

# Teacher Performance Pay Programs and Necessary Communication Actions

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**ABSTRACT:** Teacher performance pay programs have proliferated across the country over the past 20 years. To aid in understanding their many variations, the seven major components of these programs are described. Three examples of teacher performance pay programs are provided for illustration: Denver ProComp, TAP, and Houston ASPIRE. Evidence is mixed on the impact of performance pay programs in general. We suggest that flawed communication strategy and action accompanying the programs have likely contributed to weak, if any, impact. We suggest the use of a three-pronged concerted communication approach: communication strategy, communication action plan, and communication supports. We provide specific examples for each prong.

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Teacher quality improvement represents a major thrust of educational reform efforts to improve student learning and achievement. Research has shown that teacher classroom practice and effectiveness are the most important and controllable factors contributing to learning and achievement (Hanushek, 2011; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997), so a focus on teacher quality improvement is well founded.

One of the most pervasive teacher quality improvement initiatives over the past 20 years has been pay for performance. Many types of such programs have been developed, but they all share a common theory of action—namely, (1) that developing solid measures of teacher practice and student/school outcomes, (2) that guiding teachers toward improved classroom practice and outcomes, and (3) that rewarding teachers differentially with pay according to their measured performance will all motivate teachers toward performance improvement, which will then contribute to improved student learning. Around this theory of action, many teacher performance pay programs have emerged as experiments, mostly at the local level. The programs use many types of performance measures, performance standards, and performance payouts. The Teacher Incentive Fund initiative of the U.S. Department of Education is a major stimulant to the development of these programs. The fund solicits performance pay plan proposals from local and state education agencies, evaluates the proposals according to multiple criteria, and funds acceptable proposals for a 5-year period. The Teacher Incentive Fund recently completed its fourth round of proposal solicitation and support.

Collectively, we have participated substantially in the teacher performance pay arena. We have conducted evaluations of numerous local and state education agency performance pay experiments, conducted seminars nationwide on teacher performance pay design and implementation, provided technical assistance to requesting local and state education agencies, and participated in the Teacher Incentive Fund as both program evaluators and technical assistance providers. Our collective experiences from these actions have led us to convergence on many conclusions and lessons learned about teacher performance pay programs and their effectiveness. In this article, we focus on one of those conclusions—namely, that the communication strategy and actions by the local or state education agency are critical and often overlooked factors that can contribute to teacher performance pay plan success.

We begin by outlining the seven key components of performance pay plans as a way of fostering a common understanding of the plans' architecture and complexity. We then describe three current and highly visible teacher performance pay plans that have undergone substantial design and implementation phases over multiple years. A brief synopsis of research findings is provided about teacher performance pay plan effectiveness. Attention then turns to the importance of communication strategy and actions in supporting effective design, implementation, and operation of teacher performance pay plans. We provide examples of effective communication practice and identify concrete steps that local and state education agencies can take to help ensure understanding and acceptance of the teacher performance pay plan initiative.

## OVERVIEW

### Components of Teacher Performance Pay Plans

While there are myriad teacher performance pay plans, their variations revolve around seven major components. Each is identified here, followed by a synopsis of three current plans to provide a holistic view of the breadth and depth of teacher performance pay plans.

*Component 1: Reward focus.* Will the monetary payout be focused on rewarding the individual teacher, a teacher team, or an entire school? This depends on the level (or levels) at which teacher performance is to be measured. Most plans emphasize rewarding the individual teacher in recognition of the fact that his or her impact on students is due to his or her own actions. Team-based and schoolwide plans emphasize the collective nature of teacher performance and impact, so teacher performance is measured and rewarded at these aggregate levels. Of course, it is possible to have a performance pay plan that provides payouts for both individual and aggregate performance.

*Component 2: Performance measurement.* There must be performance measurement systems in place before a teacher performance pay plan is possible. Basically, the systems can focus on measuring teacher classroom practice, student achievement, or student growth. The systems can also use combinations of these three. Performance evidence indicators also must be chosen.

