Governor’s Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG) Program: Year Two Evaluation Report

Texas Education Agency
William Travis Building
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

Led By: Vanderbilt University
Peabody College

In Cooperation With: RAND Corporation
University of Missouri-Columbia
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Matthew G. Springer  
Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College  
National Center on Performance Incentives

Jessica L. Lewis  
National Center on Performance Incentives

Michael J. Podgursky  
University of Missouri-Columbia

Mark W. Ehler  
University of Missouri-Columbia

Lori L. Taylor  
Texas A&M University

Omar S. Lopez  
Corporation for Public School Education K16

Art (Xiao) Peng  
National Center on Performance Incentives
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Governor’s Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG) program is part of a long history of performance pay programs and policies in Texas. The GEEG program was state-funded and provided grants to schools to implement three-year locally-designed performance pay plans. During the 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08 school years, the GEEG program operated in 99 public schools in Texas.

Performance pay for teachers entered Texas state policy deliberations during the 1980s, a decade marked as one of the most active periods of school reform in Texas. As early as the Texas Teacher Career Ladder program in 1984, policymakers attempted to reform the single-salary schedule and introduce performance pay for educators. Several lessons emerged from those first generation programs and played a significant role in the design and implementation of GEEG. Lessons learned include that (1) adequate, sustainable funding is imperative; (2) teacher involvement in program design fosters school personnel buy-in; (3) performance pay should reward educators for their contribution to student achievement outcomes as well as teacher and staff collaboration; and (4) programs will benefit from comprehensive, independent program evaluation.

This report presents findings from the second year of a multi-year evaluation of the GEEG program. An overview of key evaluation findings is presented below.

Second-year findings from the GEEG evaluation include the following:

- GEEG plans relied heavily on measures of student achievement – especially performance levels – and teacher collaboration to determine teachers’ eligibility for bonus awards. The use of these design features changed little over the first two program years.

- The distribution of GEEG bonus awards varied noticeably among schools, and the actual distribution typically exhibited greater inequality than the proposed distribution of bonus awards.

- School personnel continued to hold generally positive views about performance pay and the GEEG program, specifically.

- Teacher turnover was greatly influenced by GEEG program participation and the design features of GEEG plans, most noticeably the size of bonus awards distributed to teachers.

- The evidence regarding GEEG program impacts on student achievement is inconclusive. Depending on the specification, the analysis indicates that GEEG had a weakly positive, negative or negligible effect on student achievement gains. The instability in the estimates may be related to common measurement problems associated with standardized tests or the statistical methods used to control for selection bias.
There is no evidence of a significant association between student achievement gains and GEEG plan design features in schools. However, the small number of GEEG schools adopting any given plan design necessarily makes these estimates imprecise, and could be masking significant effects.

Intermediate outcomes such as teacher attitudes, teacher behavior, and institutional dynamics associated with GEEG program participation may offer more appropriate outcomes measure for evaluating the GEEG program. Furthermore, teacher turnover and mobility provides another important outcomes measure.

These findings suggest that school and personnel characteristics and GEEG plan design features influence program outcomes. The attitudes and behaviors of school personnel and teacher turnover are certainly influenced by these factors. There is limited evidence that participation in the GEEG program had an effect on student achievement gains, and no evidence that GEEG plan design features affect student achievement gains. However, examination of the program’s impact on student achievement is limited by the process of schools’ selection into the program and the likely volatility of student performance measures available to measure outcomes.

Given these findings, key decision-makers in Texas are advised to pay close attention to the manner in which schools are selected into performance pay programs and the design of their performance pay plans, particularly how they determine teachers’ eligibility for bonus awards and the size of those awards.

Overall, the GEEG program provides a unique opportunity to learn about the differential effects performance pay plans have on the attitudes and experiences of school personnel, organizational dynamics within schools, teacher turnover, and student achievement gains. The GEEG program allows policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to learn about the impact of performance pay plans within high-poverty, high-performing schools. Future evaluation initiatives will continue to explore how the unique characteristics of this state-funded program – and the plans designed by participants – influence the quality of teaching and student learning within participating schools. This is increasingly important given the state’s commitment to a much larger state-funded performance pay program – the District Awards for Teacher Excellence (DATE) program.
NCPI Faculty and Research Affiliates

James W. Guthrie  
Executive Director  
National Center on Performance Incentives  
Professor of Public Policy and Education  
Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College

Matthew G. Springer  
Director  
National Center on Performance Incentives  
Research Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Education  
Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College

Dale Ballou  
Associate Director  
National Center on Performance Incentives  
Associate Professor of Public Policy and Education  
Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College

Leonard Bradley  
Lecturer in Public Policy  
Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College

Timothy C. Caboni  
Assistant Dean for External Relations  
Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College

Mark Ehlert  
Research Analyst  
University of Missouri-Columbia

Timothy J. Gronberg  
Professor of Economics  
Texas A&M University

Laura Hamilton  
Senior Behavioral Scientist  
RAND Corporation

Janet S. Hansen  
Vice President & Director, Education Studies  
Committee for Economic Development

Brian A. Jacob  
Walter H. Annenberg Professor of Education Policy  
University of Michigan

Dennis W. Jansen  
Professor of Economics  
Texas A&M University

Cory Koedel  
Assistant Professor of Economics  
University of Missouri-Columbia

Vi-Nhuan Le  
Behavioral Scientist  
RAND Corporation

Jessica L. Lewis  
Research Associate  
National Center on Performance Incentives

J.R. Lockwood  
Statistician  
RAND Corporation

Daniel F. McCaffrey  
Head of Statistics, Senior Statistician  
RAND Corporation

Patrick McEwan  
Assistant Professor of Economics  
Wellesley College

Shawn Ni  
Professor of Economics  
University of Missouri-Columbia

Michael J. Podgursky  
Professor of Economics  
University of Missouri-Columbia

Brian M. Stecher  
Senior Social Scientist  
RAND Corporation

Lori L. Taylor  
Assistant Professor  
Texas A&M University
NATIONAL CENTER ON
PERFORMANCE INCENTIVES

Examining Performance Incentives in Education

National Center on Performance Incentives
Vanderbilt University Peabody College
Peabody #43, 230 Appleton Place
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

(615) 322-5538
www.performanceincentives.org