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**THE INFLUENCE OF THE ELIMINATION OF PERFORMANCE
PAY ON TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON RETENTION AND
STUDENT PERFORMANCE AT HIGH-NEEDS CAMPUSES**

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Treatise

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my family. To my parents, Charles and Carla, thank you for supporting every dream that I have ever had. You instilled in me the ambition and work ethic to constantly strive for success. Thank you and I love you more than words can ever express.

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**The Influence of the Elimination of Performance Pay on Teachers' Perceptions on
Retention and Student Performance at High-Needs Campuses**

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There is a need to identify how the elimination of a performance pay system influences effective teachers' retention decisions at high-needs schools. Careful consideration should be given when implementing and eliminating performance-based pay programs because teacher behaviors change under monetary incentive-based programs. With student achievement as the primary goal of performance pay, an equally important issue that is not yet understood is how teachers perceive the influence of performance pay on student achievement.

A qualitative phenomenology methodology was used to determine how teachers make sense of performance pay through their experiences with the elimination of an established performance-based pay system and how these experiences influence retention decisions and perceptions of student achievement in urban middle schools with high-poverty and high-minority student populations. As effective teachers within their schools, the participants were uniquely positioned to provide valuable insight on their perceptions of the elimination of a performance pay system.

This study determined that teachers perceive the elimination of an established performance pay system to increase teacher attrition at high-needs schools and will result

in a decline in student achievement at these same high-needs schools. This research study expands the literature on teacher perceptions of performance pay and encourages district leaders to work collaboratively with school leaders and teachers to develop incentive plans for retention and student achievement at high-needs schools.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xii
Chapter 1: Background	1
Context of Study	4
Problem Statement	6
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	8
Chapter 2: Review of Literature	10
Teacher Labor Markets	10
Performance-based Pay Systems	12
Support for Performance-based Pay Systems	13
Criticism of Performance-based Pay Systems	14
Performance-based Pay Systems in Practice	17
Teacher Attrition	22
Discussion	26
Theoretical Framework	28
Conclusion	29
Chapter 3: Methodology	31
Epistemology	31
Theoretical Perspective	31
Methodology	32
Sampling Method.....	33
Data Collection	34
Data Analysis	35
Strength of Methods.....	37
Limitations of Methods.....	37
Trustworthiness and Quality	38
Positionality	38

Ethical Considerations	39
Significance.....	40
Chapter 4: Findings.....	42
Overview	42
Description of Participants.....	43
Emergent Themes	46
Influence of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation.....	50
Teaching to the Test.....	58
Sense of Self-efficacy	64
Summary	69
Chapter 5: Findings, Implications and Recommendations	70
Problem Statement	70
Purpose of the Study	72
Methodology Overview	72
Data Analysis	73
Summary of Results of Research Questions.....	76
Implications and Recommendations for Practice	81
Recommendations for Research	83
Summary	84
Appendix A Teacher Interview Protocol.....	87
Appendix B Consent for Participation in Research.....	88
References.....	90

List of Tables

Table 1:	Participant Description Summary	45
Table 2:	Participant Code Response Frequency.....	46

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Theme 1 Participant Word Frequency Cloud	48
Figure 2:	Theme 2 Participant Word Frequency Cloud	49
Figure 3:	Theme 3 Participant Word Frequency Cloud	50

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF STUDY

Background

Student learning is the critical and pivotal goal of all schools and districts, and the problem faced by these entities is the inconsistency in the quality of teachers and instruction from year to year. “The quality of the teaching force is largely determined by the pay that teachers receive” (Alexander, Salmon, & Alexander, 2015, p. 256). With a need to increase teacher effectiveness, many districts are making an effort to reward and retain effective teachers by moving to performance-based pay systems (Lavy, 2007). Providing adequate and competitive compensation is also necessary in the teacher labor market due to school districts having to compete with neighboring districts, teacher shortages, and the business community.

It is common knowledge in the educational realm that an effective teacher has the greatest impact on student learning (Alexander et al., 2015). While programs, resources, and initiatives come and go on a yearly basis, one factor that remains constant in influencing student learning is quality instruction. Three consecutive years of average but effective instruction can completely change the academic trajectory of low-achieving students, moving them from the lowest to the highest quartile in academic performance (Schmoker, 2011). Consequently, growing, developing, and retaining effective teachers are priorities of campus and district leaders each school year.

The need for quality, effective teachers is critical in all schools, but even more so in urban schools with predominantly low-socioeconomic and minority populations. “It is a known fact that most large urban districts and many isolated rural districts across the country have teacher shortages, have been forced to hire less-qualified teachers, and have difficulty competing in their markets for good teachers” (Odden & Picus, 2008, p. 397). As a result, teacher turnover

is high, which has an impact on student learning due to the lack of consistently effective instruction each school year. Across the United States, approximately half a million teachers leave their schools each year. Only 16% of this teacher attrition at schools is due to retirement. The remaining 84% of the teacher turnover is due to teachers transferring between schools or leaving the profession entirely (Boyd et al., 2011).