Classroom practice assessments require developing a teacher performance competency model that indicates the specific competency dimensions or domains involved in classroom practice, as well as scoring rubrics depicting the behaviors that exemplify levels of these competencies. A well-known example of classroom assessment model is Charlotte Danielson's framework for teaching (1996, 2007), which identifies four major domains of teaching practices, along with more specific competency components and elements. Danielson also suggests appropriate evidence indicators for each competency.

Achievement measures gauge teacher performance according to the performance levels of students against performance standards. A common measure is the percentage of students meeting a particular proficiency standard on an achievement test. But additional outcome measures could also be used, such as graduation or advanced placement enrollment rates relative to desired standards.

Student growth is measured based on standardized tests, in many cases using a statistical model to estimate the schools' or teachers' contribution or value added. The estimates take into account past student achievement as well as factors beyond the control of the teacher (e.g., student demographics, family income). The emphasis is on student growth, as opposed to attainment of proficiency standards.

For each type of measure, specific performance evidence indicators must be chosen. In the case of classroom practice, examples include classroom observation, lesson plans, and logs. Student achievement and growth performance indicators revolve around the specific standardized tests given;

more recently, student learning objectives have also begun to be used.

*Component 3: Payout schedule.* The payout schedule shows the number of performance effectiveness categories (usually three to five), the dollar amount given for each category, and when the reward is given (e.g., monthly, annually). For example, classroom practice assessment ratings and student outcomes might be combined to yield four overall performance levels (e.g., *ineffective*, *needs improvement*, *effective*, and *highly effective*), and the specific dollar payout for each category will be given. Payouts typically range from none, for the lowest performance level, to thousands of dollars for the top and are mostly provided annually.

*Component 4: Payout type.* Will the payout be in the form of a bonus or a salary addition? Bonuses are onetime supplements that must be reearned and do not get built into the base salary. Salary additions do get added to base salary and are not reearned as long as the teacher remains with the employer. Most teacher performance pay plans opt for bonuses.

*Component 5: Performance management system.* With such a keen focus on performance, a teacher performance pay plan must have a performance management system within it. The system involves a cycle of using the performance measures to develop performance goals and actions for the upcoming period; providing performance assistance and ongoing feedback to the teacher over the course of the performance cycle; assessing teacher performance at the end of the cycle; and, finally, providing performance results feedback to the teacher. The results are then used to determine the teacher's performance pay via the payout schedule and type. There is considerable variation in the specific features of the performance management systems found within teacher performance pay plans.

*Component 6: Design and implementation.* While the aforementioned five components are part of plan design, a host of other design issues come into play. Examples include types of design teams and membership, stakeholder relationships,

training and preparation for plan users (especially teachers and principals), funding the plan and its payouts, support resources, timing schedules, data systems and data collection, contractual relationships, and plan pilots. The range of issues clearly shows the complexity of the challenge in moving toward teacher performance pay.

Design issues quickly become intertwined with implementation issues. Here, matters of exactly what, who, how, and when are salient. Implementation problems typically abound, and preparedness for them is key to program success. Naturally, implementation glitches often become very unsettling to the teachers, principals, and other staff affected.

*Component 7: System management.* Design and implementation morph into the need for long-term management of the teacher performance pay plan. Examples of matters to confront include acquiring additional staff; creating alignment between the teacher performance pay plan and other human capital management systems, such as staffing, induction, mentoring, professional development, and performance management; maintaining linkages with other systems, such as data management and payroll; and maintaining favorable stakeholder relationships.

### Three Examples of Teacher Performance Pay Plans

Many teacher performance pay plans have emerged; three of the most prominent and long-term are briefly summarized next as a means of illustration. The hundreds of other plans currently being tried all share similarities to portions of these three plans.

*Denver ProComp.* The Denver Professional Compensation Plan (ProComp) was negotiated with the teachers union, funded by a voter-approved tax increase, and designed and implemented over several years. Current teachers were given the option of shifting over to ProComp or remaining under the single salary schedule; all new teachers were placed into ProComp.

