and related factors, as well as conduct regression analysis of survey data regarding teacher self-reported understanding of bonus pay criteria. I then discuss the extent of teacher understanding of the GEEG program broadly. Finally, I provide a detailed account of teacher understanding of their school plans, highlighting mandatory components, optional components, issues of bonus distribution, and teacher comprehension of other teachers and participants' responsibilities.

#### Overall Elementary Teacher Understanding

In Springer and colleagues' initial report (2007), more than 3,000 K-12 educators responded to the following survey item: "I have a clear understanding of the criteria I need to meet in order to achieve a bonus." Over 20 percent of respondents indicated that they "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with the statement while just less than 80 percent "agree" or "strongly agree." Closer analysis revealed that a statistically significant difference existed between those teachers who did receive a bonus versus those who did not. In fact, over 30 percent of non-recipient educators reported that they did not understand the criteria whereas approximately 17 percent of recipients felt the same way. In NCPI's most recent survey of GEEG educators conducted in Fall 2008, less than 12 percent of responding elementary school teachers indicated that they "disagree" or



“strongly disagree” to the same prompt provided above. Approximately 86 percent “agree” or “strongly agree.”<sup>43</sup>

In a similar vein, NCPI asked teachers to “rate how much you agree that the following types of assistance would have improved your school’s GEEG incentive plan.” Although the survey was designed to solicit teacher feedback regarding potential opportunities to receive assistance in future plan development, indirectly these prompts seem to suggest areas where teacher understanding could have been enhanced. Table 5.1 lists five survey prompts to which teachers responded. Over 40 percent of respondents believed that a better explanation from TEA as to why the school was selected to participate could have improved the school plan, and nearly half of responding elementary teachers felt as though a more thorough explanation of school guidelines might have proven beneficial. Similarly, the majority of teachers “agree” or “strongly agree” that a clearer explanation of the required school-level performance criteria could have improved the plan. Over half of the responding teachers also felt as though better support from the district officials and from TEA in developing and implementing the school’s plan would have helped.

Revisiting the teacher understanding survey item discussed above, a regression analysis into teacher responses yields greater insight into how teacher and school characteristics might influence teacher understanding of that criteria. Results of the regression analyses are reported in Table 5.2.<sup>44</sup> Teacher race, gender, and education level

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<sup>43</sup> Nearly 2.5 percent of elementary school teacher respondents indicated that they did not know.

<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that these models appear to explain very little of the variation, as indicated by the  $R^2$ , but findings are still suggestive.

Table 5.1: Potential Assistance for Improved Planning

Prompt: Please rate how much you agree that the following types of assistance would have improved your school's GEEG incentive plan.						
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know
a.	A better explanation from the Texas Education Agency as to why the school was selected to participate in GEEG in the first place.	5.73	40.98	34.08	7.67	11.54
b.	A more thorough explanation to the school of the guidelines for developing a GEEG performance incentive plan.	4.96	37.03	37.96	10.46	9.60
c.	A clearer explanation of the performance criteria that must be used by the school to determine eligibility for a GEEG bonus award.	3.95	36.10	39.19	12.16	8.60
d.	Better support from district officials in developing and implementing the school's GEEG incentive plan.	4.42	33.54	39.58	10.53	11.93
e.	Better support from Texas Education Agency in developing and implementing the school's GEEG incentive plan.	3.87	34.31	37.65	11.15	13.01

Data from NCPI Fall 2008 Survey.

Elementary Teachers Only.

N = 1,291

Table 5.2: Teacher Understanding of Bonus Criteria<sup>45</sup>

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Teacher</b>			
White	-0.021 0.054	-0.054 0.059	-0.054 0.061
Black	0.124 * 0.065	0.027 0.082	0.049 0.084
Male	-0.098 * 0.056	-0.079 0.055	-0.058 0.055
Master's	0.002 0.048	0.012 0.047	0.032 0.048
Exper (4-14)	0.075 0.066	0.071 0.067	0.075 0.066
Exper (15+)	0.125 * 0.072	0.115 0.072	0.120 * 0.072
Higher Salary	-0.024 0.064	-0.022 0.063	0.000 0.069
NCLB	0.138 ** 0.066	0.136 ** 0.066	0.132 ** 0.065
Expect Award	0.486 *** 0.103	0.464 *** 0.099	0.420 *** 0.096
<b>School</b>			
Enrollment		0.0004 *** 0.0001	-0.0001 0.0002
Black Enr.		0.0002 0.0004	0.0023 ** 0.0001
White Enr.		0.0040 ** 0.0017	0.0105 ** 0.0049
Urban		0.057 0.054	0.093 0.095
Pupil/Teacher		-0.064 *** 0.018	0.025 0.041
TEEG School		0.093 ** 0.041	0.029 0.068
Comp. Plan		-0.140 ** 0.058	0.076 0.113
Comp. Dist.		-0.158 *** 0.056	-0.248 ** 0.098
District F.E.	no	no	yes
R-Squared	0.05	0.08	0.12

Data from NCPI Fall 2008 Survey.

Elementary Teachers Only.

N = 1,260: 31 teachers who responded "do not know" were omitted.

<sup>45</sup> Teacher understanding item used for this analysis: I had a clear understanding of the performance criteria that I needed to meet in order to earn a GEEG bonus award.

(Bachelor's/Master's) were statistically insignificant in all three models<sup>46</sup> and appear to have been relatively unimportant in teacher responses regarding their understanding of the criteria. Veteran teachers of 15 or more years consistently reported having a slightly better understanding (.12) of the criteria than did other teachers, although the statistical significance was only at the .10 level.

Interestingly, teachers who taught NCLB-tested grades (.13) claimed significantly higher levels of understanding – at the .05 level. Teachers of NCLB-tested grades could report higher levels of understanding since they have had considerably more experience with high-stakes testing, a factor key to all school incentive plans. In addition, teachers who expected to receive bonus pay reported significantly higher levels of understanding at the .01 level. In fact, teachers who expected to receive a bonus reported their understanding at a rate nearly half a point higher (.43 on a 4-point scale) than those who did not expect one.<sup>47</sup>

Regarding school-level factors, total enrollment, total black enrollment, and total white enrollment are all statically significant in either Model 2 or Model 3 or both, but none of the coefficients show practical significance. In Model 2, a teacher teaching at a TEEG school reports higher levels of understanding (.09) but the variables loses its statistical significance once district fixed effects are included in Model 3. Similarly, teachers at schools with more competitive plans reported lower levels (-.14) of criteria understanding in Model 2, but the addition of district fixed effects erased any statistical

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<sup>46</sup> The only exception was African-American teachers in the teacher-level only model at the .10 level of significance.

<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the 161 teacher respondents who answered “do not know” to the expect award item had responses that were approximately a quarter of a point higher than those teachers who responded “no.” Results were statistically significant at the .05 level for the first two models and the .10 level for the third model.

significance and even swung the coefficient's sign from negative to positive. Perhaps most critically, teachers at schools that actually followed through on more competitive plans (represented as competitive distribution) were significantly less likely to claim understanding of bonus criteria even after the inclusion of district fixed effects (-.25).

### GEEG Program

Conceptually, a teacher who better recognizes the elements of the GEEG program should be more likely to understand his/her school's plan. However, the development and finalization of a state-backed program is multiple steps (and potential delimiters) away from teachers within selected schools. In this brief section on teacher understanding of the GEEG program, I report on teacher understanding regarding their school's selection into the program, a few of the monetary components of the GEEG, and the criteria by which school plans were to be developed.

#### School Selection

TEA invited schools to participate in the GEEG program based on two basic factors: high or improved student achievement and concentrated levels of low-socioeconomic school enrollments. Interviews revealed that many teachers at participating schools were unsure as to why their school was selected. The responses that were given frequently cited one of the two factors, but teachers seldom delivered both school aspects weighed by TEA. Only 6 of 30 teachers (20 percent) who were asked about their school's selection were unable to offer either factor. Instead, 18 (60 percent) cited student achievement and 13 (43 percent) cited socioeconomic conditions, but only 8 (27 percent) cited both. A few of those teachers who were able to name correctly one of

the reasons did not demonstrate knowledge as much as they appeared to guess, using phrases such as “I believe” and “if memory serves me correctly” before answering.

Responses varied not only between schools but within them. For example, the following are replies from teachers at one school to the question, “do you recall why this school was selected to participate in the GEEG program?”

Not off the top of my head. They did talk about it...but I couldn't tell you. (Teacher 1, School 4)

I think it was because the fifth grade from the year before – we...had such high scores in science. (Teacher 2, School 4)

We're in an inner city school; a lot of kids are at-risk. (Teacher 3, School 4)

I think it was based on performance from previous years...I don't know how they did it, to be honest. I don't remember. (Teacher 4, School 4)

Moreover, one teacher denied school demographics playing any kind of role in the state's decision while another believed the selection to have been completely random because the school's achievement had not been high. In sum, only a handful of teachers interviewed appeared knowledgeable discussing the reasons behind their school's selection into the GEEG program.

#### Monetary Components

The GEEG program consisted of three monetary components: the lump sum provided to schools based on student enrollment, the division of those dollars within the school, and the suggested range of bonuses for teachers. In interviews where teachers were asked if they could recall the amount of money that TEA provided yearly to a school for its participation in GEEG, fewer than half (13 of 28) of teachers either knew or

were close in their remembrance.<sup>48</sup> In a similar vein, most teachers (8 of 10) who discussed how TEA directed the lump sum to be divided within the school could do so. They usually recognized that 75 percent of the money was to serve as teacher bonus pay while the other 25 percent was to be divided amongst other school employees. However, regarding the non-teacher 25 percent, significantly fewer teachers recalled who received that money or how it was further distributed.

As discussed in Chapter 4, teachers were relatively unaware of the TEA-suggested range of bonus pay for teachers (\$3,000 - \$10,000). When teachers discussed the range of bonuses suggested by TEA, they typically presented information on their school's final plan. This kind of response sometimes carried over when teachers were asked more specifically about the potential to receive \$10,000 in bonus pay. Of the ten teachers specifically asked about the state suggested range of \$3,000 to \$10,000, only four expressed any recognition of this range.

Honestly, I did not know that you could make up to \$10,000... From my recollection I thought it was only twenty-five hundred. (Teacher 1, School 3)

Potentially delimiting factors such as the core committee of teachers, principals, and district personnel could have contributed to teachers' limited collective awareness of the range of bonus suggested in the program.

### Program Criteria

TEA designed the GEEG program to empower schools to create their own plans within parameters. The extent to which teachers fully recognized and understood the

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<sup>48</sup> For example, a number of teachers said that their school received \$100,000 per year when that was not an option under the TEA/student enrollment guidelines. However, those saying \$100,000 typically were at schools that received \$90,000. One teacher at a school receiving \$60,000 per year stated that it was \$50,000. For the most part, however, teachers were either exactly right or responded "I don't know" or something similar.

criteria within the GEEG program appears limited. Like most teacher pay-for-performance programs, GEEG emphasized student achievement potentially to the cost of other program components.

*Mandatory Criteria.* When teachers were asked broadly to discuss the GEEG program, they frequently targeted the student achievement criterion. The details that followed most often centered on the school's plan and its definition of student achievement, but the point here is that teachers nearly universal recognized the primacy of student achievement. They recognized that their reward – as a school and as an individual – was based mostly on student achievement as defined by the school.

The degree to which student achievement was discussed seemed so pervasive that the other mandatory criterion – teacher collaboration – generally was not recognized as a necessary part of the program at all. Only five of twenty-five teachers (20 percent) answered collaboration when they were asked to supply the other or another mandatory criterion of the GEEG. However, when they were informed that teacher collaboration was the other mandatory criterion, some teachers responded enthusiastically and knowingly, providing statements that suggested that this criterion could have been both less significant than student achievement and less relevant to obtaining bonus pay.

*Optional Criteria.* None of the 23 teachers asked was able to recall either of TEA's two optional criteria (professional commitment and hard-to-staff) by which to evaluate school and teacher performance. Once I reminded or informed teachers of what these optional criteria were, some asked for further clarification or description, guessed, or noted their unawareness. Teachers in schools that designed a plan that only employed the two mandatory criteria sometimes reacted in a way that suggested they had no



knowledge that such optional criteria existed as part of the GEEG program. One teacher playfully asked for a “hint” (Teacher 4, School 2) while a core committee teacher simply stated,

I don’t remember any optional criteria to be honest with you. (Teacher 2, School 3)

The following is an excerpt from an interview with another core committee teacher at another school in the same district:

T: I think that last statement, this is the first I’ve heard of [it]. Could you tell me the last statement again?

I: The last [statement] was that the teacher works in a subject that has been traditionally difficult to staff or a school that has had high turnover.

T: No, I don’t think I’ve ever heard of that one. (Teacher 2, School 2)

Even in schools where at least one optional criterion was included in the plan, teachers found it difficult to recall optional components of the GEEG program.

### School Plans

The crux of teacher knowledge of the GEEG program should probably reside with their school plans since the individualized plan was most central to their pursuit of merit pay. This section highlights teacher understanding of their school plans, focusing on the mandatory criteria, optional criteria, and distribution of bonuses before concluding with a brief analysis of the overall comprehensiveness of teacher understanding of the plan and its relation to differences amongst teachers by grade levels.

### Mandatory Criteria

*Student Achievement.* School GEEG application documents across this study's sample of schools reveal a substantial range of ways to measure teacher success as represented by student achievement. Every school, however, set a minimum threshold, requiring teachers to have at least 75 percent or higher (depending on school plan) of their students meeting acceptable levels of achievement. Regarding a school's minimal acceptable level of student achievement, most teachers (approximately 71 percent, 17 of 24) across schools were able to recall approximately the percentage of students achieving proficiency that was necessary for teachers to receive bonus pay. For example, one school deemed that at least 80 percent of students should meet minimum competencies in reading and mathematics in order for teachers to receive merit pay. One teacher at that school stated that the minimum percentage was "85 percent or something like that" (Teacher 2, School 5).

Most of the schools also had a second cut score. At the school mentioned above, teachers needed at least 80 percent of their students to meet minimum standards in order to receive merit pay. In addition, if a teacher at that school had at least 90 percent of students meet minimum standards, he/she would receive an additional bonus. Although not pressed in the interviews, a few teachers discussed the second threshold, demonstrating an awareness of its existence in their school plans. Some schools in the study also incorporated a growth model where teachers could gain additional merit pay for student improvement regardless of whether or not the teachers were able to meet the minimum cut scores. One teacher provided the following rationale:

We put growth in there. That was one of the categories...Maybe you have some students that...were special ed. or something...and you know

another [teacher] doesn't have special ed. and another teacher has [gifted and talented students]. It's just not, in other words it's not fair all the way across...So we felt like that was probably the biggest...incentive...I mean if you're a good teacher [the students] are gonna grow. If they don't, then there's something [missing]. (Teacher 4, School 1)

Teachers at schools where growth models were incorporated consistently provided similar justifications.

Interestingly, teachers' ability to explain their school plans' student achievement guidelines did not diminish significantly at schools where the plans were much more detailed. For example, this teacher was able to recall clearly the school's student achievement regulations:

I think there were three levels, and the first level was if you had...Was it 70 or 75 percent of the class pass, then you got something? If you got 90 percent or better, then you got something else. And then it was a point system which was very, I'm not sure how it worked, but I mean we gave a benchmark at the beginning of the year...then you got so many, so much extra for the growth [the students] made. So there was actually...three levels. (Teacher 2, School 4)

Overall, teacher interview data suggests that teachers basically understood the benchmarks established in their school plans (26 of 32), regardless of how detailed they became. This is not to suggest that they could recount all of the details, especially of plans that included growth models or point systems. A couple of principals mentioned that they did not understand all of the statistical work that went into their more complex plans. Still, teacher discussions and explanations of the student achievement criterion were consistently clear and accurate.

