

What Works Clearinghouse



April 2011

WWC Quick Review of the Report “Teacher Pay for Performance: Experimental Evidence From the Project on Incentives in Teaching”¹

What is this study about?

The study examined whether offering financial incentives to teachers of fifth- through eighth-grade math students improved their students' achievement on the math section of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program.

The study took place in the Metropolitan Nashville Public School District during the 2006–07 through 2008–09 school years. It analyzed data on about 24,000 students of 300 teachers who volunteered to participate in the study and received a stipend for doing so.

Approximately half of the math teachers participating in the study were randomly assigned to a group that was offered financial incentives through the Project on Incentives in Teaching. Teachers in this group received a bonus if their students' math achievement growth exceeded that of other teachers' students. The other half of the participating teachers were not offered incentives linked to their students' math achievement growth.

The study measured the effects of offering financial incentives to teachers in each year of the project by comparing the end-of-year math achievement of students whose teachers were offered financial incentives with that of students whose teachers were not offered the incentives.

Features of the Project on Incentives in Teaching (POINT)

Teachers could volunteer to participate in the study if they had 10 or more students in grades 5 through 8. About two-thirds of the district's teachers meeting these criteria volunteered to participate.

Approximately half of the participating teachers were randomly assigned to a group that was offered financial incentives linked to their students' math achievement growth. The other half was assigned to a group not offered these incentives. All participating teachers received a stipend of \$750, regardless of which group they were assigned to.

Bonuses were awarded to teachers in the group that was offered incentives based on their students' average growth on the math section of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program; teachers whose students exhibited average achievement growth at or above the 80th, 85th, and 95th percentiles received bonuses of \$5,000, \$10,000, and \$15,000, respectively.

If teachers who were awarded a bonus also taught non-math subjects, they had to maintain at least average student achievement in those subjects in order to receive the full bonus amount.

Administrators of POINT kept confidential which teachers participated in the study, whether participating teachers were offered incentives, and whether participating teachers in the group that was offered incentives actually received a bonus.

(continued)

¹ Springer, M. G., Ballou, D., Hamilton, L., Le, V., Lockwood, J. R., McCaffrey, D., Pepper, M., & Stecher, B. (2010). *Teacher pay for performance: Experimental evidence from the Project on Incentives in Teaching*. Nashville, TN: National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University.

Quick reviews examine evidence published in a study (supplemented, if necessary, by information from author queries) to assess whether that study's design meets WWC evidence standards. Quick reviews rely on the effect sizes and significance levels reported by study authors.

The WWC rating applies only to the summarized results, and not necessarily to all results presented in the study.

What did the study find?

Overall, the study found that students with math teachers who were offered the financial incentives exhibited math achievement growth that was no better or worse than students with teachers who were not offered the financial incentives.

The WWC does not consider these results to be conclusive because the groups of students compared may have differed before the intervention.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report does not meet WWC evidence standards²

Cautions: The study does not report student sample sizes at different stages of the analysis. Because it is not possible to determine attrition of students from the analytic sample, the research described does not warrant a rating of meets WWC evidence standards.

In addition, the study does not provide evidence that the groups of students compared in it were equivalent before the intervention; thus the research described does not warrant a rating of meets WWC evidence standards with reservations.

² Before publication of the quick review, the WWC contacted the corresponding author for additional information regarding attrition of teachers and students and the equivalence of the analysis samples at baseline. The author did not provide the information but indicated that the information is forthcoming in a longer report. Once the longer report is released, or if the author provides additional information directly to the WWC, the WWC will review the study, including any additional information available, and determine whether the rating of the study and the quick review should be revised.