Derived from the single salary schedule is a salary index of \$37,927, which functions as a base salary for teachers. Teachers can then earn additional pay through actions and accomplishments in four areas: knowledge and skill enhancement (e.g., completion of professional development units or advanced degree), comprehensive teacher evaluation, market incentives (hard-to-staff schools and assignments), and student growth (value added, student learning objectives). There is a separate monetary payout for each action or accomplishment, ranging from 2% to 9% of the salary index. Some payouts are bonuses, and the others contribute to base salary. Payouts range from monthly to annual lump sums.

*Teacher Advancement Program.* The Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), managed by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, is a comprehensive school reform effort that restructures not only teacher pay but also teacher evaluation, advancement, and support. Teachers receive additional pay for assuming new roles and responsibilities (e.g., master teacher), as well as for serving in hard-to-staff schools and subjects. Performance pay depends on teacher evaluation results (based on the TAP teacher competency model), individual classroom achievement growth, and schoolwide achievement growth; these three factors are recommended to carry weights of 50%, 30%, and 20%, respectively. The payouts are annual salary supplements taken from a special compensation pool. The single salary schedule remains in place.

*Houston ASPIRE program.* Houston's Accelerating Student Progress and Increasing Results and Expectations (ASPIRE) program is a comprehensive performance management and educational improvement model begun in 2007. Its four major components focus on developing human capital, improving teaching and learning, informing practice, and recognizing excellence. Housed within the last component is the ASPIRE award program, in which campus-based employees (teachers and instructional/operational support staff) can earn performance pay. Performance measures assess value-added growth and student achievement attainment with specific performance standards (indicators) set at the teacher,

group, and campuswide levels. Based on an awards matrix, multiple possible payouts (all bonuses) are possible for most staff. Specific payouts range from \$200 to \$10,000, with total possible payouts ranging from \$500 to \$13,500. There is a separate ASPIRE award program for school leaders (assistant principals, principals, and deans of instruction).

### Teacher Performance Pay Program Effectiveness

How effective are teacher performance pay programs in improving classroom practice, student achievement, and student growth? The evidence for programs designed to improve teacher performance motivation, knowledge and skill improvement, and classroom practice is a mixture of positive, zero, or negative impacts (Ahn & Vigdor, 2010; Heneman, 1998; Heneman, Milanowski, & Kimball, 2007; Kelley, 1999; Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2002; Yuan et al., 2013). With respect to improving student achievement, the most rigorous studies have found no performance pay effect (Glazerman & Seifullah, 2012; Marsh et al., 2011; Springer, Hamilton, et al., 2010; Springer, Pane, et al., 2012). Less rigorously designed studies, however, have shown some positive impact (Goldhaber & Walch, 2012; Vigdor, 2008; Winters, Greene, Ritter, & Marsh 2008).

Many factors may have contributed to the mixed evaluation results for teacher performance pay programs. An overarching factor, spanning the seven performance pay program components, is likely flawed communication strategy and action to support the teacher pay program. Such flaws lead to lack of understanding (or often misunderstanding) the performance pay components and the rationales underlying them, as well as to implementation confusion. In turn, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders experience frustration, suspicion, and anxiety with pay plans, all of which undermine such plans' motivational potential and acceptance (Heneman et al., 2007). In contrast, there are many ways that communication strategy and action can be used

as creative and positive forces for improving the understanding and effectiveness of teacher performance pay programs.

### COMMUNICATING ABOUT PERFORMANCE PAY PROGRAMS

Creating a positive response to performance pay initiatives requires strategic communication planning and execution. The overall purpose for a communication strategy within a teacher performance pay initiative is to generate understanding of the initiative among stakeholders and to help motivate teachers to improve their performance. Strategic communication first involves identifying key stakeholders and questions that they likely will have about the pay program. Guided by stakeholder input and questions, developing a communication plan can proceed on the basis of a specific plan template. In addition, creating supports for the communication plan will be necessary to sustain the plan and its impact.

#### Key Stakeholders and Their Questions

The initial task of formulating the compensation program and the communication effort is to identify all the internal stakeholders—specifically, the teachers, district leaders and staff, and school administrators who are affected by the compensation plan or whose efforts are necessary for program implementation (e.g., information technology or human resources staff). Representatives from the internal stakeholder group should be involved from the beginning of the design and communication process.