Attrition issues vary greatly among different types of schools within the same geographic areas, even though schools are drawing from the same supply pool of teacher candidates. In some instances, schools within the same metropolitan area have waiting lists of qualified candidates for their openings while other schools within the same proximity have difficulty recruiting and hiring qualified teachers for open positions. Schools that report difficulties in filling their vacancies are the same schools that have above-average turnover rates. These school-to-school differences are often due to a student population with poverty rates of more than 50%, with teacher attrition 50% higher in the higher-poverty public schools than low-poverty public schools (Ingersoll, 2001). Subsequently, high-poverty, high-minority schools consistently receive teachers who are underqualified and have little to no experience (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

Retention directly impacts teacher quality and the lack of retention results in the economic costs of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers, which far exceeds the cost of retaining effective teachers (Brill & McCartney, 2008). With student learning as the ultimate goal, retaining effective teachers is critical in affecting student performance, and performance-based pay programs are one of the common strategies for doing so. The single salary schedule that has dominated the teacher labor market for the last fifty years or so has compensated teachers based on years of experience and their level of education (Podgursky & Springer, 2007).

Originating in the Denver and Des Moines school districts in 1921, this compensation model has proven ineffective in positively affecting student performance (Jones, 2013). An example of the single salary approach is in the Houston Independent School District (HISD), where teacher salary is determined by years of service only. According to the 2016-2017 HISD compensation manual, teachers with 0-2 years of experience are paid \$51,500 per year and teachers can earn a maximum of \$71,500 after thirty-five years of service. Within those years, referred to as steps, teachers progress up the salary schedule for each year of service and earn anywhere from \$250 to \$500 more for each step.

Performance-based pay systems designed to incentivize individuals to work harder and more efficiently date back to the early 1900's in the United States. The first documented performance-based pay system was implemented in 1908 in Newton, Massachusetts. The implementation of performance pay systems saw growth during both the Nixon and Reagan administrations, but few experienced success in accomplishing their goals (Brewer, Myers, & Zhang, 2015). Compensation is one of the factors that surfaces most frequently in influencing teacher retention decisions (Pesavento-Conway, 2011). Consequently, educational reforms often focus on monetary incentives to reward and retain effective teachers.

In recent years, policy makers have experimented with performance-based pay as a strategy to compensate and retain teachers based on student achievement. Since 2005 when California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger suggested compensating teachers based on merit, governors across the country have continued to make proposals for performance-based pay for the teachers in their states (Odden & Picus, 2008). For example, performance-based pay systems in Tennessee, Austin, and New York City were implemented to increase student achievement, all varying in design and effectiveness. Tennessee's Project STAR performance

pay program resulted in improved student achievement in math by three percentage points, but had no statistical impact on reading achievement (Dee & Keys, 2004). Similarly, Austin Independent School District's REACH performance pay program showed positive impacts on student achievement on the Texas standardized assessments, but little impact on mastery of school-created student learning objectives (Balch & Springer, 2015). In contrast, the New York City School-Wide Performance Bonus Program showed little correlation between performance pay and student achievement, which was attributed to the whole-school pay out design (Goodman & Turner, 2011).

Performance-based pay systems in other states have shown a positive correlation between performance pay and teacher retention. North Carolina's Bonus Program provided incentive pay to retain teachers at academically low-performing campuses with high percentages of students in poverty, resulting in a reduced turnover rate of approximately 12% (Clotfelter et al., 2006). Denver's Professional Compensation Systems for Teachers (ProComp), Minnesota's Q-Comp program, and Florida's Merit Award Program (MAP) are further examples of systems that provided teachers with opportunities to earn performance pay based on student achievement and performance evaluation as well as their knowledge and skills. Through analysis of these programs, Podgursky and Springer (2007) found that incentive-based systems motivate and attract teachers who prefer to prosper under that type of compensation plan and that retaining effective teachers does require some type of incentive or performance pay.

Context of Performance Pay in Southeast Texas School District

Many districts are attempting to create a compensation system that awards teachers for performance rather than just years of service and education. There are various ways to do so, including performance bonuses, career-pathway stipends, hard-to-staff incentives, and career

ladder schedules. The most common model for paying teachers based on student achievement is the value-added model, which measures student progress from the previous year by the use of standardized assessments (Caillier, 2010). Value-added models are designed to determine teacher impact on student learning by grouping students and tracking their progress on standardized test scores, quantifying teachers' effect on student growth over time (Amrein-Beardsly, Pivovarova, & Greiger, 2016). Because many variables have an impact on student performance on standardized assessments, critics of performance pay systems argue that implementing a system that consistently identifies effective teachers and awards them appropriately, is difficult to achieve (Dee & Keys, 2004, p. 2004).