*Teacher Collaboration.* Teachers seldom recalled teacher collaboration as a requirement of the GEEG program, and evidence suggests that this carried over to their school plan, too, with them sometimes simply forgetting the criterion's role or

occasionally “blocking” (Teacher 1, School 5) it out. One established first grade teacher stated,

It was all just on assessment tests and that was pretty much it. (Teacher 3, School 1)

Once prompted, however, 17 of 28 teachers (61 percent) could at least discuss the most significant collaboration components as listed in their school plans. Some of the most commonly reported collaborative requirements include increased grade-level meetings, vertical meetings, and tutoring after school or on Saturdays. Nearly every school increased the number of faculty and team meetings, but most also added conditions specific to the school (or district). For example, the school plans for both pilot schools emphasized tutoring and over half of the teachers interviewed at the two schools discussed tutoring at length, noting how it was primarily for upper grade (3-6) teachers. However, lower grade teachers were encouraged to help after school, which was an additional way for them to earn points that went toward bonus pay.

After prompting, teachers generally recalled the minimum requirements necessary for them to fulfill the teacher collaboration criterion. Every school required teachers to sign in at meetings. Although at first not all schools authorized minimum percentages of teacher attendance, administrators tightened guidelines (Principal 5), with most school plans eventually mandating that teachers had to attend at least 90 percent of grade-level and/or faculty meetings. A few schools also included meeting minutes and/or meeting summaries as part of the process.

Perhaps part of the reason teachers often initially failed to recognize the collaboration component of their school plan is due to a sense of “business as usual” regarding teacher collaboration, especially in schools where the focus remained mostly

on grade-level and/or faculty meetings. One veteran teacher who served on her school's core committee had trouble recalling the collaboration component before relaying that meetings were part of the school norm.

We always do that, so I don't think that was one of the criteria. But, we always do that on campus anyways, so that was like, "Oh, okay, we already do that." (Teacher 4, School 3)

No teacher or principal interviewed indicated that a potential teacher bonus was missed or withheld due to the teacher collaboration criterion, suggesting that either teachers who were eligible for bonus pay based on student performance also fulfilled their collaboration duties or their schools were lax in their evaluations of collaboration.

Some teachers their being required to attend a certain percentage – usually 90 percent – of meetings, etc. It does not seem unreasonable to believe that participating teachers were meeting the criterion's requirements considering the similarities in collaborative expectations over time. Teachers appear to have understood the teacher collaboration component of their school's plan, but that knowledge seems to have been somewhat incomplete. An extended assessment of teacher understanding, however, reveals that the teacher collaboration criterion as defined by TEA and represented within school plans was hollow, as few teachers (or principals) could explain how the collaboration component was to be meaningful to teacher development or to student achievement.

All of the school plans, either in their listings of requirements or in their narratives, call for teachers to be involved in the collaborative process – "actively involved" (Schools 1-4), "active participation" (School 5), etc. I asked some teachers to explain how an outsider or someone from TEA would know if their collaborative efforts

were being done well, i.e., how would one know whether the school's adherence to the teacher collaboration criterion was beneficial? Teacher responses were inconsistent and included listing the types of collaboration specified in their plans (e.g., team meetings, vertical meetings, etc.), noting teacher stability, revisiting increased student achievement, simply working together formally or informally, or not recognizing it all. A few teacher statements follow:

You would know that by the results of the children...[their] attitude, their behavior change. (Teacher 4, School 7)

Basically by the scores you made; you know that's how you got the extra bonus. (Teacher 2, School 3)

I would think that it would mean being in the grade level meetings, and working together as a faculty to do whatever's best for the students and participating in those things. (Teacher 3, School 2)

The evaluation of teachers, as discussed above, was ultimately confined to teacher sign-in sheets. When teachers were asked how active involvement or participation in collaboration was measured, only a few connected it to the sign-in sheets.

I'm not 100 percent sure about my answer, but I guess I would have to say that it's measured by, we have forms that we have to fill out, we have data sheets that we turn in, and possibly they measure from that. (Teacher 1, School 3)

Quotations such as this one could illustrate how loosely interconnected school documents were regarding teacher collaboration. Phrases such as "actively involved" seem at odds with the measurement of passive actions such as signing in, and the confusion displayed by teachers appears to confirm this. Thus, although teachers seemingly understood the minimum collaborative expectations for them as it related to obtaining bonus pay, few seemed to understand what and/or how they were to contribute to the collaborative processes.

### Optional Criteria

*Criterion III.* Four of the eight schools (and both pilot schools) included Criterion III as part of their school plan for at least one academic year. Three of the school plans centered on aspects of professional development with an emphasis on completing more hours; the remaining school plan focused on improving teacher attendance. Similar to the teacher collaboration criterion, teachers demonstrated their adherence to the criterion by signing in and having enough hours recorded. Unlike the teacher collaboration component, teachers were less likely to be able to discuss proficiently or recall their teacher commitment component even after being prompted. One veteran first grade teacher admitted,

Now did [the principal] discuss [professional development] as being a criteria? We have to go to professional development...I didn't know that; well, I guess I did know that it was a criteria, you know, but I didn't know that it was a criteria for receiving this [GEEG bonus pay]. (Teacher 3, School 6)

In a school where Criterion III was included in the second and third years of the program, this teacher was unable to explain why it was added:

Now that you mention it...I do remember the first year [the criterion] was never mentioned, and then later we were told that attendance would be included in the criteria. But, no, I can't say that I know why that adjustment was made. (Teacher 2, School 8)

Teacher unawareness of the professional commitment criterion was common across the schools that included it in their plans. In addition to possible neglect in transferring knowledge to teachers or teachers seeking increased involvement or understanding, a scan of the interviews suggests many other possible reasons, including “relatively easy” requirements (Teacher 1, P-School 1) and requirements similar to those already existing in the schools (Teacher 1, School 5).

*Criterion IV.* Only the two pilot schools included the hard-to-staff school option. It is worth noting that at each of these schools, teachers were provided with a standard bonus for returning to the school the following academic year. Not unexpectedly, teachers at these schools seemed much more cognizant of the bonus amount and the expectation of returning to teach for another year. One non-committee non-grade teacher summed up the criterion as follows:

Well, coming back to the school, that amount was I guess indicated at the bottom of that criteria sheet... You do get "X" amount of money for coming back next year – \$500 I believe. That was no matter, I mean that's non-negotiable; it's almost like you're going to get this regardless.  
(Teacher 5, P-School 2)

This could suggest that more direct plan expectations might yield better teacher understanding, especially when those expectations are in one-to-one financial relationships. In other words, when teachers are informed that a specific accomplishment is rewarded with a specific bonus, they might be more likely to understand (and remember) the tasks for which they are responsible under the plan. The teachers in the pilot schools, like the rest of the teachers interviewed, did not demonstrate a comparable understanding of the teacher collaboration and professional commitment criteria.

#### Bonus Distribution

The majority of teachers seemed to understand how GEEG money would be distributed. At some schools, some bonus pay components were fixed. For example, at the pilot schools, returning teachers were rewarded with \$500 as fulfillment of Criterion IV – hard-to-staff school. When payments were predetermined, teachers were usually able to identify the task and reward easily. Teachers generally understood that they were



receiving the same amount of money as other teachers as well as the amount that they would be rewarded.

Bonus distributions at other schools, however, were more complex. With minimum thresholds established for teacher bonuses, the number of teachers who would receive merit pay could not be calculated until testing ended. Some teachers were aware of the situation.

They weren't sure how much each [teacher] would get because it would...depend on the...end results about how many would qualify for Level I or Level II or Level III. (Teacher 2, School 4)

However, the bonus ranges were not always clear and teacher awareness about how much they could or would receive in bonus payments seemed to reflect this.

Six schools included a point or level system in their plans, which essentially gave greater rewards to teachers with better student achievement results. Point systems appear to have been the most complex systems, combining student achievement measures, teacher collaboration, and optional criteria. Point-based categories were constructed and teachers were rewarded based upon the accumulation of points regardless of the criterion from which those points were amassed. “Partial credit” (Teacher 2, P-School 1) could be gathered at some schools. To one veteran pilot school teacher, the whole point system creation and money distribution appeared to be a “lengthy, complicated process” (Teacher 5, P-School 2) that she was glad to avoid.

A generic level system would include the following three levels (with bonus requirement): Level I (75 percent of students meet minimum achievement level), Level II (90 percent of students meet minimum achievement level), and Level III (a minimum

percentage of students show academic growth). One committee teacher explained her school's level system as follows:

We had levels; we had Base Pay 1 and Base Pay 2. I'm not too sure if I'm wording it correctly... We had 1 and then 2 and then there was the bonus pay, so the requirements were in order to get I believe like 90 percent of Base Pay 1, then the students had to perform at a certain level and then Base Pay 2...and then the bonus pay would come in. I believe if you had 1 and 2 then you could get bonus. (Teacher 2, School 2)

This teacher's use of the term "Base Pay" represents one of the difficulties some teachers had discussing their level plans. Multiple teachers noted receiving a "base pay" that was actually the lowest form of the merit pay. They occasionally asserted that the second level (higher minimum threshold) and/or third level (student growth) were the actual bonus levels of pay. Moreover, this teacher states that one had to achieve bonus Levels I and II to get "bonus pay," which appears to be the third level – student achievement growth. In almost all cases, teachers could receive the achievement growth money without attaining Levels I and/or II.

As the plans became more complex, teacher understanding generally appeared to decrease. Discussing the bonus requirements at a school implementing merit pay by levels, one teacher stated,

Now I'll be really honest, I don't know a whole lot about it. I didn't understand the process. I always had to go to someone else to get the points [explained]. (Teacher 3, School 2)

In fact, a few principals expressed difficulty with understanding the details of some of the pay plans and money distributions.

Well, I had one teacher who played the most significant role because she was the mathematician and I relied on her heavily to help me with the breakdown of the monies and to look at the criterias for what teachers were submitting...I call her my guru. I mean without her I don't know if I

could have done it. I relied on her heavily to help me through with that piece. (Principal 1)

Thus, it seems as though educators in schools where more complicated systems of measuring student achievement and financial distribution existed had difficulty understanding their plan fully.

### Teacher Grade Differences

Overall, teachers generally understood what minimum requirements they had to meet in order to receive merit pay even though non-student achievement criteria were somewhat vague and some school plans were comparatively complex. The emphasis of the program and the plans were on student achievement, and teachers appear to have responded accordingly. For example, one teacher is able to distinguish both between levels of student achievement and rewards and student achievement by subjects and rewards:

Seventy-five percent of [my] class passes, I think I get half of the base [bonus] pay. Ninety percent I think I'm eligible for a little more money if it happens in math, and a little more money in reading it it's in reading. (Teacher 1, School 3)

Some teachers were also able to extend their explanations to include multiple grades. The following kindergarten teacher discusses in some detail merit pay based on student achievement for grades K-2:

Okay, the Kinder through second grade had their criteria...It was a Readiness test for math...The reading test was based on...the Texas Primary Reading Inventory [TPRI]...Kinder would take the first grade Readiness test; first grade would take the second grade Readiness test...We were showing growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year in both reading and math. Those were the two...instruments that were gonna be used in order to show gain. (Teacher 4, School 2)

However, few teachers spoke confidently and/or knowledgably about teacher requirements for all grade levels, even regarding the heavily emphasized student achievement criterion. Much of the knowledge gap appears to have stemmed from a TAKS/non-TAKS teacher divide. For example, the following non-TAKS teacher statement was represented to some extent in many of the interviews:

My familiarity of the program would probably be just early childhood because I don't know too much about the TAKS cause [I taught second grade]. (Teacher 1, School 4)

Similarly, TAKS teachers occasionally lacked insight into the plan requirements for lower grade teachers, as relayed by this fourth grade teacher's statement:

And then lower levels, I don't know. I just know it was based on the TPRI reading of the lower...children. (Teacher 2, School 1)

Interestingly, most teachers who spoke of paraprofessionals, non-grade teachers (e.g., special education, physical education), and other staff were able to recall those bonus amounts and responsibilities accurately, possibly because those amounts were usually fixed and the responsibilities were not as detailed as grade-level teachers' were.

The TAKS/non-TAKS division seems as though it were prominent amongst non-committee teachers. The two previous quotations as well as a significant number more that highlight a lack of teacher understanding across grades were given mainly by non-committee teachers. On the other hand, the most lucid responses around issues of teacher requirements were typically provided by core committee teachers who were perhaps more involved in the early stages of plan formation. Continuing the quotation of Teacher 4 at School 2 provided above, she turned next to an equally full explanation of the TAKS grade teacher student achievement responsibilities:

Then in third through fifth, that was based on their TAKS assessments, and I'm not real familiar with their point system, you know, but they had to start at 2100, I think, or something to that effect from the first TAKS assessment through to the end of the year to see what growth they would get in both reading and math...I guess in fourth grade whatever gains they made from the end of the third grade scores through the end of that year, of their present year, and that's how they were able to determine what gains they made. (Teacher 4, School 2)

Not all committee members went into such detailed accounts of teacher responsibilities for various grade levels. However, there was considerably less hesitancy to answer such questions and seldom did a committee teacher confess to ignorance of the responsibilities of other grade teachers.

### Chapter Summary

During the early stages of GEEG implementation as well as after its completion, approximately 80 percent of teachers indicated that they understood their school's plan. Teachers who expected to receive an award or who taught NCLB-tested grades were significantly more likely to report a good understanding, while those teachers who were in schools where the distribution of bonus dollars was more competitive were less likely to relay an understanding of their school plan. Teachers appear to have been more likely to have understood their school plan than the GEEG program, as they often could not explain why their schools were selected to participate nor could they identify and/or distinguish between mandatory and optional program criteria. Regarding school plans, however, teachers were nearly universally able to discuss in detail the expectations surrounding student achievement and bonus pay. They generally did not appear as knowledgeable when explaining their GEEG-related teacher collaboration

responsibilities. Teachers of grades K-2 seemed less likely to have a deep understanding of the program and plan than did teachers of NCLB grades (3-5).

## CHAPTER VI

### SELF-REPORTED PROGRAM EFFECTS ON TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

In this chapter, I present my findings on the program effects on teachers and schools. First, I examine the impact that GEEG had on individual teacher perceptions and actions – teacher-level factors. Then, I report teacher perceptions of potential change on their professional learning community. Finally, I discuss some other potential concerns of teachers not specifically addressed elsewhere in this dissertation.

#### Teacher-Level Change

Teacher perceptions and actions are assumed to change with the implementation of a pay-for-performance system. The extent to which those changes actually take place is seldom considered in the merit pay literature. In this section, teachers' perceptions of program fairness, enthusiasm, effort, and practices are examined.

#### Program Fairness

Teachers overall indicated that the GEEG incentive plans were fair. Nearly seven out of ten survey respondents (69 percent) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the following statement: “The GEEG incentive plan developed by my school was fair to teachers. Over 75 percent believed that they could achieve the performance criteria established in the plan.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the majority of teachers interviewed believed the

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<sup>49</sup> Over 76 percent responded “disagree” or “strongly disagree” to the prompt, “I did not believe that I could achieve the performance criteria established by my school’s GEEG incentive plan.”

GEEG program and their school plan to be fair. Of those teachers who answered directly and clearly to the fairness question, over 85 percent (24 of 28)<sup>50</sup> responded positively.

Reasons provided by teachers in support of program fairness include plan transparency, teacher involvement in plan development, school/teacher ownership, and equal financial distribution. Two teachers who expressed inherent concerns with the notion of teacher pay-for-performance admitted that the plan was as reasonable as one could hope given their perceived flaws of the concept itself.

There's just no way to please everyone... There's no way to be fair to everyone, [but] it's as fair as it can be. (Teacher 3, School 4)

Some combination of teacher involvement and plan transparency was the most frequently cited reason teachers believed the program to be fair.

Everybody knew at the beginning of the year what was going to happen. So after the first year [when everyone was paid equally], it's as fair as they can make it. Everybody has an opportunity...to take part in the money. (Teacher 5, School 5)

I think it was fair. Everyone had a chance to give their input. Everyone had a chance to see how the...pay was going to be disbursed...Everyone had a chance to...read, look, talk, share. If they chose not to share that's because they chose not to, and that was pretty much a personal decision. (Teacher 3, School 1)

As seen in the quotations above and others not provided here, teachers who agreed that their plans were fair overall clearly believed that their roles (or opportunities) in plan development were critical. The perceived openness of GEEG program policies gave teachers “a chance” to influence their school plans. Even some teachers who expressed

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<sup>50</sup> It is worth noting that the responses of teachers in the pilot schools were noticeably less positive in terms of program/plan fairness. Six of nine teachers reported the program to be fair, but half of those six did so with clear reservations. However, teacher and leadership stability at the pilot schools appeared to be much less stable than at the study sites – as noted through observation, discussion, and school applications – so it is conceivable that involvement, understand, and plan transparency were all more limited, especially to non-committee teachers.



what they believed to be fundamental flaws or limitations of pay-for-performance and/or their own school plans still reported that their plans were reasonable because they were developed collectively. Interestingly, some teachers who indicated that they did not understand the plans well claimed those plans to be fair because the opportunities to participate and gain information were available.

