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תמריצים להגברת תפוקת המורים

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Compensation Incentives to Boost Teacher Productivity: US Research Yields Disappointing Results

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Abstract

Three rigorous studies of compensation incentives in the US indicate that paying higher salaries to more effective teachers does not lead to higher overall levels of student achievement. The results were similar whether incentives were provided to individual teachers, or on a school-wide basis. One interpretation of the findings is that teachers were motivated to improve performance, but lacked the tools to do so. Other teacher quality initiatives should be evaluated with the same rigor as has been applied to the compensation reforms.

Recent studies of teacher compensation incentives in the US indicate that simply paying teachers more – whether as individuals or as entire school staffs – does not result in higher student achievement. These studies use rigorous designs to ensure that the effects of programs are not biased due to patterns of selection into the programs.

Compensation incentives for teachers are a prominent school reform strategy in the US. A variety of federal programs provide funds that

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states and local districts can use to pay teachers more if they produce higher student achievement. This strategy is motivated by research that indicates that teachers vary substantially in the achievement of their students, but traditional markers of merit such as years of experience and degrees obtained are poor predictors of productivity. One response to these findings is to offer higher pay to teachers who are especially successful at elevating student achievement. The logic of this approach is that higher pay will motivate teachers to work harder or to select more effective strategies to raising student achievement. However, three recent studies suggest this strategy is not successful.

In Nashville, Tennessee, teachers volunteered to participate in an experiment in which those who produced higher student achievement would receive higher pay, with possible salary increases ranging as high as \$15,000. Among those who volunteered, half were randomly assigned to participate in the program, and half served as controls. After three years, however, researchers found no consistent effects of program participation on student achievement (Springer et al. 2010). Overall, achievement of students whose teachers were eligible for the bonuses was no higher than that of students whose teachers were not eligible. Similarly, a program of performance pay in Chicago also found no achievement increases for students whose teachers were eligible for pay bonuses (Glazerman and Seifullah 2010).

One of the quandaries about implementing performance pay for teachers is whether bonuses should be paid to teachers as individuals, or as members of an entire school staff. While it is possible to link student achievement to particular teachers, that is true only for tested subjects (reading and mathematics). Moreover, the individual approach may promote competition rather than cooperation within schools. Hence, other approaches to compensation incentives focus on whole schools rather than individual teachers. New York City, for example, recently conducted an experiment with school-wide performance bonuses, in which schools were randomly assigned to be eligible to receive school-wide bonuses for elevating student achievement to specific targets. After

three years, however, despite the allocation of bonuses to many schools, student achievement was no higher in the participating schools than it was in schools that had not been selected to participate in the program (Marsh et al. 2011).

The ineffectiveness of pay for performance programs in the US suggests that increased motivation may not suffice to lead teachers to improve student outcomes. One interpretation of these results is that money is not a major motivator for teachers. Indeed, teachers have been found to prioritize working conditions over pay when seeking positions (Ingersoll 2006). However, recent studies have not required such a tradeoff. More likely teachers were motivated to improve performance, but lacked the tools – knowledge, skills, and/or working conditions – to do so.

Increased teacher compensation may still be important to recruit the highest caliber of teachers into the profession, or to induce highly effective teachers to work in the most challenging contexts. Other teacher quality initiatives may also be considered, such as professional development to provide teachers with additional knowledge and skills to improve their work, and improved working conditions such as smaller classes and more time to meet with colleagues. These approaches should be examined with the same rigor as has recently been applied to performance pay in the US studies.

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