Although the salaries are relatively high compared to other school districts in the teacher labor market within the Southeast Texas area, Southeast Texas School District implemented one of the nation's largest performance-based pay system in 2007 in order to award effective teachers for student achievement through performance bonuses. Under the Teacher Performance Compensation Award Program (TPCAP), the single salary schedule remained intact for base pay and the performance pay bonuses served as additional compensation linked to student performance on standardized exams, using the value-added model (Olson, 2007). The TPCAP program ended following the 2015-2016 school year due to decreased funding (District Administrator, personal communication, January 23, 2017).

There are currently twenty-three schools within the Southeast Texas School District that are still participating in an extended version of the TPCAP performance pay program, which is designed to award teachers for their students' performance on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). These schools were also participants in the original TPCAP program, but were identified as schools that needed further incentives to improve student achievement. According to a Southeast Texas School District administrator, who referenced a program evaluation of the performance pay program, retention of core academic teachers increased from 81.8% in 2012-2013 to 83.2% in 2014-2015. Also,

the percentage of teachers receiving performance pay bonuses at high-needs schools increased from 19.7% in 2012-2013 to 26.2% in 2014-2015 (Personal communication, February 8, 2017).

The current group of schools were identified for participation based on historically low mastery rates on STAAR and high rates of economically disadvantaged students. The performance pay program for these schools is funded through the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) program grant, which is a federal grant program designed to provide districts with funding to develop and implement performance-based compensation systems in high-needs schools (“USDE”, 2017). The TIF grant has funded performance pay at the twenty-three schools, which includes twenty-one elementary schools and four middle schools, since the 2013-2014 school year. Funding will conclude at the end of the 2016-2017 school year (District Administrator, personal communication, January 23, 2017). Therefore, the effective teachers at these high-poverty, high-minority schools with a history of poor academic performance will no longer receive performance pay for their students’ academic achievement.

Problem Statement

There is a need to identify how the elimination of a performance pay system influences effective teachers’ retention decisions at high-needs schools. Performance pay influences teachers’ behaviors, and since teachers respond to incentives, careful consideration should be given when implementing and discontinuing performance-based pay programs (Jones, 2013). The current performance pay program in Southeast Texas School District awards teachers for student achievement in schools with historically low academic performance and high rates of economically disadvantaged students. With student achievement as the primary goal of performance pay, an equally important issue that is not yet understood is how teachers perceive the influence of performance pay on student achievement.

The attrition of teachers in high-poverty, high-minority schools in Texas, Georgia, New York and North Carolina reflect the trend of teachers leaving schools with high concentrations of

poor students and minority students. Hanushek et al. (2004) explain that schools serving large numbers of academically disadvantaged, black, or Hispanic students lose significantly more teachers to other districts and other professions than affluent or low-poverty schools with higher academic achievement. While economic status and academic performance influence teachers' attrition decisions, Lankford et al. (2002) state that student demographics has an even stronger impact, as qualified teachers leave schools where the proportion of nonwhite students is at least 75% greater than the schools they are transferring to and transfer to schools where the portion of poor students is 50% less. These attrition trends result in the minority and economically disadvantaged students systematically having new and inexperienced teachers, thus adversely affecting academic achievement.

With the intent of performance pay being to increase the quality of teachers to improve student academic achievement, prevent attrition, and retain teachers at high-needs campuses to prevent the trend of effective teachers moving to schools that serve relatively high-performing and economically sound students (Clotfelter, Glennie, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006), the desire for districts across the nation to establish a tighter link between teachers' effectiveness in the classroom and their compensation influences current policy in public schools (DeAngelis & Dang, 2016). While there is no one-size-fits all approach to performance-based pay design and implementation, and the measures used to determine teacher effectiveness vary greatly, the goal of such compensation plans is to award teachers for student achievement. Careful design and implementation are critical to the success of any performance-based pay program, and "the incentive structure created needs not only promote teacher effectiveness but also be fiscally feasible if the program is to be sustained" (DeAngelis & Dang, 2016, p. 16). Therefore,

discontinuing performance pay for teachers who have shown positive impacts on student achievement can have lasting implications within the context of high-needs schools.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine how effective teachers make sense of performance pay through their experiences with the elimination of an established performance-based pay system and how these experiences influence teachers' retention decisions in academically low-performing schools with high portions of economically disadvantaged and minority students. One goal of the study was to understand how teachers perceive performance pay influencing their decisions to remain in their current positions at high-poverty, high-minority schools. A second goal of the study was to explain how teachers perceive student achievement to be influenced by performance pay. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

For urban high-poverty, high-minority middle schools in Southeast Texas-

1. To what extent does the elimination of performance pay influence teacher retention decisions?
2. How do teachers perceive the influence of performance pay on student achievement?
3. How do teachers make sense of their experience with performance pay?