All four of the teachers who indicated that the plans were unfair made statements at various points in the interviews that suggested that they disagreed with merit pay plans, at least in part. For example, one veteran third grade teacher had the following to say:

I don't think dangling a money carrot in my face should make me decide whether I'm going to be a good [teacher]. You know? And, this is the way it is. It's been handed down to me. I will not turn it down, but it's not something that I agree with. (Teacher 4, School 5)

In addition, two of the four teachers taught at the same school and expressed similar reservations (as did the two teachers there who were more positive) – mainly that the distribution of students by abilities and other factors were not equal across the school, meaning that proficiency measures were unfair ways to evaluate bonus pay.<sup>51</sup>

A closer analysis of the survey data as shown in Table 6.1 reveals some interesting factors impacting teacher views of plan fairness that were generally difficult to consider with the smaller sample size of interviewees. Approximately 84 percent of African-American teachers believed that their plan was fair, whereas only 68 percent of white or Hispanic teachers responded favorably. Female teachers (70 percent) seem to have viewed plans slightly more positively than male teachers (64 percent). Perhaps in line with incentive literature that indicates that younger and less experienced teachers are

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<sup>51</sup> This was a point raised by numerous teachers across sites, but at other schools teachers seemed more inclined to shrug it off as an issue of chance. Interestingly, the school listed above was one of the least competitive as indicated by the Gini coefficient measure employed in Chapter III.

Table 6.1: Teacher Perceived Fairness of School Incentive Plan

Survey Item: The GEEG incentive plan developed by my school was fair to teachers.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know
<u>Overall</u>		9.06	16.96	47.64	18.9	4.65
<u>Race</u>	Black	4.83	7.59	51.03	33.10	3.45
-	Hispanic	9.43	18.04	50.47	17.45	4.60
-	White	7.05	19.82	51.54	16.30	5.29
<u>Gender</u>	Female	8.61	16.48	50.92	19.41	4.58
-	Male	11.56	19.60	47.74	16.08	5.03
<u>Experience</u>	2-3 Years	6.45	7.74	57.42	20.65	7.74
-	4-14 Years	9.28	16.32	52.54	17.66	4.19
-	15+ Years	9.52	20.94	45.09	20.09	4.27
<u>Degree</u>	Bachelor's	8.87	16.37	51.21	19.32	4.22
-	Master's	9.72	18.81	48.59	16.93	5.96
<u>Salary</u>	25K-40K	12.77	14.89	51.06	16.31	4.96
-	40K-60K	8.48	17.06	51.12	18.71	4.58
<u>Award Status</u>	Expect Award	7.20	16.70	52.78	20.44	2.88
-	Do Not or Unsure	16.87	18.07	40.56	12.45	12.05
<u>NCLB</u>	NCLB Grade	8.71	16.42	50.64	19.87	4.36
-	Non-NCLB Grade	11.11	20.11	49.21	13.23	6.35
<u>TEEG Status</u>	TEEG School	7.58	17.12	51.82	19.85	3.64
-	Non-TEEG School	10.62	16.80	48.97	17.91	5.71
<u>Urbanicity</u>	Urban School	9.03	16.81	50.14	18.83	5.19
-	Non-Urban School	9.20	17.60	51.60	19.20	2.40
<u>Plan</u>	More Egalitarian	6.64	15.08	54.00	20.81	3.47
-	More Competitive	11.62	18.95	46.66	16.88	5.89
<u>Distribution</u>	More Egalitarian	7.32	14.09	54.01	21.55	3.04
-	More Competitive	11.29	20.63	45.86	15.52	6.70

Data from NCPI Fall 2008 Survey.  
 Elementary Teachers Only.  
 N = 1,291

more likely to favor merit pay, teachers with less experience were more likely to believe that their school plan was fair.<sup>52</sup> Teachers with Master's degrees were less likely to respond "agree" or "strongly agree" (66 percent) than were teachers with Bachelor's (70 percent). No real difference in perceived fairness emerged by salary. The largest teacher-level difference appears to have been between teachers who were expecting an award (73 percent) versus those who either did not expect an award or were not sure if they should expect an award (53 percent).

As for school-level factors, the competitiveness as designed in school plans and distributed in actual rewards appears to be substantial regarding teachers' perceptions of plan fairness. Nearly 75 percent of teachers in schools where the plan was more egalitarian in design reported it to be fair, and over 75 percent of teachers in schools where the actual distribution of bonuses was egalitarian responded "agree" or "strongly agree" to the fairness item. Teachers in schools where the plan was more competitive or the actual distribution was more competitive were much less likely to view their school's incentive plan as fair, with 47 percent and 61 percent agreeing/strongly agreeing, respectively. NCLB grade-level teachers were much more likely to believe that their school plan was fair, as over slightly 70 percent of them responded "agree" or "strongly agree" in comparison to less than 60 percent of non-NCLB grade teachers. Teachers in schools that went on to participate in the TEEG incentive program (72 percent) responded more positively overall than teachers in schools that did not (67 percent). No real difference in perceived fairness emerged by school urbanicity.

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<sup>52</sup> The percentage of teachers reporting that they "agree" or "strongly agree" with the plan being fair is as follows: experience 2-3 years (78 percent), 4-14 years (70 percent), and 15 plus (65 percent).

### Teacher Enthusiasm

Most teachers interviewed (24 of 31) initially indicated that the potential for merit pay did not affect their enthusiasm for teaching during the process nor did the loss of potential rewards (in non-TEEG schools) decrease enthusiasm with the program's completion. In brief,

[GEEG] didn't affect me at all in any way before it started, when it was going on, and now that it's ended. (Teacher 3, School 2)

I love my job whether GEEG was there or not. [It is] something that I want to do. (Teacher 3, School 1)

On the surface, such teacher response is in harmony with much of the theoretical and qualitative work on teacher pay-for-performance: Teachers do not enter teaching for financial reasons.

[Money] is not the primary reason for getting into teaching... (laughs) We wouldn't be teachers if we were money motivated. (Teacher 2, School 5)

In fact, many teachers reported that they had goals and aspirations for themselves and their students regardless of the possibility of receiving bonuses.

My...frame of mind isn't, "Oh, I need three more kids to get the grant," you know...If I happen to meet that criteria, "awesome," but if I don't, I'm here for the kids not for the money. (Teacher 3, School 3)

Much of the interview data confirm these views.

However, to assume that because many teachers do not enter the profession with financial gains in mind or heart suggests that financial motivation does not impact teacher behavior is probably naïve. A few teachers determined that they were indeed affected by the opportunity to receive additional money. The motivation could be direct, as represented by the following teacher assessment:

[We are] just like little children... We want to be rewarded in effort of pushing out and going beyond. So the main thing is that it did make a difference in our motivation... I tell you if you ever want to inspire teachers give them bonus money; you can see the big smiles on their faces. (Teacher 4, School 7)

Or the motivation could have been more indirect in nature. For example, teachers noted shifts in professional development attendance and collaborative efforts that ultimately impacted them positively.

It impacted me a lot because by us having it and having to do more professional development, it made me look for different ways to keep my children motivated. Other ways that I didn't think of before. So it made me move to a different level of teaching... It influence my desire to teach in the future because... it helped me to give to a whole different level of children that maybe were being missed before. (Teacher 2, School 7)

All changes in enthusiasm reported by teachers were positive. Still, only a quarter or so of teacher respondents indicated a shift in their enthusiasm.

Although it might not show in survey data, teacher experience also seemed to play a role in curbing teacher enthusiasm for those teachers interviewed in this research.<sup>53</sup>

Specifically, those teachers who were within a few years of retirement or who had reached retirement but had elected to continue to teach were frank in their assessment. For example, a teacher with over 30 years of experience (and 20 years in the school) flatly responded,

No. I'm here for the long haul. I'm in it for the long haul. (Teacher 4, School 2)

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<sup>53</sup> For a few topics, survey and interview data are in opposition. There are a number of possible explanations for this. For example, the interview data consist of subsets of teachers in a subset of schools and might not be representative. Moreover, interviewees might be less likely to provide full disclosure when discussing a contentious issue such as pay-for-performance, especially with someone potentially perceived as an outsider. On the other hand, interviewees might see an opportunity to engage fully in a conversation on a sensitive issue that directly impacts their work and income. Whatever the reasons, any discrepancy can only really be solved through observation, which, as mentioned earlier, was not an available option in this research.

Even some teachers with significant but less experience were already considering their career trajectory:

I'm going for 30 so (laughs) I'll hit 30...I don't think [GEEG] has influenced [my enthusiasm]. I mean, once you're on this track...They say if you make it through the first 10, then you'll more than likely retire. So, I've already made it through [more than 10 years], so I'm good to go.  
(Teacher 1, School 1)

In sum, approximately a quarter of the teachers interviewed submitted that GEEG-merit opportunities impacted their enthusiasm for teaching in some positive way. It is difficult to say how reliable that figure is considering teachers could A) say what they think I would prefer to hear or expect them to say (i.e., report a false positive impact on their enthusiasm)<sup>54</sup> or B) not say what they would like to avoid perceived potential problems with administrators, TEA, etc. (i.e., not reporting negative changes in enthusiasm). Regardless, little disputation can be made to a significant number of teachers expressing a real change – directly or indirectly – in their enthusiasm through the GEEG initiative.

More broadly, teachers were asked to respond to items on the NCPI survey regarding any change in their enthusiasm and enjoyment of teaching, as well as the possibility of their exiting the profession with the conclusion of the GEEG program (see Table 6.2). Approximately half of teacher respondents indicated that their enthusiasm for teaching as well as their enjoyment of teaching had not changed since the conclusion of the GEEG program. The majority of the remaining teacher responses indicated that teachers were more enthusiastic (over 40 percent) and enjoyed teaching more (about 40 percent) than they did the previous year. Over 60 percent of teachers indicated

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<sup>54</sup> Although the research that I conducted was independent of TEA influence, I did not keep secret the fact that I was working with NCPI, a research center working under contract with TEA. It is possible that some teachers misconstrued the research setting, tying it (and me) to a TEA evaluation of sorts.

Table 6.2: Enthusiasm for Teaching Post-GEEG

Prompt: The GEEG incentive plan ended with the close of the last school year (2007-08). Compared to last year, how much have the following aspects of your teaching experience changed?							
	Decreased Greatly	Decreased Moderately	Decreased Minimally	No Change	Increased Minimally	Increased Moderately	Increased Greatly
a. Your enthusiasm for teaching.	2.09	2.17	4.03	50.58	10.15	15.49	15.49
b. Your enjoyment of teaching.	2.63	2.17	6.74	48.33	11.85	14.18	14.10
c. The likelihood that you will leave the teaching profession.	11.93	3.72	4.80	62.74	7.36	4.88	4.57

Data from NCPI Fall 2008 Survey.

Elementary Teachers Only.

N = 1,291

that they were no more or less likely to exit teaching, slightly more than 20 percent reported being less likely to leave the profession, and approximately 15 percent indicated that they were more likely to exit.<sup>55</sup> It is interesting to note that school TEEG status<sup>56</sup> and level of competitiveness by award distribution did not seem to affect teacher enthusiasm, but the level of competitiveness by school plan design did. Teachers in schools with egalitarian plans were more likely to report greater enthusiasm (45 percent) for teaching after the GEEG program ended than did teachers in schools with competitive plans (37 percent).

### Teacher Effort

Teachers seldom overtly addressed – whether they were asked directly or indirectly – the incentive program’s effect on their effort levels.<sup>57</sup> In alignment with much of the education performance pay literature, the few who openly discussed effort suggested that they were already giving maximum effort.

I think I worked just as hard [before GEEG]... That’s what our job is, is to try to get these kids to where they need to be, and so I don’t think I worked any harder. I just knew there was money attached if we got there, but it’s not that I worked any harder to get there. It’s the same. I mean, I still do what I need to do. (Teacher 2, School 1)

How can I say it? I try my best, you know. I try my best regardless of whether the grant is [there or not]. You know, it’s your job. (Teacher 1, School 8)

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<sup>55</sup> It is possible that veteran teachers at or near retirement might have responded that they were more likely to exit teaching given that the survey item did not explicitly link the exit possibility to the loss of potential GEEG bonus dollars.

<sup>56</sup> A comparison of survey responses of teachers in schools continuing into the TEEG program with teachers in schools not continuing with any school-level incentive program reveals no significant differences, although teachers in TEEG indicate that they might be less likely to exit teaching. Again, this difference is nominal.

<sup>57</sup> Only six teachers directly addressed the issue of effort, but many of them seemed to talk around the issue. Most interview data suggest that teachers believed that they were relatively unaffected, but a closer analysis using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 2005) would be key in substantiating this claim.



Not all teachers, however, shared this perspective completely. One teacher declared that all of the school's teachers were likely impacted significantly by the program:

As a matter of fact, I think all of us put forth more effort, more time, more interest, and more [enthusiasm]. (Teacher 2, School 6)

A teacher at a school in a different district had a similar viewpoint, stating

I think it made teachers work a little harder to try and make that extra mile...I saw teachers working a lot harder trying to get there, you know, and sometimes it didn't happen, but I think it boosted...the teachers...to work at another level. (Teacher 2, School 3)

In both of the quotations immediately above, however, the teachers appear to be cautious in their account of teacher effort, focusing more on the faculty more broadly and less on their own levels. Such indirect commentary regarding increased levels of teacher effort was not widespread but seemed to be the preferred means of communicating that some teachers were able to and sometimes did boost their efforts.

### Teacher Practices

Potential teacher behavioral changes were numerous. In this research, the initial interview protocols were designed to address possible changes in teacher pedagogical approaches and professional development attendance. I asked every teacher about their pedagogical practices pre-, during, and post-GEEG; in some of those conversations, time spent on tasks or subjects and data-driven decision-making emerged frequently enough to warrant their own brief discussions. Thus, this sub-category is divided farther into four distinct analyses: pedagogy, time on tasks or subjects, data-driven decision-making, and professional development.

*Pedagogy.* NCPI survey data shown in Table 6.3 reveals that over 70 percent of elementary teacher respondents indicated that GEEG did not affect their teaching practice or professional behavior, although more than 25 percent maintained that the program did impact their behavior. More than 60 percent of teachers felt as though GEEG improved teaching practices in the school, while just over 30 percent “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed.” In terms of pedagogical change from the final year of GEEG to the first year after the program, nearly two-thirds of teachers believed that there was no change with regards to the amount of time they spend teaching non-TAKS subject material, although approximately 30 percent relayed that they spent more time on non-TAKS subjects. In analyses not shown here, teachers in schools where more competitive plans were designed were nine percent more likely to claim that they had changed teaching practices or professional behavior than were teachers in schools with more egalitarian plans. Similarly, teachers in schools with competitive plans were 7 percent more likely to disagree with their colleagues that GEEG improved teacher practices in the school, as were teachers in schools that went on to participate in TEEG compared to teachers at non-TEEG schools.

Twenty-three of thirty-three teachers (70 percent) reported making minimal if any pedagogical changes, noting that “most [teachers] would still be the same” (Teacher 5, School 5) with or without the GEEG. Some interviewees stated that there was no reason to change their practices because they were doing what was best for their students already. Occasionally, teachers would recall making pedagogical changes over the previous three years but claimed they were unrelated to the GEEG:

Table 6.3: Effects on Pedagogy

Prompt: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement about the GEEG that operated in your school.								
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know		
a.	The GEEG incentive plan did not affect my teaching practice or professional behavior.	4.42	21.53	44.31	27.27	2.48		
b.	The GEEG incentive plan at my school helped improve teaching practices.	7.98	22.39	44.62	17.27	7.75		
Prompt: The GEEG incentive plan ended with the close of the last school year (2007-08). Compared to last year, how much have the following aspects of your teaching experience changed?								
		Decreased Greatly	Decreased Moderately	Decreased Minimally	No Change	Increased Minimally	Increased Moderately	Increased Greatly
a.	The time you spend teaching non-TAKS subjects. <sup>58</sup>	3.1	2.01	3.18	62.35	10.07	13.01	6.27
b.	The time you spend providing supplemental materials or tutoring.	0.77	0.46	2.01	48.18	18.05	17.58	12.94

Data from NCPI Fall 2008 Survey.