Reaching out to teacher and principal professional associations represents the first step in stakeholder engagement. Even if there is no formal bargaining unit or local teachers' association, savvy district leaders invite teachers and principals to the design table early in the process. Not only are their perspectives and expertise needed for decision making in the planning and design stages, but those engaged in the

effort can also serve as key spokespersons as the project progresses.

Involving educators who will be affected by the pay initiative also helps to vet or think through program features and translate those components in an understandable way. If a program seems too complicated, unwieldy, or not transparent, educators will tend to question its value or fairness, which in turn can fuel resistance. Those engaged in the design process serve as a check for these perceptions. In addition, educators affected by any initiative may have more trust in the system if their peers are involved and they have a way to communicate with them as the design process unfolds. No compensation initiative can be successful without buy-in from stakeholders, and attempting to gain buy-in after the fact is exceedingly challenging. Early and ongoing engagement is central to establishing acceptance of the changes. Outreach through surveys, in-person meetings, or communication forums can help broaden input and foster greater understanding and acceptance. These communication forums should focus on all components of the performance pay plan.

In addition to internal stakeholders, external stakeholders must be identified and included in communication efforts. School boards, parents and community members, the business community, local government officials, and policymakers all have a stake in local education and need to be engaged through communication efforts. Effective use of the media can help reach these important audiences. To do so, messaging must be designed to break down plan complexity into simple descriptions that can be carried through the media. Cultivating media relationships can help set the stage for timely communication about the purpose and elements of performance pay plans.

External stakeholders likely have differing levels of interest in the details of the compensation initiative, but they do need a general understanding of the system as a whole. It is helpful to focus on the elements that are closest to their interests. For example, parents may tend to be most concerned with questions of impact on student learning and how the pay initiative will reward and retain effective educators for

their children. School board members may be more focused on issues pertaining to sustainability and budget but also have clear interests in the recruitment, selection, and retention of effective teachers, which are all typical purposes of performance pay plans. Different messages will need to be crafted for these different groups.

There are many potential questions that educators—the key stakeholder group—will likely have about the seven components of the performance pay plan. As summarized earlier, the seven components are reward focus, performance measurement, payout schedule, payout type, performance management system, design and implementation, and system management. Table 1 illustrates some of the potential questions that an educator may have. Their wide scope aptly portrays the importance of communication for gaining understanding and motivation. Communication activities are thus fundamental to the success of the performance pay program.

### Communication Plan

*Communication goals.* High-quality communication efforts are goal oriented, proactive, and monitored over time. A strategic communication plan strives to build trust among stakeholders by making the design and implementation processes of the performance pay initiative transparent and participatory, whether through active involvement, the systematic collection of feedback, or both. A quality communication plan is structured to support the communication goals of understanding and acceptance and the motivational impact of the program. Communication goals should be developed at the onset of determining communication efforts—for example,

*Goal 1:* Identify internal and external stakeholders and engage them throughout the design, piloting, and implementation processes.

*Goal 2:* Build understanding of performance pay program through timely and relevant messaging to key stakeholders and communication channels.

**Table 1. Performance Pay Components and Typical Educator Questions**

<i>Components</i>	<i>Questions</i>
Reward focus	Who is the focus of the award? Individual teacher? Teacher team? School?
Performance measurement	What are the measures? Teacher classroom practice? Student achievement? Student growth? Combination of all three?
Payout schedule	When will the award be given? Monthly? Annually? What are the performance levels that receive awards? What are the specific dollar amounts for each performance level?
Payout type	What is the payout type? Bonus? Salary addition?
Performance management system	How is performance goal setting and planning done? What kinds of assistance are provided by supervisors? How many times a year is an educator reviewed? What types of feedback are provided and when? Is there a final, overall evaluation? What is the appeals process?
Design and implementation	What is the purpose of the system? Who designed the system? Which stakeholders were involved in the design? How will the plan be funded? What training will be provided? What support and resources will be provided? What is the pilot plan? What is the implementation plan?
System management	How will the system be maintained? Who will oversee the system? How will the performance pay plan and the current human capital management system align? How will the performance pay plan align with the current payroll system?

*Goal 3:* Provide regular and timely updates on all program developments tied to design decisions, feedback, and other mechanisms for change.

