



INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
MARIA "CUCA" ROBLEDO MONTECEL, PH.D., PRESIDENT & CEO
5815 CALLAGHAN ROAD, SUITE 101
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78228
210.444.1710 • FAX 210.444.1714
CONTACT@IDRA.ORG • WWW.IDRA.ORG

Teacher Performance Pay Systems – Do They Pay or Do They Cost?

**Testimony of IDRA presented for the House Public Education Committee,
August 8, 2017**

Thank you for allowing the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) the opportunity to provide written testimony of its research and analysis on teacher performance pay systems and their effects on public education. In addition, IDRA addresses the other issues raised in HB 354 further below.

Founded in 1973, IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization that is dedicated to assuring equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. Throughout its history, IDRA has conducted extensive research and analysis on a range of Texas and national educational issues impacting public school children, including school finance and improving teacher quality.

Can Teacher Performance Pay Perform Well or Persist Long-Term?

Teacher performance pay systems are intended to improve student and teacher performance in the classroom, but the research shows that such systems do not necessarily lead to true improvement.

First, teacher performance pay systems demonstrate great inaccuracy when evaluating teachers. In a review of multiple studies on the performance pay model, Darling-Hammond (2015) notes that performance pay systems are not consistent in their teacher ratings. Whether it is within one model over time or across varying models using different methods of calculating teacher performance, large swaths of teachers would fluctuate in their scores. Sass (as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2015) showed how teachers in one year were rated in the top levels of performance only to find themselves in the bottom levels the next year and vice versa. Similarly, Briggs & Domingue (as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2015) demonstrated how 40 percent to 55 percent of teacher performance scores in a Los Angeles district could change when another statistical model was used to calculate their scores. Such an inaccurate system can lead to a damaging misclassification of teachers.

Moreover, for teaching quality to improve, either ineffective teachers must exit the school or profession or effective teachers must get better (Harris, 2007). Improvement via poor teacher attrition is a slow process, because a mass exodus of ineffective teachers is highly unlikely especially when other employment opportunities are bleak. However, as noted earlier, trying to pinpoint ineffective teachers based largely on test scores is difficult to determine from one year to the next. Still, compounding the problem is that teachers may not know how to actually improve themselves concerning issues that impact student learning, such as content knowledge and

pedagogical skills needed to teach for understanding traditionally difficult subjects like math (Harris, 2007).

Additionally, research has demonstrated that performance pay systems can have no effect on improvement of test scores while also having little effect on motivating teachers to try harder or to change their instructional practices. Springer, et al. (2012) published a randomized assignment study where researchers found statistically equal performance on assessments between students with teachers receiving bonuses (the treatment group) and students with teachers not receiving bonuses (the control group). Furthermore, there was “little evidence that [the experiment’s] incentives induced teachers to make substantial changes to their instructional practices or their level of effort and equally little evidence that the changes they did make were particularly well chosen to increase student achievement” (Springer, et al., 2010, pg 44). A similar study of Chicago’s Teacher Advancement Program resulted in similar conclusions (National Education Policy Center, n.d.).

But even if teacher performance pay systems worked in Texas, serious doubts are raised as to how long that would actually last. Across the nation, policymakers very rarely commit long-term to performance pay systems due to unsustainable financial and political support. So even if such policies can be effective, the improvement would be almost assuredly very short-lived (Harris, 2007). Even in Texas, the state has never sustained a teacher performance pay program for very long. Texas could not maintain the District Awards for Teacher Excellence (DATE) program for very long at all (five years). Even when adding the entirety of the very brief life of its predecessors – Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG, three years with one overlapping with DATE) and the Governor’s Educator Excellence Grant (three years with one overlapping with TEEG) – the commitment is still minimal and not long enough to be effective.

Texas History: District Awards for Teacher Excellence (DATE) Program

In Texas, studies on the DATE program reported some seemingly positive results. Springer, et al. (2010) observed declines in teacher turnover for schools that gave relatively substantial rewards and for teachers who were receiving awards for their performance. Moreover, students were achieving higher gains of improvement on average over time in DATE schools versus non-DATE schools.