Elementary Teachers Only.

N = 1,291

<sup>58</sup> Teachers in schools participating in the TEEG program were less likely to report spending more time teaching non-TAKS subjects than were teachers in schools that were no longer in an incentive program, but the differences were minimal.

I try to adapt to the needs of the students...they have different needs, so I try to adapt to their needs...I have seen some things that have worked for me; some things haven't worked for me. So, I try to use the things that work for me. But it is independent of the grant. (Teacher 3, P-School 2)

In addition, a few teachers noted that their autonomy was restricted to school and/or district curriculum, limiting their ability to adjust pedagogical practices if they had desired to do so.

Still, somewhat in discord with much of the teacher pay-for-performance literature, a substantial number of teachers (10 of 33) indicated that they did make important changes in their pedagogical strategies. Even in this era of accountability, one second grade teacher discussed her decision to include more materials in testing formats since students that young have had limited experience with assessment. Other teachers communicated a considerable shift in strategy, occasionally focusing on lower-achieving students:

I try to do more one-to-one and more small groups, whereas before I might have did more group discussion. But those that I see need a little bit more help now, I can pull them to the side because I've already explained to the other ones – they pretty much know what to do. (Teacher 2, School 7)

I found maybe some new strategies to use with those low kids, so I'm able to bring them up more. I try to attack more of the lower students so that I could bring them up, cause I knew that if I'd get the higher ones and the middle ones to keep going, you know, in practice I'd be okay. (Teacher 2, School 3)

In addition, some teachers reported increased emphasis on certain subjects such as English and/or mathematics or skills within those subjects (e.g., fluency), although some contested that uneven subject focus had been in place prior to GEEG.

In a couple of rare cases, teachers were able to provide a more measured and nuanced response, recognizing that they made no conscious change but incremental (and potentially subconscious) adaptation was possible.

I keep wanting to say “no” because I don’t recall really making like this amazing change, but I guess yes because...things have changed because of little things we’ve done. (Teacher 1, School 3)

Although such responses offer glimpses of profundity, the responses never fully seem to synthesize or express clearly how the program modified teacher behavior over time.

Principal interviews could be indicative of more teachers making meaningful pedagogical changes than teacher performance incentive literature might indicate. In the pilot schools, where teacher turnover appeared to be higher, one principal noted that there were only a few veteran teachers who “were set in their ways” (P-School Principal 2), and many newer and relatively inexperienced ones were more likely to alter their delivery of instruction. Another principal pointed out that teachers had to change with the times and reported an increased shift to teaching styles that were more likely to keep students active and engaged. In these discussions, however, principals did not seem to make concrete connections between teacher pedagogical change and GEEG incentives.

*Time on Subjects/Tasks.* In some of the interviews, teachers discussed modifications to the amount of time that they spent either on subjects or tasks in relation to the GEEG. Similar to the majority of responses to issues of pedagogical change, most of the teachers (27 of 30) who mentioned time believed that they either A) did not make any significant changes or B) made alterations that were not influenced by GEEG. Teachers who did note increasing time on certain subjects or in specific areas of instruction often reported doing so for the greater good of their students:

Because with me I still know my purpose here... I also know with it or without it that I still have a job to perform, and I'm still going to do that... I put more time where it is needed. If I need to put more time in whatever subject area, I'm gonna put it there regardless [of the GEEG program]. (Teacher 4, School 6)

Again, a few teachers also felt restricted by school and/or district scheduling, with a couple of teachers from the same school suggesting that their autonomy was limited.

Our time won't change, our subjects. We have certain times to do each one anyways. (Teacher 2, School 7)

We followed the curriculum, okay, as given to us... We followed... the objectives... I mean we have a timeline. (Teacher 4, School 7)

A principal at a different school (and district) observed something similar regarding her faculty:

The district has made some major changes in our curriculum guides that they provide that gives us more of our scope and pacing for what needs to be taught. So I think that the teachers are very much tied to that. (Principal 2)

Multiple teachers at another school in the same district as the principal quoted above, however, reported more time spent on English, reading, and fluency as a result of GEEG, at least in part. None of them mentioned the district's involvement in curriculum design and/or pacing.<sup>59</sup>

Those are the numbers being turned in, you know, so it has to look good so you need to do the extra time either during P.E., during tutoring, during reading – lots of comprehension, lots of fluency. Pretty much every day we were testing them... I think had the grant not been there, maybe we wouldn't have been pushing it as much. (Teacher 3, School 3)

The level of impact GEEG actually had on teacher changes in their classroom is difficult to pinpoint, but when teachers had enough freedom to make choices, it seems as though the presence of the GEEG program was heightened.

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<sup>59</sup> Teachers in both of the other schools participating in this study did indicate that the district influenced curriculum.

*Data-Driven Decision-Making (DDDM).* Approximately half of the teachers (10 of 19) who discussed DDDM in relation to GEEG reported no visible changes. Teachers at a couple of schools relayed that DDDM had been an important part of their school culture prior to GEEG. Thus, in their opinion, GEEG had little impact on their use of it.

We have been disaggregating data for years and years and years. We pick apart every assessment. We look at...testing groups; we look at student groups; we look at content areas... We look at every little thing... We've already been doing it. (Teacher 5, School 5)

In other schools, some teachers indicated that DDDM had been part of the school norm, but teacher scrutiny of student data had not been intense. Participating in GEEG seemed to raise the quality of their use of DDDM.

Before we looked at data, but I mean [the district] really...showed us how to analyze it even more closely. Ever since then...we've been looking at the data – which objectives need to be re-taught. (Teacher 4, School 4)

Finally, at the remaining schools DDDM either was not addressed by teachers or they had not implemented DDDM until they began participating in GEEG. One teacher with over 25 years of experience at School 2 struck a similar tenor as her colleagues, saying

Data-driven decision-making definitely was one of the main and will continue to be one of the main...factors in how we guide our instruction. That's something that I have really learned a lot about during the GEEG portion – those three years. (Teacher 4, School 2)

Across participating schools, it seems as though the GEEG program positively influenced teachers' use of DDDM, either affirming, strengthening, or underlining its potential value with regards to improving student achievement.

*Professional Development.* Nearly 85 percent of elementary teachers surveyed by NCPI reported time spent in professional development as being an important factor for

teachers to receive GEEG grant money.<sup>60</sup> About one-third of teachers surveyed indicated that the GEEG plan did not contribute to improved quality of professional development while about a quarter of respondents reported that it did. The remaining 40 percent or so of teachers answered “do not know.” Although half of teachers claimed that the amount of time they spend in professional development since the GEEG program ended has not changed, approximately 45 percent declare that they have increased the amount of time they spend in professional development. Teachers in schools that continued into TEEG were eight percent more likely to “disagree” or “strongly disagree” than their non-TEEG peers that professional development quality during GEEG improved. Teachers in schools with competitive plans were about six percent more likely to report an increase in time spent in professional development since GEEG’s conclusion than were teachers in schools with egalitarian plans.

Including the pilots, three schools emphasized professional development as their primary or only component of the optional Criterion III that they elected to include in their plans. Teacher interview data in all three of these schools offered mixed results – some teachers noting substantial personal and collective changes in pursuit of professional development and others suggesting little or no meaningful changes. However, nearly all of the interviewed teachers in those three schools did relay that encouragement (or expectation) to attend and development opportunities increased. Still, teachers doubted whether the increased professional development was effective. The number of hours required in the plans and the lack of meaningful professional

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<sup>60</sup> Data not shown here. Approximately 14 percent responded “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” One percent selected “do not know.”



development (i.e., limited session topics that sometimes did not address teacher needs) appear to have constrained teacher participation.

In the schools that did not include optional criteria or specify professional development in the optional criteria<sup>61</sup> that they did employ, professional development routines were undisturbed. One principal discussed GEEG as a non-factor in this regard:

I mean professional development is a given. That's something that has to happen. Teachers know that. Things are constantly changing. They know that they have to be abreast of what's going on...I don't think that GEEG enhanced that or...had an impact. (Principal 6)

Indeed, most teachers in these seven schools substantiated this principal's perspective, frequently citing their ongoing professional development efforts and/or the opportunities that had been and continue to be available.

### Professional Learning Community

Regression analyses for the professional learning community (plc) scale are presented in Table 6.4. Teachers were asked a series of questions on their school's plc since the conclusion of the GEEG program, so results should be interpreted as post-GEEG plc. Across the models (and with varying degrees of levels of statistical significance), white teachers were less positive about school plc than were Hispanic or black teachers; male teachers reported lower levels of plc than did female teachers; and teachers with Master's degrees relayed lower levels of perceived plc than did teachers with Bachelor's degrees.

Perhaps the most key finding from this individual-level data is that teachers who expected to receive an award for their GEEG performance the prior academic year were

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<sup>61</sup> One school elected to have professional development as part of their use of Criterion III, but it was clustered under the state's Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) system.

Table 6.4: Professional Learning Community<sup>62</sup>

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Teacher</b>			
White	-0.195 ***	-0.251 ***	-0.252 ***
	0.070	0.075	0.076
Black	0.037	-0.132	-0.174
	0.083	0.108	0.113
Male	-0.153 **	-0.142 *	-0.104
	0.073	0.074	0.071
Master's	-0.183 ***	-0.169 ***	-0.154 **
	0.064	0.064	0.063
Exper (4-14)	0.015	0.010	0.018
	0.076	0.075	0.076
Exper (15+)	0.134	0.119	0.099
	0.085	0.083	0.084
Higher Salary	0.018	0.035	0.042
	0.077	0.079	0.076
NCLB	0.053	0.049	0.061
	0.086	0.088	0.084
Expect Award	0.271 **	0.245 **	0.201 *
	0.120	0.121	0.113
<b>School</b>			
Enrollment		-0.0005 ***	-0.0005 *
		0.0002	0.0003
Black Enr.		0.0006	-0.0007
		0.0004	0.0014
White Enr.		0.0064 ***	0.0039
		0.0021	0.0057
Urban		-0.032	-0.303 ***
		0.071	0.097
Pupil/Teacher		-0.060 ***	0.060
		0.021	0.049
TEEG School		0.059	0.179 *
		0.054	0.095
Comp. Plan		-0.003	-0.121
		0.072	0.126
Comp. Dist.		-0.227 ***	-0.197 *
		0.074	0.118
District F.E.	no	no	yes
R-Squared	0.03	0.06	0.14

Data from NCPI Fall 2008 Survey.

Elementary Teachers Only.

Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) - 6 (Strongly Agree)

N = 1,291

<sup>62</sup> Professional Learning Community construct consists of items addressing the following: teacher respect of teachers, teacher ability to express professional views openly, teacher shared belief of school's central mission, teacher trust, teacher ability to question or challenge other teachers, teacher communication, teacher opportunity to take risks, teachers go beyond the classroom to ensure student success.

more positive about school plc in each of the models (.27, .25, and .20), although with district fixed effects the significance level was only .10. In other words, those teachers who believed that their teaching performance was successful as defined by the incentive program were more likely to view their school's professional learning community positively than were their colleagues who did not expect to receive an award.<sup>63</sup>

The level of school plan competitiveness was not significant in either Model 2 or 3. However, teachers in schools where the actual distribution of monies were more competitive were significantly more likely (.01 and .10 levels, respectively) to convey lower perceptions of school plc (.23 and .20). This suggests that the actual distribution of dollars is more important than is a school plan, at least in terms of teacher perceptions of their professional learning community. Although a school's TEEG status<sup>64</sup> was not significant in Model 2, it was significant at the .10 level when district effects were added. Teachers in schools that continued to participate in an incentive program were more likely to suggest high levels (.18) of plc.

Two of the most prominent aspects of professional learning community are teacher collaboration and teacher trust. Within the series of plc survey items, phrases such as "teachers respect other teachers," "teachers openly express their views," "trust each other," and "talking through views" are representative. Therefore, in the next two subsections, I explore collaboration and teacher trust/tension in more depth with interview data.

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<sup>63</sup> Definitive reasons for this cannot be established given the data, but two possibilities could be that teachers expecting to receive bonuses have more positive outlooks in general or spend more time with other teachers who expect to be successful in receiving bonuses.

<sup>64</sup> TEEG: Whether a GEEG school continued to participate in an incentive scheme, the TEEG program.

## Collaboration

Teacher responses around questions of GEEG impact on teacher collaboration were generally consistent within schools and split evenly across schools. Interestingly, the four schools where teachers frequently reported minimal or no impact on their collaborative practices were all located in the same district. In fact, this is the same district where school GEEG applications were nearly identical in narratives and criteria details and listed “actively involved” as an expectation of teacher collaboration. About half of the teachers interviewed from those schools indicated that GEEG’s collaboration criterion was redundant in their schools.

I think we were doing it already. It just kept going, so I don’t think it improved it. (Teacher 4, School 3)

Other teachers across these schools often altered their answers in mid-response, shifting from the redundancy claim to admitting GEEG potentially had minimally positive effects on their collaboration, including more structure, increased rigor, or fine-tuning.

I really don’t think [that there were changes in collaboration]...at my grade level...I don’t think it changed. School-wide, I didn’t really see a major change. I didn’t...If anything, I think things have gotten more structured. (Teacher 3, School 2)

None of these types of responses were substantiated with examples. Indeed, all of the teachers in this district who suggested that GEEG might have impacted collaboration did so only after denying the feasibility of it at length.

On the other hand, the majority of teachers at the remaining four schools were generally positive about teacher collaboration in their schools prior to GEEG but still asserted that it had improved subsequent to the implementation of the school plan. The

two most commonly cited transformations in teacher collaboration were teacher effort and vertical planning<sup>65</sup>:

We [were collaborating] before, but not as strong as we do now. Sometimes [we would] get together a short time – maybe 15 minutes, 20 minutes. Now we decide to stay the whole 45 or 50 minutes during our conference time. (Teacher 3, School 5)

We would work together on different tasks that we had... We would help each other out. If one was doing this..., then the other teacher would pitch in and do something else to help out... So, we collaborated in all different grade levels... Pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> [grade]. (Teacher 2, School 7)

Admittedly, the responses from teachers from this “set” of four schools do not appear to be bundled as tightly, but they do seem to be substantially different from those provided by teachers from the singular district and discussed above. Given the divergence between schools, teachers still recognized the state’s emphasis on teacher collaboration, which appears to be in line with survey results indicating that almost 90 percent of teachers viewed teacher collaboration as an important factor in receiving GEEG money.

TEEG status does not appear to be a factor in collaboration across these schools. However, the competitiveness of bonus distribution could be an important indicator. The four schools from the same district all had low levels of competitiveness, especially in comparison to the other four schools. There are at least two reasons to proceed cautiously with any interpretation of this finding. First, obviously the “district effect” could be more influential on similarities in teacher collaboration than the level of competitiveness of reward payouts. Second, the results could be counterintuitive to some readers. Teachers from schools that were more egalitarian seemed less likely to report positive effects of GEEG on teacher collaboration. Inversely, this could indicate that more egalitarian

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<sup>65</sup> Teachers at all schools acknowledged the role of traditional horizontal planning in their schools prior to and during GEEG. Vertical planning/collaboration centers on working with teachers of other grade levels, e.g., a second grade teacher collaborating with a third grade teacher.

schools are less likely to emphasize or press teachers to perform additional collaborative actions or that teachers are more resistant to additional effort when their reward(s) will be impacted minimally.