*Goal 4:* Develop, implement, and monitor feedback loops to answer questions and track understanding of the program.

*Goal 5:* Develop and manage the program website as a known and comprehensive source of program information for district educators.

High-quality communications efforts are designed so that communications are proactive instead of reactive. Successful communicators know that it is much easier to “manage the message” by building and leveraging positive relationships with those in charge of various channels of communications (e.g., leaders of stakeholder groups and the media) and by clearly and thoroughly communicating information out in front, rather than “fighting fires” and responding afterward to problems created by the misinformation and *disinformation* that arise from an information vacuum.

Finally, communication efforts must be monitored continuously. A communication plan should be thought of as a “living document” that evolves over time. It needs to be structured to track the stages in program design and implementation and accommodate changes in program understanding. The plans also should remain nimble enough to address the inevitable challenges that come with efforts of this complexity. The communication plan must therefore include benchmarks for progress and a regular assessment of how well communication elements are working.

*Communication plan components.* Appendix A shows a template of the main components of a communication plan. The template provides space to specify the key messages, relevant goals, communication activities, vehicles, audience, persons responsible, timeframe/deadline, and progress-monitoring efforts.

The plan is organized around key messages, which support the communication goals. Key messages take into consideration the specific issues and concerns of one or more audiences and how to best address them. Key messages are ideally created in tandem with representative stakeholders to ensure that they address the issues and concerns of their intended audiences. From these messages, detailed communication activities and relevant communication vehicles can be developed to disseminate needed information.

The vehicles used for a communication activity should be determined by considering the most effective ways to reach a particular audience. Examples include the program website, brochures, press releases, program handbooks, e-mail, and presentations. A variety of communication vehicles should be deployed to ensure adequate reach and saturation. *Reach* refers to getting the message out to everyone concerned. *Saturation* refers to thoroughly communicating the message through a variety of vehicles. A one-shot notice of a change in the program in a newsletter, for example, neither will reach everyone (e-newsletters tend to have a reader rate of only 20% to 40%, with 50% considered excellent) nor be internalized by all those who do happen to read it. Repeated, clear, and consistent multivehicle messaging is indispensable for attaining understanding of the system and buy-in.

The persons responsible for each communication activity should be identified with a relevant timeframe or deadline. Progress monitoring allows for tracking the implementation of the plan specifics. This includes reach and impact—that is, the audiences’ understanding of the communication content as well as their reactions to it.

*Communication plan example.* Appendix B provides an example of a partially completed communication plan, which identifies two example key messages that are further broken out into communication activities, vehicles, their intended audiences, and relevant goals (the numbers shown in the *Goals* column refer to the sample communication goals listed in the Communication Goals section). Note that persons responsible and deadlines are not shown in the table for reasons of space but are nonetheless important features of a plan.

In this sample plan, “program to be designed with stakeholder participation and input” is the first key message, which is aligned with the first sample goal: “Identify internal and external stakeholders and engage them throughout the design, piloting, and implementation processes.” Under the first key message, two communication activities are listed (in a full plan, there would be additional activities): outreach to stakeholders and establishment of an advisory council. These

activities are effected through a number of vehicles that target various audiences. While the specific activities listed in the sample plan pertain mostly to the initial engagement activities, stakeholder engagement is crucial throughout the life of the compensation program—whenever milestones are reached and need to be communicated, when evaluation or other feedback leads to changes in the program, and when new resources become available, to name just a few.

There are other good examples from teacher performance pay programs that are relevant to the first key message in Appendix B. TAP exemplifies a deliberate nationwide effort of initial and continued stakeholder engagement and buy-in (Lasagna, 2010). The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching requires local stakeholder engagement before any TAP adoption. When a local school administrator is interested in implementing TAP, support from the local district must first be achieved. The school faculty then must vote in favor of adopting the program, and, if appropriate, support from the teacher's union must be secured. Chicago's TAP confirmed stakeholder buy-in through a legal agreement with the teachers union before implementing the program (Lasagna, 2010).