However, much about the study’s methodology casts considerable doubt into its results. Student outcomes were measured in terms of school averages (i.e., analysis was only at the aggregate level), and there were no associations made between students and teachers in terms of academic improvement to be able to determine nuances of those relationships that led to student success (Springer, et al., 2010; Gratz, 2011). Moreover, though these improvements in gains (i.e., reductions in the gap between DATE schools and non-DATE schools) were positively significant, they were extremely small, sometimes to the tune of just a few points (Springer, et al., 2010).

Additional doubt is raised when considering other shortcomings of the research. Analysis was only performed over two years of the program, which is not nearly long enough to confidently make generalizable results or to use as any sort of proof that teacher performance pay actually works in Texas or elsewhere (Gratz, 2010). Even the authors themselves raise caution for those who wish to use the study as conclusive proof of the success of the DATE program to deliver improved student success, improvement in teacher quality, or increased retention of effective teachers (Springer, et al., 2010; Gratz, 2010). Furthermore, a great deal of variation between individual school and district characteristics and program implementation was not explored by the authors especially in regards to how schools and districts actually improved student test scores (Gratz, 2010).

Finally, the largest underlying assumption of the study – “the validity of the TAKS test as a single measure of achievement” (Gratz, 2010, p. 6) – was never established nor were the concerns surrounding the state assessment ever addressed (Gratz, 2010). In any research study evaluating policy impacts, establishing the strength and validity of one’s data collection instrument(s) is imperative to the internal validity of the study itself.

Additional Crucial Contextual Issues and Concerns with Performance Pay

Teacher performance pay systems’ inherent issues – as demonstrated through research – such as misclassification of teachers, inability to truly increase student outcomes, and failure to substantially improve teacher quality alongside our repetitive investment in questionable short-lived policy solutions are concerning for Texas given certain contexts in which many of our schools in need of high quality teachers exist.

For example, over the past several years, Texas has been experiencing a shortage of teachers certified in bilingual or ESL education, while the population of students identified as English learners (ELs) continues to grow (Hinojosa, 2016). When teachers are not equipped to provide much-needed services for students requiring those services, they can grow burdened or exasperated, which can lead to lowering expectations for EL students. IDRA has demonstrated in the past that lowering expectations for students correlates with low student performance because a student’s performance is negatively impacted when students are not respected and challenged (Hinojosa, 2016).

Further concern arises for bills like HB 354 that call for teachers to be evaluated on not just their students’ performance and growth but also on their school’s overall performance and growth. Recent research has shown that distribution of quality teachers is uneven as “disadvantaged schools are less likely to have access to high-quality instruction than students in affluent schools” (DeMonte & Hanna, 2014, p. 1).”

This is greatly troubling as current trends in teacher turnover show that teachers who serve in highly impoverished communities with high concentrations of minority and low performing students move to schools that are more affluent and White with higher levels of performance. One of the most frequently ranked causes for teachers transferring from a school is the quality and suitability of student assessments (Loeb, et al., 2005). Thus, teacher performance pay programs based in state assessment scores could incentivize teachers in schools serving our most vulnerable communities to move to higher performing and more affluent schools instead of actually trying to improve their knowledge, skills and pedagogy.

Recommendations for Improving Student Performance, Improving Teacher Quality, and Retention of High Quality Teachers

The above testimony is an abbreviated discussion of some of the research involving performance pay. While such programs may appear attractive on paper to some, research shows that they are not yielding positive effects. As such, IDRA offers policy alternatives to teacher performance pay systems to assist in the Legislature’s goals of improving student performance, improving teacher quality and retaining more high-quality teachers in Texas public schools.

Recommendation: IDRA recommends that, in lieu of performance pay strategies, the Texas House should consider adopting proven policies (TLEC, 2017) that support and increase the number of high quality, certified teachers into the Texas teacher pipeline, such as:

- Recruiting well-prepared teachers in high-need fields who stay in teaching, and not through temporary faculty agencies.
- Supporting high quality mentoring of new teachers in high-need fields and hard-to-staff schools and regions.
- Creating, where necessary, and supporting high quality teacher education programs in high-need areas.
- Providing scholarships for entering teachers, with special focus on high-need fields and locations.
- Providing resources to support recruitment incentives for experienced teachers in high-need fields to teach in hard-to-staff schools and regions.
- Supporting increased teacher pay and benefits for teachers in high-need fields.
- Supporting struggling teachers in high-need fields and school principals with strong, continual, research-based professional development and mentoring.
- Requiring all teacher training programs (traditional and otherwise) to train teachers on cultural competency and inclusive communities.
- Studying teacher attrition rates and examining factors that could improve teacher retention.