### Trust/Tension

By design, teacher pay-for-performance usually results in some level of teacher tension since participants compete for merit pay bonuses that are limited to those teachers most successful in raising student achievement. Survey data presented in Table 6.5 seems to contradict this. Over 70 percent of teachers “disagree” or “strongly disagreed” that their school’s GEEG plan had negative effects on the school; nearly 60 percent disagreed that the plan had caused resentment; almost 75 percent disagreed that teachers were more competitive than cooperative; and approximately two-thirds disagreed that teachers lacked trust of one another. Still, for any given prompt, 20 to 35 percent of teachers did agree that trust had declined and/or tension had risen. Moreover, teachers in schools that were not going to participate in the TEEG program or who taught in schools with more competitive awards distribution consistently held more negative views of teacher trust and tension, with differences between the two groups ranging from four to eight percent.

On the other hand and on first appearance, the teacher interview data appears to support performance pay literature. Multiple teachers at all of the schools provided a number of reasons for their school faculties’ varying levels of staff discord, including general competitiveness, hurt feelings, unequal classroom makeup, grade level differences, and perceived underpayment of non-teacher staff. One teacher summed up teachers’ early experiences with GEEG as follows:

Table 6.5: Teacher Trust/Tension

Prompt: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement about the GEEG incentive plane that operated in your school.					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know
a. The GEEG incentive plan had negative effects on my school.	24.17	47.17	14.95	7.51	6.20
b. The GEEG incentive plan caused resentment among teachers at my school. <sup>66</sup>	15.03	42.76	20.99	12.16	9.06
Prompt: Think about teachers at your school this year (2008-09). To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about teachers in your school?					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do Not Know
a. Seem more competitive than cooperative.	20.68	53.60	20.53	5.19	n/a
b. Do not really trust each other.	10.15	54.30	26.18	9.37	n/a

Data from NCPI Fall 2008 Survey.

Elementary Teachers Only.

N = 1,291

<sup>66</sup> Over 25 percent of non-TEEG teachers indicated that the GEEG incentive plan had negative effects on their school whereas only about 19 percent of TEEG teachers suggested the same. In a similar vein, over 37 percent of non-TEEG teachers agreed that the GEEG program caused resentment among teachers compared to just over 29 percent of TEEG teachers.

I think it just caused a lot of fighting...and a yucky climate in the school...Teachers that were, you thought were, you know, nice people before, they would be ugly to you...It was all over money. (Teacher 1, School 1)

In fact, only a few teachers who discussed their school's climate were able to do so without at least mentioning some early disharmony. A small minority of teachers maintained hurt feelings and regret, noting that they do not see some teachers in "the same light as before" (Teacher 1, School 1).

On the other hand, some teachers reported that early problems did not develop into lasting teacher division.<sup>67</sup> Some discussed teachers and staff taking preventive measures.

One of the things that we did talk about at the beginning was how [GEEG] could be divisive and how we wanted to make sure that it was implemented in a way that it wouldn't be. And we felt [that] if we could not do that, we didn't want to participate. (Teacher 1, School 5)

Others noted how teachers quickly transitioned from potential divisions to student achievement and to meeting collective goals. A principal of one of the pilot schools believed the process to be a bonding experience, noting that the program and the school's participation were presented to teachers as a school reward and less of an individual competition. Some teacher interviewees suggested that the strong sense of teacher community found throughout these schools eventually outweighed most individualism.

We didn't want [anyone to lack a bonus], so we really tried hard to help each other so that it wouldn't occur. (Teacher 2, School 3)

We'd assist other teachers if they were having a difficult time looking at their data and seeing how they performed, so we would assist other teachers who were having problems...it was everyone helping each other. (Teacher 1, School 2)

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<sup>67</sup> In fact, of the 17 teachers who discussed the lasting impacts of GEEG on their professional learning communities, seven believed that there were no lasting impacts, five believed that there were lasting positive impacts, and five believed that there were lasting negative impacts.



In addition, for the majority of teachers, negative ramifications did not extend through the GEEG program or beyond its completion.

Everything is pretty much exactly the same as it was... We still work really closely together. Nobody, you know, is taking out claws. (Teacher 3, School 3)

Thus, it seems as though any negative incentive impact might be limited to short-term effects for most of these schools and participants. Still, one possible TEA oversight in this process did lead to clear and lasting bitterness at most of the schools.

*TAKS/Non-TAKS.* TEA's invitation to schools to participate in the GEEG program was based on school demographics and performance. The performance component was based largely on school standing and aggregate student achievement, both of which were established via the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), which is given each spring to students in grades 3-11. Therefore, elementary schools in GEEG were invited based on the performance of their students (and teachers) in grades 3-5 (or 3-6) only. At least six teachers reported in detail on dissension that resulted from this split.

Most school plans were designed to reward TAKS teachers more than non-TAKS teachers since the school was selected based on TAKS results.<sup>68</sup> In two schools in the same district, teachers noted early opposition from non-TAKS teachers that waned over time. TAKS teachers in those schools discussed their efforts to explain the level of pressure that feel to non-TAKS teachers as justification for their additional levels of bonus pay, with a couple noting that non-TAKS teachers do not volunteer to move up.

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<sup>68</sup> Although I was unable to locate the exact differences in pay by TAKS/non-TAKS teacher designation, it seems as though these differences varied considerably by school. I base this assumption on teacher interviews and the Gini coefficient developed by Taylor, Springer, and Ehlert (2008).

Non-TAKS teachers appeared somewhat reticent in their agreement. For example, one second grade teacher stated,

[TAKS teachers will] get more than the kindergarten, first, and second [grade teachers] because they were in the testing grade, even though [non-TAKS] work just as hard...So, it got to the point, but like I say, fairness prevailed...even though I may work hard, but I wasn't in that grade level so I received less. (Teacher 2, School 6)

At other schools, non-TAKS teachers continued to express frustration over the payment differential, occasionally point out that they serve as the foundation for TAKS-teacher successes. In other words, although school ratings are based on TAKS results, outstanding TAKS results would not be possible without good K-2 instruction.

An additional point of contention between the TAKS/non-TAKS teachers rested on the difference in testing format. This was especially problematic from the TAKS-teacher perspective. Since the TAKS is a statewide assessment, TAKS teachers viewed it as maintaining appropriate measurement and test alignment. However, no such state assessment exists for K-2 teachers, so various assessments were included or assembled to measure non-TAKS teacher effectiveness. TAKS teachers clearly felt as though the non-TAKS assessments were less conclusive, and in some instances, potentially inconclusive.

#### Other Potential Concerns

Cheating was mentioned more seldom than I anticipated, in part, it seems, because the statewide TAKS assessment is heavily monitored. Instead, any discussion of cheating was primarily directed toward non-TAKS grade opportunities since some of those teachers had substantial roles in forming and/or grading the assessments. For the most part, however, cheating or the possibility of it seems to have been a nonfactor.

A few teachers mentioned but only one really articulated this more macro concern of the GEEG and similar merit programs: Why allow for such large bonus differences *across* schools? The program encourages localized plan development within parameters, but the differences between schools – even those in the same city (or possibly district) – can vary substantially.

Not every school does the bonus program the same, and that is not fair. Because if my bonus for having 97 percent of my kids pass their state assessment was such-and-such money, but in another school, the same teaching position, the same level of success, they got \$4,000. Well, why did they get \$4,000 if my bonus was \$2,000? (Teacher 5, School 5)

In a similar vein, this teacher discussed the potential bonus differences across school levels within the same district, noting that rewards in middle or high schools could be substantially easier or harder to receive.

A real concern of some teachers was student mobility. Although one school had very specific rules in place regarding whose test scores would or would not be counted when determining teacher bonuses, most of the other schools had not sufficiently considered this issue. A few teachers remembered their resignation during one or more of the program years when low-performing students transferred into their class shortly before testing, decreasing their opportunity to receive merit pay or higher levels of bonus.

The role of new teachers was also an issue that was not usually addressed with foresight by TEA or within school plans. As mentioned above, many were not given sufficient information about the program, plan, and potential for merit pay. Some school committees had to address the issue after the program was already under way. Similar planning deficiencies existed for exiting teachers. A few teachers also reported that some teacher assistants and part-time teachers were unhappy with the level of bonus they

received for their efforts. Typically, paraprofessionals and part-time teachers were given smaller, set bonuses. The extent of their involvement in the process and their complaints is beyond the scope of this work, but the potential of their dissatisfaction could have an impact on classrooms and schools, and is worth highlighting here.

### Chapter Summary

Teachers generally saw the GEEG incentive plan adopted by their school as fair, and some teachers highlighted the plan's transparency. In addition, teachers occasionally noted that their opportunity to participate in plan development and/or implementation was key, even when juxtaposed with personal prejudices against merit pay. However, few interviewed teachers suggested that GEEG altered their enthusiasm for teaching, effort, or classroom practices directly, although a substantial number did indicate indirect impacts.

Upon the completion of the GEEG program, teachers often reported an increased level of professional learning community. Those teachers who expected to receive an award relayed a perception of higher levels of plc than those who did not expect a bonus. Teachers in more competitive schools reported lower rates of plc. Most teachers who were interviewed believed that their school faculties were already doing a good job of collaborating, but interview data indicated that a substantial number of teachers thought that the GEEG program actually increased the frequency and/or relevance of teacher collaboration. Similarly, teachers typically reported maintained or increased levels of teacher trust, even though tension might have arisen in early stages of plan development.

Some rifts between teachers of TAKS grade levels and teachers of non-TAKS grade levels, however, appear to be more lasting.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary of the Purpose

Theoretical work and some early research on teacher merit pay or pay-for-performance concluded that such ways of compensating teachers were in direct conflict with the “nature of teaching” (Murnane & Cohen, 1986). More recent research has focused primarily on change in student achievement results when such pay plans are installed. Surprisingly little, either historically or currently, has been done to consider the implementation of pay-for-performance programs. Perhaps this is because the implementation of these programs has been similarly, almost uniformly, top-down in nature. The recently completed Governor’s Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG) program piloted in Texas appears to be representative of a national trend to increase teacher role and participation in the process (e.g., the federal Teacher Incentive Fund program, Denver’s ProComp). Therefore, the following two broad questions shaped the research of this study:

1. What occurred in participating schools from the time the school was notified of its opportunity to take part in GEEG until its pay-for-performance application was approved by the state?
2. What changes occurred within participating schools once their pay-for-performance plans were implemented?

More specifically, this study focused on teacher involvement in the design, development, and implementation of school plans. In addition, possible teacher-level (e.g., pedagogical

strategy) and school-level (e.g., professional learning community) impacts of the performance incentive plan were explored.

### Summary of the Methodology

I conducted thirty-four teacher and eight principal interviews across eight elementary schools that participated in the GEEG program. These semi-structured, one-to-one interviews addressed the research questions above by asking teachers to discuss their roles in school plan development, knowledge of the roles of others, understanding of the GEEG program broadly and the school plan specifically, and perceptions of program impact on themselves and their teacher community. Principal interviews covered similar information, serving mainly as a way to triangulate and check teacher responses.

Interview protocols were piloted at two other elementary GEEG schools. Participating schools were further delineated based on their eligibility for TEEG – a second and more recent Texas performance incentive program – and the level of plan competitiveness.

In addition, I analyzed the schools' applications to the Texas Education Agency. These documents became binding contracts between the school and the state education agency, detailing what criteria the schools would utilize, how teachers were to meet expectations, and how bonuses would be distributed among teachers meeting those bonuses. Also, a school leader was responsible for providing a narrative of decision-making processes and information dissemination in these documents. From the documents, I gathered information that I would not have through the interviews (e.g., the expansive role of the district for some schools), and I was able to understand school plans in much greater depth.

Finally, I accessed and contributed to the National Center on Performance Incentives' Fall 2008 survey. This survey was conducted across all GEEG schools. I limited my analyses to elementary school teachers, yielding an N of nearly 1,300 and a response rate of approximately 80 percent. The survey contained a professional learning community construct as well as numerous survey items on teacher understanding and collaboration, amongst others.

### Summary of the Findings

#### Teacher Involvement

Over 75 percent of teachers responding to a survey conducted in the middle of their first year in the GEEG program indicated that teachers were involved in the development of their school's plan. Teacher interview data seems to confirm this, as the majority of teachers indicated that they were involved in the planning process. However, the process of plan development was not always clear to teachers. District personnel and school principals often played a more significant role in shaping school plans than teachers realized. In some districts and/or schools, not all of the options as listed in TEA's notification to awarded schools were explained or even outlined to teachers. Eventually, all teachers were notified of the program and the details of the school plan through informal channels and/or information dissemination in the form of discussion, presentation, and/or networking. However, teachers who were not part of their schools' core committees seemed to be considerably less involved in the process than those colleagues who were on the committees. Therefore, although most teachers indicated that they had been involved in (and perhaps throughout) the process, nearly all of them were



restricted by one or more delimiting elements, including district-level personnel and/or decisions, school principals, and/or other teachers who served on the school core committee.

### Teacher Understanding

During the early stages of GEEG implementation as well as after its completion, approximately 80 percent of teachers indicated that they understood their school's plan. Teachers who expected to receive an award or who taught NCLB-tested grades were significantly more likely to report a good understanding, while those teachers who were in schools where the distribution of bonus dollars was more competitive were less likely to relay an understanding of their school plan. Teachers appear more likely to have understood their school plan than the GEEG program, as they often could not explain why their schools were selected to participate nor could they identify and/or distinguish between mandatory and optional program criteria. Regarding school plans, however, teachers were nearly universally able to discuss in detail the expectations surrounding student achievement and bonus pay. They generally did not appear as knowledgeable when explaining their GEEG-related teacher collaboration responsibilities. Teachers of grades K-2 seemed less likely to have a deep understanding of the program and plan than did teachers of NCLB and/or TAKS grades (3-5).

### Teacher Impact

Teachers generally saw the GEEG incentive plan adopted by their school as fair, and some interviewed teachers highlighted the plan's transparency. In addition, teachers occasionally noted that their opportunity to participate in plan development and/or implementation was key, even when juxtaposed with personal prejudices against merit

pay. However, few interviewed teachers suggested that GEEG altered their enthusiasm for teaching, effort, or classroom practices directly, although a substantial number did indicate indirect impacts.

### Organizational Impact

Upon the completion of the GEEG program, teachers often reported an increased level of professional learning community. Those teachers who expected to receive an award relayed a perception of higher levels of professional learning community than those who did not expect a bonus. Teachers in more competitive schools reported lower rates of plc. Most teachers who were interviewed believed that their school faculties were already doing a good job of collaborating, but interview data indicated that a substantial number of teachers thought that the GEEG program actually increased the frequency and/or relevancy of teacher collaboration. Similarly, teachers typically reported maintained or increased levels of teacher trust, even though tension might have arisen in early stages of plan development. Some rifts between teachers of TAKS grade levels and teachers of non-TAKS grade levels, however, appear to be more lasting.

### Conclusions

The often-delivered argument that teacher pay-for-performance is antithetical to the nature of teaching did not seem to ring true in the GEEG pilot study in Texas. Clearly, there are limitations to this study that have been addressed above, especially in Chapters I and III. Still, the conclusions that we can draw from this research are important to consider as debate on and implementation of performance pay systems advance. I now present the major conclusions of this study. A substantial number of these

conclusions diverge from previous findings and/or traditionally held beliefs about teacher performance pay.

Most teachers who were interviewed and/or who responded to NCPI surveys indicated that they were involved to some degree in the development of their school's plan. Although multiple early studies of teacher merit pay plans recommended teacher involvement in designing plans, with few exceptions (Denver's ProComp being one) little practitioner participation has been utilized or sought. Moreover, teachers of participating GEEG schools were well aware of their participation in a pay-for-performance program. Some studies (e.g., Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2001) suggest that this is not always the case. In contrast to studies such as those by Ballou and Podgursky (1993) and Goldhaber, DeArmond, and DeBurgomaster (2007) that suggest that as survey items, interview questions, or general discussions more clearly define pay-for-performance, teachers respond with greater rates of disfavor, GEEG teachers' feelings were generally neutral to positive.