Denver ProComp is another example of a program that established stakeholder buy-in during the initial development phase. ProComp was collaboratively developed by the Denver Public Schools and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association. The stakeholder buy-in that ProComp was able to establish through its collaborative development helped in achieving funding approval for the program by the Denver community (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2007).

The Houston ASPIRE award program learned the importance of stakeholder buy-in after its initial program development in 2006. The superintendent of Houston charged the Houston Independent School District's research department with developing a performance pay system with no responsibilities or tasks assigned to other departments within the district. The superintendent solicited feedback on the developed plan from teachers and principals, but the Houston Federation of Teachers claimed that "authentic teacher

involvement was lacking during the initial planning conversations" (Behrstock & Akerstrom, 2008, p. 3). As a result of what was viewed as a unilateral development of the program, there was a lack of buy-in from the teachers and the teachers union. As a result of this and other implementation challenges, teacher morale was recorded at a 20-year low. In 2007, the Houston Independent School District redesigned the program with extensive teacher collaboration, and it was re-launched.

Returning to Appendix B, the second key message in the example plan is "performance pay program information and resources are widely available." Under this message, information and resources related to the seven performance pay components are to be communicated through a variety of vehicles targeting various audiences to maximize reach and saturation. Much of this information can be communicated through district websites or those dedicated to the program. For example, the Denver ProComp and Houston ASPIRE websites provide general overviews of the programs in addition to specific information about program measures, payout amounts, payout schedules, links to teacher manuals/handbooks, and frequently asked question. Denver ProComp and Houston ASPIRE both provide links on their websites to program brochures that include easy-to-read charts describing the program measures, requirements to earn the award, the amount of the award, and the dates of payouts.

*Communication plan implementation components.* As mentioned, several components of the communication plan are not shown in the example: persons responsible, timeframe/deadline, and progress monitoring. These components specify the details related to the actual implementation of the communication plan.

The person responsible executes the assigned communication activities and is typically a district communications specialist or designee. However, attention should be paid to determining the best person to develop or deliver a message based on its target audience and other considerations. For example, building leaders may be best suited to address their parent-teacher organizations.



The *timeframe/deadline* category may designate either the deadline for a communication event that aligns with a specific date (e.g., a milestone in the program implementation) or the timeframe for a regularly recurring activity (e.g., a monthly newsletter).

As defined earlier, progress monitoring allows communicators to determine the effectiveness of their efforts. Means for progress monitoring include feedback loops, such as periodic focus groups, program evaluations, participant surveys, and communication audits. Progress monitoring helps assess whether communication efforts are reaching their targets and how the audiences are reacting. The following are examples of progress monitoring. The Denver ProComp external evaluation (Proctor, Walters, Reichardt, Goldhaber, & Walch, 2011) included user feedback in its report. Feedback was gathered through participant interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Communication efforts by the district, understanding of the system by program participants, and sources of information used by the participants were assessed. The Austin REACH program also had an external evaluation (Burns, Gardner, & Meeuwesen, 2009) that included an analysis of communication efforts. One of the evaluation findings presented was that participants in veteran schools felt as though they received less program support from the central office later in the timeline compared to when the school initiated the program. As a response to the finding, REACH program staff began training campus-based facilitators to provide staff with program support (Austin Independent School District, 2011).

### Supports for the Communication Plan

Tools and support are necessary to implement a high-quality communication plan. Communication will be disseminated at both district and building levels. Districts may communicate with school boards, media, business community, and policymakers, as well as teachers and parents. Principals or building leadership teams are often tasked with communicating to audiences both internal (teachers) and ex-

ternal (parents). They are in a position to translate changes in policy, instruction, and personnel. Support must be provided to communicators at both levels. The development of building-level communication materials, support, and other resources can assist principals and leadership teams with their communications efforts. A building-level communication and engagement toolkit could include the following:

- A readiness tool*—a checklist of components that help participants plan and prepare for the rollout of a program. Implemented early, such a tool can be a powerful means of engaging stakeholders and gaining support.
- Presentation materials*—PowerPoint slides, handouts, and so forth that help building leaders present program information to their staff in a manner that is accurate and consistent across buildings.
- Talking points*—the essential messages to be delivered, using terminology determined most appropriate for the audience concerned, in a clear and consistent manner.
- Building-level communications plans*—an action plan for building leaders to organize their communication efforts so that they, too, are strategic, timely, and consistent.

