

What Works Clearinghouse



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WWC Quick Review of the Report “The Effect of Performance-Pay in Little Rock, Arkansas on Student Achievement”†

What is this study about?

This study examined whether the Achievement Challenge Pilot Project, a performance-pay program for teachers, improved the academic achievement of elementary school students.

The study was conducted in elementary schools in Little Rock, Arkansas. The authors analyzed standardized math, reading, and language test scores.

Effects were measured by comparing 2006-to-2007 test score gains in three schools that implemented the program with gains in district elementary schools that did not implement the program.

Features of the Achievement Challenge Pilot Project

Teachers are paid bonuses if their students experience increases in test scores

Bonuses range from \$50 to \$400 per student, depending on the average test score gain

Funded by Little Rock School District and private foundations

What did the study authors report?

The study reported higher student test score gains for students in schools that implemented the performance-pay program than for students in schools without the program.

The WWC does not consider these results to be conclusive because the two groups of schools were not initially equivalent. The higher test score gains in the schools that implemented the program may reflect other characteristics of these schools not controlled for in the analysis.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report is not consistent with WWC evidence standards

Cautions: The study compared student test score gains in the three schools that implemented the performance-pay program in 2006-07 with test score gains in district schools that did not implement the program. Because the program was targeted to low-performing schools with high proportions of low-income students, the two groups of schools initially had very different student characteristics and average test scores. Although the study authors control for some of these differences in their analysis, there may be other differences between the schools that could influence student test score gains. In addition, the lowest-performing schools may have implemented other changes to improve test scores in an attempt to meet statewide accountability standards and these other changes may have influenced test score gains. For these reasons, differences in test score gains cannot be attributed with confidence to the effect of the performance-pay program.

†Winters, M., Greene, J. P., Ritter, G., & Marsh, R. (2008). *The effect of performance-pay in Little Rock, Arkansas on student achievement* (Working Paper 2008-02). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University, National Center on Performance Incentives.