Levels of teacher involvement varied greatly. Teacher beliefs about merit pay impacted involvement levels: Those teachers who expressed an affinity for the concept expressed greater desire to be involved than those who were indifferent to or against merit pay. Perhaps more importantly, teachers who were assigned to their school's core committee had much greater levels of involvement than those teachers who were not on the committee. In some schools, decisions at the district and administrative levels limited teacher involvement. Some district personnel and/or principals assumed more control – whether openly or covertly – of the design process than the Texas Education Agency's Request for Proposal (2007) suggested was appropriate. Teachers were nearly universally

unaware of modifications made by district personnel or principals. Moreover, teachers serving on school core committees were not always vigilant in disseminating information and collecting non-committee teacher feedback. Thus, it seems as though most teachers had some level of involvement but probably not as much as they believe they had.

Most teachers self-reported that they had a good understanding of their school's plan. Previous research on teacher understanding of their performance pay plans has either shown poor teacher understanding (Jacob & Springer, 2007) or cautiously positive results (Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2002). Although the Community Training and Assistance Center (2004) report on Denver's pilot program also suggested strong teacher understanding, those results were not emphasized nor expounded upon greatly. Like the design of the Denver pilot program, the Texas Education Agency explicitly endeavored to garner teacher involvement and build understanding.

Similar to teacher levels of involvement, teacher understanding of their school plans does not appear to be as high as teachers report by survey. Few interviewed teachers could speak accurately about their plan outside of the student achievement criterion. However, TEA, districts, and administrators appeared to make clear throughout the process that student achievement was the true endgame for teachers; the majority of bonus pay was based on improved test scores. Therefore, it should not be too surprising that teachers had a much greater understanding of their student achievement requirements than of other requirements or options.

The Texas Education Agency did include a mandatory collaboration criterion, too, which might be the first such measure required in a teacher pay-for-performance scheme. Only about half of interviewed teachers initially recognized its stated importance. Once

all teachers were reminded of its role in the school plan, few could expound upon how the criterion impacted their pursuit of bonus dollars. Teachers in schools where optional criteria were included in school plans were able to discuss them about as well they could identify the import of the collaboration criterion.

More broadly and considerably more in line with teacher performance pay literature, teachers struggled to discuss aspects of the GEEG program. Items that seemed fundamental at the school level, at least to this researcher, were seldom recognized. These “items” included questions on the amount of money the school received for its participation, how the figure was determined, what criteria were mandatory for schools to include in their plans, and what criteria were optional. Few interviewed teachers – if any – could answer all of those questions.

Based on the evidence, one cannot suggest that teachers clearly understood the GEEG program. Further, teacher understanding of their actual school plans is probably much less than they have reported on surveys. That is, unless we consider that teacher understanding of performance incentive plans need not extend beyond their primary means of attaining bonus pay. If teachers only need to understand those criteria for which they are held accountable in the form of receiving or not receiving additional pay, then Texas GEEG teachers did understand their school plans fairly well. This is an important distinction between what teachers need to know to attain bonus pay and what states, districts, or others would like them to know in their pursuit of bonus pay.

In accordance with previous research, many teachers indicated that they were already working as hard as they could and bonus pay would not prompt them to work more. In a similar vein, few teachers reported a change in their enthusiasm for teaching,

although proponents of merit pay have suggested that teachers would strive harder and become more excited about their prospects given the opportunity to achieve bonuses. Diverging from previous research, survey and teacher interview data revealed a general perception of fairness around the program and school plans. According to teachers, perceived fairness did not translate to widespread changes in the classroom, however, regarding pedagogy, time spent on tasks, data-driven decision-making, or professional development.

Early literature – Firestone (1994), Shannon (1986), and Smylie and Smart (1990) – concluded that professional learning communities in schools with competitive bonus pay schemes would be undermined. More recent research literature, including Jacob and Springer (2007) and Lewis and Springer (2008), spends significant time relaying teacher and administrator concerns about the potential negative effects of performance pay on professional learning communities. Although found in the GEEG study, negative impact on school professional learning community was noticeably less pervasive than the aforementioned studies would suggest. In fact, teacher survey responses revealed that over 70 percent of teachers believed the GEEG to cause no additional negative effects on their schools. Teacher interviews revealed stable or improved collaborative environments. For the most part, data suggest that teacher dissension early in the planning process faded rather quickly once program implementation began.

### Implications

Before addressing what the implications of this study are, it is important to again acknowledge that limitations in this study exist, especially regarding generalizability.

Clearly, there is no semblance of an experimental or quasi-experimental design.

Moreover, implications based on an interview sample of fewer than 40 elementary school teachers and 8 school documents must be considered with some reservation. However, the number of interviews is not inconsequential. In addition, a triangulated examination of survey, interview, and document analyses does give some credence to the implications that emerge. While none of the implications that follow should be considered infallible, they do offer some guidance, especially given the very limited research on teacher involvement in and understanding of pay-for-performance plans. Some of the potentially meaningful implications on future implementation, policy, and research from this study include the following:

1. If teachers are provided with a roadmap and parameters within which to work, they can and will take an active role in designing incentive pay plans. Previously, their roles had been marginalized as teachers seldom had any substantial voice in the merit pay plans in which they would participate. For the most part, teachers welcomed the opportunity to play a significant role in the development of their plans.
2. Providing schools with the autonomy to establish plan details at the local level allows for more careful consideration of contextual issues. School plan details varied considerably across assessment type for K-2 grade levels, collaboration emphases, and the adoption of optional criteria.
3. Not all teachers need to be involved heavily in the process to feel as though they are participating in it. From 2007 survey data results, non-core committee teachers reported high levels of involvement, which was mostly confirmed

- through interviews. The opportunity to receive information and provide feedback could be as important to many teachers as having a leading role in the process.
4. There appears to be a link between teacher involvement in plan design and teacher understanding of the plan – at least their perceived understanding of the plan. Much of the teacher performance incentive literature suggest teachers be involved in the process on one hand while reporting that teachers do not understand their plans on the other hand. None of the literature explicitly connects these two issues although some seem to imply the connection. Establishing correlational or causal relationships between the two extends beyond the scope of this work, but it is at least suggestive that in this setting, teachers report that they were involved in the process and understood their plans.
  5. Teachers can feel confident about and perhaps empowered by their perceived understanding of performance incentive plans, even if that understanding is somewhat limited in actuality. Traditional teacher distrust of pay-for-performance schemes could stem, at least in part, from a lack of sufficient understanding of the plan.
  6. It is not necessary for teachers to understand well all of the dimensions of their incentive pay plans, just the ones tied most directly to their bonus efforts. This could lead to the following question: Why bother with unnecessary dimensions? As will be discussed further below, a component such as the teacher collaboration criterion had significant effects although it was not well understood.
  7. District and/or administrative influence on processes is probably better if enacted prior to the presentation of programmatic goals, criteria, etc. to faculty and staff.



The extent to which district and administrative involvement was a positive or negative influence on school plans, communities, etc. is unknown. However, teachers were generally unaware of changes made prior to their involvement in plan development, which could have played a significant role in their elevated levels of perceived involvement and understanding.

8. A fair plan does not necessarily lead to drastic teacher change. Many teachers who indicated that their GEEG plan was fair reported that they had made no changes as a teacher. One teacher stated multiple times that her school's plan was fair, but she still fundamentally disagreed with the concept of merit pay.
9. Teacher collaboration does not have to be at risk when competitive pay plans are enacted. The teacher collaboration criterion, although not well defined, motivated administrators and core-committee teachers to emphasize its importance to all teachers. Still, it is important to note that most interviewees suggested that these schools already maintained high levels of teacher collaboration.
10. Expectations for teacher collaboration should be more clearly defined to maximize its effectiveness. Although many teachers responded favorably to the collaboration criterion, most did not really understand how they were supposed to benefit from it. Perhaps the component was included as a safety measure of sorts, aiming to minimize potential competitive fallout. Given that the criterion did have some positive results, more clearly defined expectations should only enhance the benefits gained.
11. Teacher trust and/or community will not automatically suffer from competition. Much of the teacher disagreement that surfaced at schools was created by state

oversight in program design and faded soon after the school plans were established.

12. Details of state (or district) program designs should be considered fully and potential responses projected, especially regarding aspects of teacher community. Minor and easily overlooked issues from a developer's perspective can be major fissures locally. A prime example in this study is the TAKS teachers/non-TAKS teachers divide experienced at nearly every school in which I conducted interviews. Rewarding schools based on standings extending from TAKS-level student achievement but including all teachers in the incentive scheme set up a natural point of contention within schools.
13. More competitive plans lead to increasingly less desirable results. Negative and statistically significant results (and practically meaningful) were found regarding teacher understanding of plans and quality of professional learning community. In other words, as plans become more competitive, teachers report less understanding of the plans and lower levels of professional learning community.

### Recommendations

The recommendations that surface from this study are best presented through policy and research lenses.

#### Policy

1. Teachers should have an active role in the design and implementation of performance pay schemes. Teacher performance pay literature has called for some level of teacher participation for over 20 years, and this research suggests that

- some teachers are willing and capable of playing integral roles in plan development.
2. If not already established, some sort of committee of teacher leaders should be in place at a participating school. All teachers can be included in the process through whole-group discussion, small-group discussion, etc., but decisions should ultimately be left to a smaller, more manageable group than can discuss, vote, and decide on issues.
  3. State, district, or other entities should provide parameters within which teachers work to develop or finalize an incentive plan. Teachers in this study understood the program and school plan to a degree, but the demands of their occupation combined with their limited experience with pay-for-performance and other macro-level program planning limit their capacity to create an adequate incentive plan from scratch.
  4. A teacher collaboration component should be considered in school pay-for-performance plans. At the same time that such plans are intended to be competitive, research shows that a school's professional learning community has a significant impact on student achievement. Maintaining a balance between competitiveness and community will be difficult but is necessary and possible.
  5. All district and administrative decisions in the process should be transparent. Research indicates that teacher perceptions of merit pay plans are divided at best. If teachers are to be involved in the process, decisions being made at administrative levels should not be kept from them. Such actions could derail any progress that a staff had made in developing a plan.

6. Program (or plan) creators must forecast every possibility and have procedures to address unforeseen obstacles. This is undoubtedly a vast undertaking and oversight might be inevitable. However, this study demonstrates how staff tension and potential division can surface from a minor lapse. The issues that arose between K-2 (Non-TAKS) teachers and 3-5 (TAKS) teachers could have been curtailed in various ways if Texas Education Agency would have identified the potential split earlier in the process.

#### Further Research

1. Consider the effects and impacts of a similar program on low-performing schools. The schools in this study were high-achieving, high-poverty ones that could be fundamentally different than low-achieving schools. This is especially important when one considers the priority placed on using teacher performance incentives to improve student achievement.
2. Collect and analyze information from teachers and administrators from schools in which the state or district placed a pay-for-performance scheme. The majority of performance pay schemes recently implemented adhere to a top-down practice, but few studies have been conducted to gather detailed information regarding the perspectives and experiences of teachers in those schools. Such analyses would add depth to this literature while serving as a potentially interesting and informative counter to this study.
3. Measure the potential correlational or causal link between teacher involvement and understanding, as well as teacher attitudes that could materialize from that link. Experimental, quasi-experimental, and large-scale data analyses are all

possible ways of addressing the extent to which teacher involvement leads to greater teacher understanding that leads to more positive teacher attitudes toward performance pay.

4. Advance work on the effects of level of plan competitiveness on teacher understanding and professional learning community and its components, e.g. teacher collaboration. Little attention has been given to the size of merit bonuses, the percentage of teachers in a plan who received them, and how those factors affect teachers and schools. This research suggests that bonus differences across plans could be meaningful.

APPENDIX A  
TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Statement of Introduction:** Hello, my name is Coby Meyers and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Vanderbilt University. I am researching some of the potential influences of GEEG on teachers. Specifically, I am interested in teacher roles in school performance planning, program effects on professional learning communities, and post-GEEG effects. I appreciate any information that you can provide.

If it is okay with you, I will record this interview. I will keep all information that you provide confidential. All of your responses are voluntary, and you reserve the right to end this interview at any time. This interview should take not more than 45 minutes to complete. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Start Recording.

For the record, is it okay to record this interview?

**RESEARCH QUESTION #1:** What happened in participating schools from the time they were notified of their opportunity to partake in GEEG until their pay-for-performance plans were approved by the state?

***1. To begin with, I would now like to ask several questions about how your school's pay-for-performance plan was determined.***

1a. To start, could you talk about your role in designing [School's] pay-for-performance plan?

[If status is unclear]: Were you a member of the GEEG committee?

1b. How was the [School's] GEEG plan developed? Could you please explain the process as best you know it?

\*What decisions were made at the school level?

\*Who made those decisions?

\*How was information disseminated to the faculty? Staff?

1c. Was there a voting process to determine your school's pay-for-performance plan?

[If yes]: Please describe the voting process.

Who was involved?

Administrators? Teachers? Parents? Students?

Were there meetings prior to the vote?

If so, how many? When were they held?

What was discussed at these meetings?

What was voted on?

How were votes conducted?

[If no]: Who was responsible for developing the pay-for-performance plan?

Did he/she/they solicit advice or opinions from teachers or administrators in your school? If so, who?

1d. Did you speak freely at these meetings? Why or why not?

In your opinion, to what extent were other teachers and staff able to speak freely?

**2. Next, I would like to ask you a few questions about GEEG.**

1a. Please explain your understanding of the incentive plan adopted by your school as part of the GEEG program.

Possible Probes

What is the range of bonuses available for teachers?

Are all teachers eligible for bonuses?  
If not, why not?

Who was eligible for bonuses?

How do teachers acquire bonus pay?

1b. Please explain the GEEG program as you understand it?

Possible Probes

Why was this school selected for the GEEG reward?

How much money did your school receive in the last academic year for its participation in GEEG?

How was the bonus money supposed to be divided at the school level? In other words, were all staff drawing from the same pot of money?

What were the GEEG criteria by which schools were to determine rewards?

In addition to criteria X,Y,Z, were there other criteria?

[If school X] elected to include leadership and hard-to-staff criteria, why?



**RESEARCH QUESTION #2:** What changes to the professional learning community occurred within participating schools once pay-for-performance plans were implemented (in 2007-08)?

**3. Next, I would like to ask you a couple of questions about [School's teacher community] that occurred between the first school year (2006-07) of GEEG and the school years since (2007-08 & 2008-09).**

3a. Thinking back to your school prior to GEEG, how would you describe teacher collaboration here?

- Could you provide an example?

3b. Since the implementation of GEEG in the 2007-08 school year, has teacher collaboration changed?

- How? Could you provide an example?

\*\*The next couple of questions are little more specific.

3c. First, did you speak freely during collaborative sessions or teacher meetings?

- Why or why not?

3d. Second, did you find teacher collaboration during GEEG to be beneficial?

- Why or why not?

3e. What were professional development opportunities like prior to GEEG?

3f. Did professional development opportunities change during GEEG?

- Did administrators or others encourage more participation?

3e. Thinking about teacher community generally, is there anything else that you would like to say with respect to GEEG?

**4. Next, I would like to ask you some questions about possible changes in your approach to or feelings toward teaching now that GEEG has concluded.**

4a. First, could you walk me through a typical school day for you?

4b. Now, how similar would the day you just described be to the typical day of the last two years participating in GEEG?

- [If not addressed in 4b] More specifically, can you describe your enthusiasm for teaching? Example?
- [If not addressed in 4b] More specifically, can you describe how you spend your time teaching? Does it vary by subject?

- [If not addressed in 4b] More specifically, can you describe the pressure that you feel to increase student achievement? From what source has it increased or decreased?

4d. Finally, to what extent has your experience with GEEG influenced your desire to teach in the future?

- How important is the opportunity to receive merit pay to you?
- How fair do you believe the GEEG program was?

\*\*\*Is there anything else about GEEG or performance incentives in general that you would like to say or feel is important to note?

### ***CONCLUDING QUESTIONS***

***5. Finally, if you are willing to share this information, I would like to ask a couple of background questions about your school and yourself.***

5a. Including this year, how many years have you taught on a full-time basis?

5b. Including this year, how many years have you taught on a full-time basis at this school?

5c. Are you currently tenured in \_\_\_\_\_ School District?

5d. What is your race? (Confirm all that apply)

- Asian
- American Indian
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic or Latino
- White

Thank you again for your time and participation.

***Stop Recording.***

### ***Generic Statement of Conclusion***

Thank you very much for your participation in this interview. I hope to have the results of this study completed in late spring. Between now and then, if you have any questions or concerns, I can be reached by email at [coby.v.meyers@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:coby.v.meyers@vanderbilt.edu).