Similarly, for a statewide performance pay program, the state education agency can prepare communication toolkits to be used at the district level and even the school level.

An additional form of support for communications comes within training. Given that all internal participants will likely require some form of training on the program, particularly those who will be directly impacted by the new system, training is a forum for communications that reaches all participants. Therefore, training and related materials must communicate a consistent message about why the district is implementing the program and the particulars of the seven key components of performance pay programs. The communications plan should include training as a communication activity, and those developing the communications messages should contribute to the description of the purpose and goals provided during the training.

## CONCLUSION

Teacher performance pay programs are on the upswing in popularity, funding, design, implementation, and legislative mandates. Despite their many differences, these programs are based on a foundation of seven major components. These components and the specific design variations within each present designers with a myriad of choices for specific plan features, as illustrated with our descriptions of the Denver ProComp, TAP, and Houston ASPIRE teacher performance pay programs.

Evaluations of teacher performance pay programs show a mixed set of results, with mild positive impacts (at best) on improvement in teacher improvements in classroom practice, student achievement, and student growth. Many possible reasons have been offered for the mixed evidence, ranging from ill-conceived designs to shoddy implementation to inadequate evaluation methodologies. Many reasons suggest that flawed communication with teachers and other stakeholders might be a part of the problem and that the more successful and long-standing programs have embraced and practiced proactive and thorough communication. We, among others, have made this suggestion based on our experiences in teacher performance pay program design, implementation, technical assistance, and evaluation.

The communication approach that has emerged from our experiences is that it must have three prongs: strategy, action, and support. Strategically, it is necessary to identify key stakeholders and the types of questions and concerns they have about the program. A specific and focused communication plan can then be developed (often with stakeholder input as well). That plan will surround and guide the information pipelines that get laid internally and externally. The plan will have several elements: key messages, goals, activities, vehicles, audiences, persons responsible, timeframes and deadlines, and monitoring. Attention must also be given to several communication supports; without them, the best of plans may flounder. By using this three-pronged approach, communication can become a partner in strengthening the impact of teacher performance pay programs. **JSPR**

## APPENDIX A: COMMUNICATION PLAN TEMPLATE

Key Message	Relevant Goals	Communication Activity	Vehicle	Audience	Persons Responsible	Timeframe/Deadline	Progress Monitoring
Message 1							
Message 2							

Key Message	Relevant Goals	Communication Activity	Vehicle	Audience
Program to be designed with stakeholder participation and input	1	Outreach from Program leaders to involve representative Internal and External Stakeholders in the initial design and decision-making process: approach union and professional organization leaders (for internal) and relevant leaders (external) to identify personnel to represent their groups on Program Advisory Council Establishment and announcement of the Program Advisory Council	Personal contact  Press release E-mail announcement Story in staff newsletter Press release to media Announcement in e-newsletter Website	Internal stakeholders: educators, district administrators, district staff via leaders of unions and professional organizations External stakeholders: school board members, community representatives, municipal officials via contact with leaders. Community All staff All staff External stakeholders Parents, community, school board All
Performance pay program information and resources are widely available	1, 2, 3, 5	Create dedicated space on district website for Program resources such as performance measurement details, salary calculator, and payout schedule, etc.	Website	All
	1, 2, 3	Create and distribute common tools for principals to share info with teachers	PPT	All staff
	1, 2, 3, 4	Facilitate overview sessions with all staff, district-wide or by school	In-person	All staff
	1, 2, 3	Make staff aware of Program News (e-newsletter) and how to subscribe	E-mail	All staff
	1, 2, 3	Write a series of brief articles for the local newspaper (Facebook page, television, radio, etc.) to inform public of initiative	Media—story suggestions	Parents, community, school board via the media
	1, 2, 3, 4	Make presentations to PTO	Speaker with PPT	PTO
	1, 2, 3, 4	Make presentations to School Board	Speaker with PPT	School Board

Note. Goal numbers refer to the five goals in the Communication Goals section.

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