IDRA thanks this committee for the opportunity to testify and stands ready as a resource. If you have any questions, please contact IDRA's National Director of Policy, David Hinojosa, at david.hinojosa@idra.org or 210-444-1710, ext. 1739.

References

- Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Ing, M., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2011). "The Influence of School Administrators on Teacher Retention Decisions," *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(2), 303-333.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2015). "Can value Added Add Value to Teacher Evaluation?" *Educational Researcher*, 44(2), 132-137. <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/can-value-added-add-value-teacher-evaluationer.pdf>
- DeMonte, J., & Hanna, R. (2014). *Looking at the Best Teachers and Who They Teach: Poor Students and Students of Color Are Less Likely to Get Highly Effective Teaching* (Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress). <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/TeacherDistributionBrief1.pdf>
- Gratz, D.B. (2011). *Review of "District Awards for Teacher Excellence Program: Final report"* (Boulder, Colo: National Education Policy Center). <http://nepc.colorado.edu/thinktank/review-district-awards>
- Harris, D.C. (2007). *The Promises and Pitfalls of Alternative Teacher Compensation Approaches* (Tempe, Ariz.: Education Policy Research Unit, Arizona State University). <http://epsu.asu.edu/epru/documents/EPSE-0704-231-EPRU.pdf>
- Hinojosa, D. (March 29, 2016). "Ways to Improve Teacher Preparation, Retention, and Shortages in the State of Texas," Testimony before the Texas Senate Education and Higher Education Committees (San Antonio, Texas. Intercultural Development Research Association). http://www.idra.org/images/stories/IDRA_Testimony_on_Teacher_Preparation_Shortage_032916.pdf
- Loeb, S., Darling-Hammond, L., & Luczak, J. (2005). "How Teaching Conditions Predict Teacher Turnover in California Schools," *Peabody Journal of Education*, 80(3), 44-70.
- National Education Policy Center. (n.d.). "Teacher Performance Pay Has No Motivational Effect on Teachers, Study Finds," web page story (Boulder, Colo.: National Education Policy Center). <http://nepc.colorado.edu/understanding-the-news/teacher-performance-pay-has-no-motivational-effect-teachers-study-finds>
- Springer, M.G., Ballou, D., Hamilton, L., Le, V., Lockwood, J.R., McCaffrey, D.F., Pepper, M., & Stecher, B.M. (2010, September 21). *Teacher Pay for Performance Experimental Evidence from the Project on Incentives in Teaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University). <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/performanceincentives/files/2012/09/Full-Report-Teacher-Pay-for-Performance-Experimental-Evidence-from-the-Project-on-Incentives-in-Teaching-20104.pdf>
- Springer, M.G., Ballou, D., Hamilton, L., Le, V., Lockwood, J.R., McCaffrey, D.F., Pepper, M., & Stecher, B.M. (2012, September 30). *Final Report: Experimental Evidence from the Project on Incentives in Teaching (POINT)*

(Nashville, Tenn.: National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University).

<https://my.vanderbilt.edu/performanceincentives/files/2012/09/Full-Final-Report-Experimental-Evidence-from-the-Project-on-Incentives-in-Teaching-2012.pdf>

Springer, M.G., Lewis, J.L., Ehlert, M.W., Podgursky, M.J., Crader, G.D., Taylor, L.L., Gronberg, T.J., Jansen, D.W., Lopez, O.S., & Stuit, D.J. (2010, December). *District Awards for Teacher Excellence (DATE) Program: Final Evaluation Report* (Nashville, Tenn.: National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University).

https://my.vanderbilt.edu/performanceincentives/files/2012/10/FINAL_DATE_REPORT_FOR_NCPI_SITE4.pdf

Texas Latino Education Coalition. (2017, April 25). "Testimony Opposing HB 880 Regarding Elimination of Bilingual Education Certification," testimony Presented before the House Public Education Committee (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association). <http://www.idra.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/TLEC-Testimony-Against-HB-880-04-25-17.pdf>

The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, non-profit organization led by María Robledo Montecel, Ph.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.