APPENDIX B  
PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Statement of Introduction:** Hello, my name is Coby Meyers and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Vanderbilt University. I am researching some of the potential influences of GEEG on teachers. Specifically, I am interested in teacher roles in school performance planning, program effects on professional learning communities, and post-GEEG effects. I appreciate any information that you can provide.

If it is okay with you, I will record this interview. I will keep all information that you provide confidential. All of your responses are voluntary, and you reserve the right to end this interview at any time. This interview should not take more than one hour to complete. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

### Start Recording.

For the record, is it okay to record this interview?

**RESEARCH QUESTION #1:** What happened in participating schools from the time they were notified of their opportunity to partake in GEEG until their pay-for-performance plans were approved by the state?

1. Why was this school selected as a GEEG school?
2. How was the GEEG award announced to the staff?
3. Could you please describe your role in designing [School's] GEEG plan?
  - a. What was your role after/since GEEG's inception?
4. More generally, how was your school's GEEG plan devised?
  - Who played significant roles?
  - Why did they receive those roles?
  - Was there a voting process? If so, who participated?
5. How were the plan details and expectations communicated to faculty and staff? Did they continue to be communicated?
  - a. Were new teachers informed? How?
6. Were there (Do there continue to be) complaints about the program?

**RESEARCH QUESTION #2:** What changes to the professional learning community occurred within participating schools once pay-for-performance plans were implemented (in 2007-08)?

1. Please explain the teacher collaboration criterion as it existed in your school's plan.
  - How was collaboration defined?

- How was collaboration measured?
2. How would you describe teacher collaboration in your school prior to GEEG?
  3. If any occurred, what changes in teacher collaboration did you notice after GEEG was implemented?
  4. More specifically, could you describe any changes in your school's teacher community with regards to the following:
    - Teacher interest in professional development?
    - Teacher trust of one another?
    - Teacher participation in meetings and/or collaborations?
  5. How has the atmosphere in your school changed since GEEG concluded?
    - Do you feel less pressure to increase student achievement?
      - Why or why not?
    - Do you think that teachers feel less pressured to increase student achievement?
      - Why or why not?
    - To what extent did teachers prepare or teach differently?
  6. To what extent do you think that the loss of GEEG funds will have impacted your teaching staff?
    - Were you able to hire higher quality individuals based on the bonus potential of GEEG?
    - Do you know if any teachers are more likely to leave your school now that bonus dollars are not available? If so, do you think that they are transferring schools/districts or exiting teaching?
  7. What is your overall assessment of GEEG in relation to teachers and teaching?

\*\*\*Any other comments on GEEG or performance incentives in general that you would like to share or feel are important to share?

Thank you again for your time and participation.

***Stop Recording.***

***Generic Statement of Conclusion***

Thank you very much for your participation in this interview. I hope to have the results of this study completed in late spring. Between now and then, if you have any questions or concerns, I can be reached by email at [coby.v.meyers@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:coby.v.meyers@vanderbilt.edu).

APPENDIX C

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: CASE REPORTS

### Pilot School #1 (PS-1) – District P

The school campus collaborated with another local campus and the district accountability, human resources, finance, and evaluation departments to plan, design and carry out grant activities. Within the school, one faculty member of each grade and classified area were asked to participate on the Campus Advisory Committee (CAC) to discuss and determine the school's GEEG plan. Members of this committee were then responsible for reporting back to respective grade team members for feedback. Eventually, the plan was approved by the CAC and the District Advisory Committee. The principal acted as the liaison for the district and school.

This school implemented a plan that included both the mandatory (student achievement and teacher collaboration) and suggested (teacher commitment/initiate and hard-to-staff) GEEG criteria. In the first year of the plan, all teachers were considered to have contributed to improved student performance on TAKS, which resulted in the school's rating of "recognized." Thus all full-time teachers were rewarded with a minimum of \$1,000. Since this school has had difficulty with teacher turnover, additional years of service were rewarded, so a teacher with two years of experience at the school received an additional \$500 while a teacher with three or more years of experience received another \$500. In addition, TAKS teachers were awarded an additional \$475 and teachers who met tutoring requirements were given with \$50. Therefore, a returning full-time teacher was awarded between \$1,000 and \$2,525.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Another potential bonus of \$275 is reported for student achievement – 60% passing rate on reading TAKS for grades 3-5, 30 percent on grade level on the DRA for grades k-2, and other comparable measures for other teachers. However, it does not appear as this bonus was given to anyone. It is unclear whether no one earned this bonus or if this bonus should not have been documented as such.

In years two and three, the plan became very complex. However, the optional criterion of hard-to-staff school remained relatively similar to that of the first year by maintaining fixed payment amounts. Returning experienced teachers were awarded with \$1,000 while returning teachers with one year or less of experience received \$500. In addition, returning TAKS teachers (grades 3-5) non-grade teachers were given an additional \$500. These fixed incentives were awarded first.

The other three criteria consisted of point-accumulation schemes to determine bonus pay out of the remaining money. The bulk of points that teachers could amass stemmed from a minimum of 70 percent student pass rates on that grade's primary assessment.<sup>70</sup> Although the maximum number of points possible in this plan was 60, only TAKS teachers could actually reach that mark. Teachers of other grade levels could only accumulate 40 to 45 points. Sixty percent of the appropriated monies were set aside for this criterion. Of that, dollars were split amongst qualifying teachers based on the number of points they earned.

Similar schemes were designed for the teacher collaboration and teacher initiative/commitment criteria. For the teacher collaboration criterion, teachers could earn points by acting as a team leader, a CAC member, and tutoring, with incremental increases in points for more days spent tutoring. This criterion was worth 25 percent of the money allotted for teacher awards. The remaining 15 percent of money targeted to teachers fell into the teacher initiative/commitment criterion. In it, teachers could accumulate points through high attendance marks, being named campus teacher of the year, earning a "highly qualified" distinction, completing 30 hours of non-required

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<sup>70</sup> TAKS for grades 3-5, ARD for special education, TPRI for K-2, and Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test for pre-kindergarten.



professional development, or earning or progressing a National Board Certification or advanced degree in an educational field.

#### Pilot School #2 (PS-2) District P

The district announced the grant, and all faculty members were invited to a meeting in which school PS-1 also participated. Various presentations were made, focusing on grant guidelines, teacher compensation best practices, and data availability. The school's leadership team collaborated with PS-1's teacher leaders throughout the planning and development process. Support and assistance was provided consistently by district accountability and evaluation departments.

Within the school, one faculty member of each grade and classified area were asked to participate on the Campus Advisory Committee (CAC) to discuss and determine the school's GEEG plan. Members of this committee were then responsible for reporting back to respective grade team members for feedback. Eventually, the plan was approved by the CAC and the District Advisory Committee. The principal acted as the liaison for the district and school.

This school implemented a continuous plan<sup>71</sup> that included both the mandatory (student achievement and teacher collaboration) and suggested (teacher commitment/initiate and hard-to-staff) GEEG criteria. Since these school identified itself as a "high needs" school, the CAC designed a plan similar to school PS-1's plan. Regarding the difficult-to-staff criterion, returning teachers received a fixed bonus incentive: a new teacher who completed a full year received \$500, a returning teacher

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<sup>71</sup> Schools were given the option of tweaking their plan between year one and year two. Most school plans were noticeably different for the last two years of the program. This school's plan, however, went unchanged.

who completed a full year received \$1,000, and returning TAKS grades (3-5) teachers received an additional \$500.<sup>72</sup> These fixed incentives were awarded first.

Also similar to school PS-1, this school developed a points-based system with student achievement representing 60 percent of the remaining money allocated for teachers – teacher initiative/commitment accounted for 15 percent and teacher collaboration 25 percent. Pass rates across exams (varying by grade level) were set at 70 percent. Again, TAKS grade level teachers could earn more points than could teachers of non-TAKS grades. For the teacher collaboration criterion, teachers could earn points by acting as a team leader, a CAC member, and tutoring, with incremental increases in points for more days spent tutoring. For the teacher initiative/commitment criterion, teachers could accumulate points through high attendance marks, being named campus teacher of the year, earning a “highly qualified” distinction, completing 30 hours of non-required professional development, or earning or progressing a National Board Certification or advanced degree in an educational field.

#### School #1 (S-1) – District #1

The school Campus Leadership Team (CLT)<sup>73</sup> first discussed the school’s eligibility to participate in the GEEG on February 10 and February 17 of 2006. An informational meeting was conducted by the district to announce campus selection and provide more information about the grant development process. Follow-up sessions were conducted with the CLT and at grade levels, in specialized departments, and with other

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<sup>72</sup> It is difficult to determine whether returning teachers received these bonuses regardless of student achievement levels. One page in the document indicates that student achievement measures had to have been met, while another page does not address the issue.

<sup>73</sup> Campus Leadership Teams typically consist of the principal, one teacher from each grade level, one teacher from the specialized department (i.e., special education, physical education, etc.), parents, district representatives, and other community members, which could include local business people.

staff to clarify grant criteria and developmental process, respond to questions and concerns, and obtain teacher and staff input. Eleven such meetings occurred from late March through late April. Eventually, a confidential online vote was conducted to determine whether or not the campus would proceed with the grant application process. Nearly 98 percent of the staff agreed to proceed with grant development of the awarded three-year, \$60,000 per year GEEG program.

The principal then met a minimum of five times with District Governor's Educator Excellence Award Support Committee, which was comprised of members of the district human resources department, information systems department, and grants department. The school CLT then developed an initial design and presented it to the entire faculty, where the plan was reviewed and critiqued. The CLT then revised and presented the updated version to the faculty again. This process continued until there was consensus in form of over 88 percent of the staff ultimately supporting the school's pay plan. The CLT assisted with on-going monitoring of the project. The principal was charged with providing monthly progress reports of the program to area superintendents, as well as reporting the successes and challenges of the program's implementation to the staff during meetings.

This school implemented a plan that included only the GEEG mandated student achievement and teacher collaboration criteria. In the first year of the plan, student achievement was demonstrated with a 75 percent minimum pass rate on the 2004-2005 TAKS assessment.<sup>74</sup> According to the school's plan creation overview, all teachers contributed to improved student performance on TAKS, which resulted in the school's

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<sup>74</sup> Actual school-level pass rates were 82 percent for reading and 83 percent for mathematics.

rating of “recognized.” Therefore, all teachers were rewarded with bonuses, with full-time teachers receiving \$2,040 each.

For plan years two and three, a 75 percent student pass rate remained the minimum expectation for teachers to receive bonus pay. However, the plan was considerably more complex. Instead of TAKS student pass rates representing the whole faculty, student achievement was determined by grade level assessments, including TPRI, TAKS, SDAA, Circle, and IEPs. In addition, bonus payments varied based on student achievement levels: Achievement Level I required 75 percent of students meeting minimum expectations; Achievement Level II required 90 percent of students meeting minimum expectations; and Achievement Level III required evidence of student growth. These achievement levels and subsequent awards were weighted in the incentive system as follows: 52 percent, 18 percent, and 30 percent, respectively. Teachers were required to attain an Achievement Level I bonus before either Achievement Level II or III bonus pay could be reached.

Potential monies were not arranged evenly across faculty. Since the grant was awarded based on the school’s TAKS scores and TAKS teachers are subject to greater accountability and liability, base performance pay was differentiated. The grant money was divided into pools reserved for teachers of certain grades. For example, \$1,600 was made available to divide equally among all third grade teachers who qualified for Achievement Level I bonus pay. This division of grant money into pools occurred for all three achievement levels. Any monies for achievement level I and II that remained after all qualifying teachers had been paid were assigned to Achievement Level III and divided equally amongst qualifying teachers.

The mandatory teacher collaboration component remained unchanged during the three years of the program. Data review, vertical planning, grade level meetings, SST, and teacher/parent conferences were the necessary activities. Teachers were to be actively involved in these collaborative efforts to earn incentive pay. Sign-in sheets, SST paperwork, and conference logs and minutes were the ways teacher collaboration was demonstrated, with a 90 percent attendance rate at the appropriate meetings required.

#### School #2 (S-2) – District #1

The first documented discussion of GEEG appears in the school's February 16, 2006, faculty meeting. From then, alternating Campus Leadership Team (CLT) meetings and faculty meetings included the school's eligibility to participate in the GEEG as a primary talking point. These meetings were conducted throughout March and April to clarify grant criteria and developmental process, respond to questions and concerns, and obtain teacher and staff input. In addition, an informational meeting was conducted by the district in early March to announce campus selection and provide more information about the grant development process. Eventually, a confidential online vote was conducted to determine whether or not the campus would proceed with the grant application process. Nearly 92 percent of the voting staff (88 percent of the total staff) agreed to proceed with grant development of the awarded three-year, \$60,000 per year GEEG program.

The principal then met a minimum of five times with District Governor's Educator Excellence Award Support Committee, which was comprised of members of the district human resources department, information systems department, and grants department. The school CLT then developed an initial design and presented it to the

entire faculty, where the plan was reviewed and critiqued. The CLT then revised and presented the updated version to the faculty again. This process continued until there was consensus in form of 100 percent of the staff ultimately supporting the school's pay plan, as recorded in an anonymous online survey. The CLT assisted with on-going monitoring of the project. The principal was charged with providing monthly progress reports of the program to area superintendents, as well as reporting the successes and challenges of the program's implementation to the staff during meetings.

This school implemented a plan that included only the GEEG mandated student achievement and teacher collaboration criteria. In the first year of the plan, student achievement was demonstrated with an 81 percent minimum pass rate on the 2004-2005 TAKS reading assessment and a 79 percent minimum pass rate on the 2004-2005 TAKS mathematics assessment. According to the school's plan creation overview, all teachers contributed to improved student performance on TAKS, which resulted in the school's rating of "recognized." Therefore, all full-time teachers were rewarded with bonuses \$1,915 each.

For plan years two and three, a 75 percent student pass served as the minimum expectation for teachers to receive bonus pay. However, the plan was considerably more complex. Instead of TAKS student pass rates representing the whole faculty, student achievement was determined by grade level assessments, including TPRI, TAKS-I, TAKS-Alt., SDAA II, Circle, Highscope, Tejas Lee and school-based math assessments. In addition, bonus payments varied based on student achievement levels: Base bonus pay required 75 percent of students achieving mastery; Level I Pay required 90 percent of students achieving mastery; and Level II Pay required evidence of student growth. These

achievement levels and subsequent awards were weighted in the incentive system as follows: 57 percent, 16 percent, and 27 percent, respectively. Teachers were required to attain Base bonus before either Level I Pay or Level II Pay bonus could be reached.

Potential monies were arranged evenly across faculty in the sense that each full-time teacher had an opportunity to reach the highest bonus levels.<sup>75</sup> Bonus pay was available separately for mathematics and reading achievement. Incentive awards were set in both the Base and Level I Pay categories. Teachers who reached the Base incentive received \$500 per subject (reading and math). Teachers who reached the Level I Pay incentive received an addition \$140 per subject. Teachers who reached the Level II Pay incentive received a minimum of \$240 per subject, but if any teacher failed to reach the Base and/or Level I Pay incentive, those bonus dollars were added to the Level II Pay money pool. In other words, any monies for Base and Level I Pay that remained after all qualifying teachers had been paid was assigned to Level II Pay and divided equally amongst qualifying teachers.

The first year of the mandatory teacher collaboration component listed only horizontal and vertical grade level meetings as specific activities. Teachers were to be actively involved in these collaborative efforts to earn incentive pay. Grade level minutes and CLT minutes were the ways teacher collaboration was demonstrated. In plan years two and three, however, more detail was provided for the collaborative criterion. Teachers were to demonstrate collaboration through grade and vertical team meetings, reviewing data, and on-going communication with parents and other professionals, as measured by CLT and grade level meeting minutes, conference logs, profile folders, and

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<sup>75</sup> This is an important distinction. In some schools, teachers of assessments that might be considered more demanding (i.e., TAKS) would be eligible for a greater share of bonus pay. This is not the case here, where all teachers have an opportunity to reach the same maximum bonus.

SST documents. Again, active collaboration was mandatory, but no attendance rate requirements were provided.

School #3 (S-3) – District #1

An informational meeting was held on February 23, 2006, for all faculty and staff members to announce the campus's selection as one of the GEEG schools and to provide information about the program. Over the following six to eight weeks, follow-up sessions were conducted with the CLT and at grade levels, in specialized departments, and with other staff to clarify grant criteria and developmental process, respond to questions and concerns, and obtain teacher and staff input. In late March, a confidential online vote was conducted to determine whether or not the campus would proceed with the grant application process. Over 98 percent of the staff agreed to proceed with grant development of the awarded three-year, \$90,000 per year GEEG program.

The principal then met a minimum of five times with District Governor's Educator Excellence Award Support Committee, which was comprised of members of the district human resources department, information systems department, and grants department. The school CLT then developed an initial design and presented it to the entire faculty, where the plan was reviewed and critiqued. The CLT then revised and presented the updated version to the faculty again. This process continued until there was consensus in form of nearly 97 percent of the staff ultimately supporting the school's pay plan, as recorded in an anonymous online survey. The CLT assisted with on-going monitoring of the project. The principal was charged with providing monthly progress reports of the program to area superintendents, as well as reporting the successes and challenges of the program's implementation to the staff during meetings.



This school implemented a plan that included only the GEEG mandated student achievement and teacher collaboration criteria. In the first year of the plan, student achievement was demonstrated with an 87 percent minimum pass rate on the 2004-2005 TAKS reading assessment and a 82.3 percent minimum pass rate on the 2004-2005 TAKS mathematics assessment. According to the school's plan creation overview, all teachers contributed to improved student performance on TAKS, which resulted in the school's rating of "recognized." Therefore, all full-time teachers were rewarded with bonuses of approximately \$2,280 each.<sup>76</sup>

For plan years two and three, a 75 percent student pass rate served as the minimum expectation for teachers to receive bonus pay. Moreover, the plan was considerably more complex. Instead of TAKS student pass rates representing the whole faculty, student achievement was determined by grade level assessments, including TPRI, TAKS, SDAA II, Circle, Brigance, Tejas Lee and school-based math assessments. In addition, bonus payments varied based on student achievement levels: Base bonus pay required 75 percent of students achieving mastery; Value Added A required 90 percent of students achieving mastery; and Value Added B required evidence of student growth. These achievement levels and subsequent awards were weighted in the incentive system as follows: 50 percent, 20 percent, and 30 percent, respectively. Teachers were required to attain Base bonus before either Value Added A or B bonuses could be reached.

Potential monies were arranged evenly across faculty in the sense that each full-time teacher had an opportunity to reach the highest bonus levels. Bonus pay was available separately for mathematics and reading achievement. Incentive awards were set

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<sup>76</sup> Depending on teacher participation in the GEEG presentation and subsequent meetings, this dollar amount varied for a few teachers by not more than \$5.

in both the Base and Value Added A categories. Teachers who reached the Base incentive received \$580 per subject (reading and math). Teachers who reached the Level Value Added A incentive received an additional \$250 per subject. Teachers who reached the Value Added B incentive received a minimum of \$350 per subject, but if any teacher failed to reach the Base and/or Value Added A incentive, those bonus dollars were added to the Value Added B money pool. In other words, any monies for Base and Value Added A that remained after all qualifying teachers had been paid were assigned to Value Added B and divided equally amongst qualifying teachers.

The first year of the mandatory teacher collaboration component listed only horizontal and vertical grade level meetings as specific activities. Teachers were to be actively involved in these collaborative efforts to earn incentive pay. Grade level minutes and CLT minutes were the ways teacher collaboration was demonstrated. In plan years two and three, however, more detail was provided for the collaborative criterion. Teachers were to demonstrate collaboration through grade and vertical team meetings, reviewing data, and on-going communication with parents and other professionals, as measured by CLT and grade level meeting minutes, conference logs, profile folders, and SST documents. Again, active collaboration was required, which was defined as 90 percent attendance at the appropriate meetings.

#### School #4 (S-4) – District #1

The principal was informed of the school's eligibility to participate in the GEEG at a meeting in the second week of February 2006. The faculty and staff were notified and the first overview and planning session was held at the end of the month. Follow-up sessions were conducted with the CLT and at grade levels, in specialized departments,

and with other staff to clarify grant criteria and developmental process, respond to questions and concerns, and obtain teacher and staff input. Such meetings occurred from throughout March and into late April. Eventually, a confidential online vote was conducted to determine whether or not the campus would proceed with the grant application process. Approximately 89 percent of the staff agreed to proceed with grant development of the awarded three-year, \$90,000 per year GEEG program.

The principal then met a minimum of five times with District Governor's Educator Excellence Award Support Committee, which was comprised of members of the district human resources department, information systems department, and grants department. The school CLT then developed an initial design and presented it to the entire faculty, where the plan was reviewed and critiqued. The CLT then revised and presented the updated version to the faculty again. This process continued until there was overall staff support of the school's pay plan.<sup>77</sup> The CLT assisted with on-going monitoring of the project. The principal was charged with providing monthly progress reports of the program to area superintendents, as well as reporting the successes and challenges of the program's implementation to the staff during meetings.

This school implemented a plan that included only the GEEG mandated student achievement and teacher collaboration criteria. In the first year of the plan, student achievement was demonstrated with a 78 minimum pass rate in reading and a 75 percent minimum pass rate in mathematics on the 2004-2005 TAKS assessment. According to the school's plan creation overview, all teachers contributed to improved student performance on TAKS, which resulted in the school's rating of "recognized." Therefore, all teachers were rewarded with bonuses, with full-time teachers receiving \$1,944 each.

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<sup>77</sup> No approval rating was provided by this school.

For plan years two and three, a 75 percent student pass rate remained the minimum expectation for teachers to receive bonus pay. However, the plan was considerably more complex. Instead of TAKS student pass rates representing the whole faculty, student achievement was determined by grade level assessments, including TPRI, TAKS, SDAA II, Circle, Tejas Lee, and school-based math assessments. In addition, bonus payments varied based on student achievement levels: Incentive Level I required 75 percent of students meeting minimum expectations; Incentive Level II required 90 percent of students meeting minimum expectations; and Incentive Level III required evidence of student growth. These achievement levels and subsequent awards were weighted in the incentive system as follows: 61 percent, 16 percent, and 23 percent, respectively. Teachers were required to attain an Incentive Level I bonus before either Incentive Level II or III bonus pay could be reached.

Potential monies were arranged evenly across faculty in the sense that each full-time teacher had an opportunity to reach the highest bonus levels. Bonus pay was available separately for mathematics and reading achievement. Incentive awards were set in both Incentive Level I and II categories. Teachers who reached the Incentive Level I bonus received approximately \$555 per subject (reading and math). Teachers who reached the Incentive Level II bonus received an additional \$150 per subject. Teachers who reached the Incentive Level III bonus received a minimum of \$212 per subject, but if any teacher failed to reach Incentive Level I or II, those bonus dollars were added to the Incentive Level III pool of money. In other words, any monies for Incentive Level I or II that remained after all qualifying teachers had been paid were assigned to Incentive Level III and divided equally amongst qualifying teachers.

Staff development activities, grade-level meetings, faculty meetings, and CLT meetings were the necessary activities to fulfill the first year of the teacher collaboration criterion. Teachers were to be actively involved in these collaborative efforts to earn incentive pay. Staff development agendas, attendance sheets, grade-level minutes, and CLT minutes were the ways teacher collaboration was demonstrated, with a 90 percent attendance rate at the appropriate meetings required. In years two and three of the plan, SST and SST records were added to the qualities and measurement requirements.

School #5 (S-5) – District #2<sup>78</sup>

The school was invited to apply for funding from the GEEG program in early February of 2006. The next day and twice more in the following month the school committee met, planned, and discussed the qualifications and requirements of the program. The committee consisted of professional and administrative staff, business and community partners, district program directors, and education advisory committee members amongst others. During this time, the school principal met twice with principals of other awarded schools, the district superintendent, and the assistant superintendent of curriculum. Participating schools' grant-writing teams and the district grant-writing team also met in the first month after notification.

This school's plan was designed for all three years of program participation. Student achievement was measured by End of the Year benchmark scores for math, reading, and science for teachers of grades K-4. It is unclear why teachers of grade 5 were not included. Reading achievement for K-2 was measured by TPRI and Tejas LEE scores while mathematics achievement was district developed benchmark assessments. Reading and math achievement for grades 3 and 4 were measured by TAKS, as was

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<sup>78</sup> This district two school is in the same urban area as the two district three schools.

grade 4 writing achievement. Science achievement for grades K-4 was measured by science benchmark assessments.

Teacher participation in faculty meetings, grade level meetings, lesson planning, staff development, campus planning, and parent conferences was considered collaboration. Agendas and/or minutes and sign-in sheets for collaborative sessions were used to measure teacher collaboration. Teachers were responsible for their own “active participation,” although active participation is undefined and unmeasured. This school also committed to using the teacher exhibits on-going commitment criterion (criterion 3). Teachers were expected to demonstrate the “Exceeds Expectations” in the first four domains of the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) of Texas, which includes the following: (1) active successful student participation in the learning process; (2) learner-centered instruction; (3) evaluation and feedback on student progress; and (4) management of student discipline, instructional strategies, time and materials. Teachers who met criterion 2 and criterion 3 and had 80 percent student mastery were rewarded with a bonus of \$2,000. If student mastery was at least 90 percent, teachers were rewarded with approximately \$700 more.

#### School #6 (S-6) – District #3

School 6’s campus committee consisted of teachers representing all grade levels, support staff, and administrative staff but not the principal whose role was limited to grant manager. The committee interacted with non-committee teachers and the site-based decision making committee throughout the process. All processes/decisions were ultimately coordinated/approved by the district’s grant department. Eventually, the finalized incentive plan was distributed to the faculty and school community through

school board meetings, staff meetings, flyers, teacher letter communication, grade level meetings and email. School 6 received \$100,000 annually for its participation in the GEEG program.

In year one, teacher bonuses were distributed based on the Recognized status the school received the previous year, i.e., all full-time grade teachers received some bonus pay – either approximately \$1,900 (non-TAKS teachers) or \$3,000 (TAKS teachers). In years two and three, teachers were responsible for student achievement on grade-level assessments TPRI, ITBS, TAKS, SDAA, and PRTE. Non-TAKS teachers whose students met minimum achievement levels received approximately \$1,150 each while TAKS<sup>79</sup> teachers whose students met minimum achievement levels received \$3,000 each.

However, it is important to note that School 6 application does not clearly delineate between criteria. Are the above potential bonus payments wholly for student achievement or do they include elements of teacher collaboration (and on-going teacher commitment)?

As for teacher collaboration, the Year One Plan indicates that hours spent teaching after school and on Saturdays were the leading elements of the criterion but no form of measurement was offered. In years two and three, tutoring services continued to be the noteworthy aspects of teach collaboration. For the last two years of participation, teacher collaboration was measured via sign-in sheets.

School 6 also included Criterion III (teacher on-going initiative, commitment, etc.) in the second and third years of the program. Again, their plan does not make clear whether or not this criterion impacted individual teacher bonuses. Teachers were

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<sup>79</sup> This school limited TAKS teacher payments to teachers of grades three and four but included grade five in years two and three. Rationale is not clear as to why grade five teachers did not receive bonus pay for year one. The inclusion of grade five teachers in years two and three is the reason that the pre-k through second grade teacher bonus decreased from year one to years two and three.

accountable for professional development, including workshops and grade level meetings. This was measured by the certificates, sign-in sheets, and staff development hours with development related to testing areas weighing more.

School #7 (S-7) – District #3

School 7's campus committee consisted of teachers representing all grade levels, support staff, and administrative staff but not the principal whose role was limited to grant manager. The committee interacted with non-committee teachers and the site-based decision making committee throughout the process. All processes/decisions were ultimately coordinated/approved by the district's grant department. Eventually, the finalized incentive plan was posted in the school office and each staff member received a copy of it. The school received \$135,000 annually for its participation in the GEEG program.

In year one, teacher bonuses were distributed based on the Recognized status the school received the previous year, i.e., all full-time grade teachers received some bonus pay – either approximately \$2,100 (non-TAKS teachers) or \$3,000 (TAKS teachers).. In years two and three, teachers were responsible for student achievement on grade-level assessments TPRI, ITBS, TAKS, SDAA, and PRTE. The distribution of monies for years two and three are unclear. On one hand, one section of the document indicates that bonus pay was only available for TAKS teachers. However, in another section, Pre-K through second grade teachers also appear eligible for bonus pay. It is also unclear whether or not teachers received either \$1,800 or \$3,000, between \$1,800 to \$3,000, \$1,800 and/or \$3,000, or some other bonus payment structure. Moreover, School 7's application does not clearly delineate between criteria. Are the above potential bonus payments wholly for



student achievement or do they include elements of teacher collaboration (and on-going teacher commitment)? It appears that non-TAKS teachers whose students met minimum achievement levels received \$1,800 each while TAKS teachers whose students met minimum achievement levels received \$3,000 each.

As for teacher collaboration, the Year One Plan indicates that hours spent teaching after school and on Saturdays were the leading elements of the criterion and were measured by attendance sign-in sheets. In years two and three, tutoring services are not mentioned and it is unclear whether those continued to be important elements or if they were displaced by the following: collaborative planning at the grade and vertical planning levels. Increased collaboration with staff members and parents and increased involvement in the learning community were also raised as noteworthy collaborative pursuits. For the last two years of participation, teacher collaboration was measured via sign-in sheets, content area benchmark analysis, and content area pulse tests.

School 7 also included Criterion III (teacher on-going initiative, commitment, etc.) in the second and third years of the program. Again, their plan does not make clear whether or not this criterion impacted individual teacher bonuses. It was also imprecise in its listing of qualities, activities, or behaviors expected, as teachers were to “meet responsibilities for monitoring and supervising students.” This was measured by the district staff development records and required at least 50 hours of professional development yearly. There is one line in the document stating that professional development would be paid through the general operating budget and Title I resources, which indicates that this bonus might have existed outside of the actual GEEG program.

#### School #8 (S-8) – District #4

Upon learning of the school's eligibility to participate in the GEEG program, the campus administration formed an advisory committee that consisted of key stakeholders in the school community: administrators, classroom teachers of each grade level, a special program teacher, and a campus instructional specialist. This committee met two times to determine the measures for the disbursement of grant funds of \$60,000 per year in the GEEG program. Further, this committee was responsible for reviewing performance expectations and making any modifications from year one to years two and three. Committee members were also responsible for communicating information and soliciting feedback for consideration from other teachers and staff.

In School 8's first year of participation, all teachers were awarded bonuses of approximately \$1,600 for the school's Recognized state status, as determined by student performance on the TAKS assessment. For plan years two and three, an 80 percent student pass rate stood as the minimum expectation for teachers to receive bonus pay. Moreover, the plan was considerably more complex. Instead of TAKS student pass rates representing the whole faculty, student achievement was determined by grade level reading assessments, including DRA, TAKS, EDL, and LAP. In addition, bonus payments varied based on student achievement levels and teacher grade levels: Incentive Level I (\$500) was given to all returning full-time teachers; Incentive Level II (\$700) was available to all full-time teachers and required 80 percent student growth rate on reading; and Incentive Level III (\$500) was only available to full-time TAKS-grade teachers and required 85 percent of students meeting minimum TAKS reading expectations. For all measures of student achievement, the percentage of students meeting minimum

expectations was based on students who were enrolled in classes before the PEIMS snapshot, i.e., student mobility issues were minimized.

Teacher collaboration was undefined for the school's Year One Plan. For years two and three, it remained fairly undefined but can be better understood through its measures, which included the following: sign-in sheets, agendas, and team/department meeting summaries. According to teacher interviews, agendas and meeting summaries were reviewed by the principal, who provided commentary for the participating teachers.

As a fourth level of teacher bonus pay, Year Two and Year Three plans included a teacher attendance quality to represent Criterion III, teacher exhibits on-going initiative. Teachers who accrued fewer than four personal absence days throughout the school year received an additional bonus of approximately \$240. School administration emphasized education research as its rationale for including teacher attendance in its plan, noting that excessive teacher absenteeism is directly proportional to decreases in student academic performance.

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