Definition of Terms

Performance-based Pay- Financial incentives in the form of a cash bonus whenever student scores on standardized assessments achieve particular metrics (Jones, 2013).

High-Poverty- Public schools where more than 75% of the students are eligible for free or reduce-price lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017, retrieved from:

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_clb.asp).

High-Minority- For the purposes of this study, high-minority is defined as more than 50% of the student population as being non-white.

Effective Teachers- For the purposes of this study, effective teachers are defined as teachers who have received performance pay bonuses for student achievement for the last two school years at minimum.

Low-performing Schools- “Schools that are in the bottom 10 percent of performance in the State, or who have significant achievement gaps, based on student academic performance in reading/language arts and mathematics on the assessments required under the ESEA or graduation rates” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, retrieved from: <https://www.ed.gov/race-top/district-competition/definitions.>)

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The design of this study presented in the following chapter was informed by research on teacher labor markets and performance pay designs, large scale performance-based pay systems intended to reward student achievement, and teacher attrition in schools with large portions of poor and minority students. This chapter is structured as follows. The first section presents a brief history of teacher labor markets and performance-based pay designs. The second sections covers research on actual large-scale performance pay systems in practice. The purpose of this section is to provide examples of performance-based pay systems and their correlation to teacher retention and student achievement, as the intent of performance pay in these systems is to reward teachers for student academic performance. Because this study explored the relationship between performance pay and the retention of effective teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools, the final section reviews the literature on teacher attrition in schools with these demographics.

Teacher Labor Markets

According to Jones (2013), economic theory suggests that performance pay programs can change teachers' motivation, cooperation, and attrition decisions. The competitive nature of teacher labor markets, and the need for teachers to provide quality instruction in high-needs schools, cause districts to develop tools for recruiting and retaining teachers through such incentives as salary increases, sign-on bonuses, incentive pay, and performance pay. According to Lavy (2007), "tying teachers' pay to their classroom performance should improve the current educational system both by clarifying teaching goals and by attracting and retaining the most productive teachers" (p. 87). Extrinsic motivation in the form of monetary awards is designed to encourage teachers to constantly strive to improve performance to meet district goals and remain in the profession, therefore exhausting more effort due to the possibility of reward (Firestone, 2014).

Supporters of performance-based pay compare it to the business community that pays individuals based on knowledge and skills and how those attributes contribute to company performance, resulting in performance bonuses (Odden & Picus, 2008). Using only a single salary schedule contradicts this, and instead treats educators as if their opportunities based on knowledge and skill are the same both inside and outside of the labor market (DeAngelis & Dang, 2016). So ideally, performance-based pay systems would encourage teachers to continue to grow and develop in an effort to align themselves with the district's student performance goals. These "market incentives" (Clotfelter et al., 2006, p. 3) in education bring cost-benefit analysis to the conversation, as the benefits of higher quality teachers come with the costs of higher compensation expenditures.

Teacher labor markets are partially influenced by supply and demand, as the demand for teachers is determined by the number of students needing education. However, applying supply and demand theory in a simplistic sense would suggest that teacher salaries rising significantly would entice more people to enter the profession, therefore leading to an oversaturation of the market and a lower competitive salary. Therefore, teacher salaries are not determined based on supply and demand. Instead, the teacher labor markets function more as an oligopoly, as the states control the majority of the output through teacher certifications and school accreditations (Alexander et al., 2015).

From an economic perspective, gaining an understanding of the variations in performance-based pay systems, as well as the impact that performance pay has on student achievement and teacher retention, will provide insight as to the types of incentives that have the most impact on achievement and retention. While most districts use student performance on standardized assessments to determine the effectiveness of teacher performance, there are other subjective factors utilized in other instances such as teacher appraisals. In all cases, performance pay appears to be unstable from year to year, which can cause the total expenditures spent on performance pay to be a bit unpredictable. Examining how districts determine and award effective teachers based on performance is one goal of the following review of

literature on performance-based pay systems, as well as how these incentive programs consequently influence teacher retention. In regard to teacher retention, the cost of performance pay in an effort to improve student achievement and retain effective teachers ideally would outweigh the cost of continuous recruitment, hiring, sign-on bonuses, professional development for new teachers, and instructional resources needed to supplement poor instruction.

Performance-Based Pay Systems

The single-salary schedule for compensating teachers has been traditional practice for the majority of the 20th century. This traditional system pays teachers based on years of experience and level of education (Conley & Oden, 1995). The major limitations and criticisms of the single-salary schedule include its inability to provide incentives to teachers to acquire new skills and provide standards-based instruction, its inability to respond to the labor market forces, and the lack of correlation between education and experience with improved student achievement (Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Various alternative compensation systems have been created to align the interests of teachers with the goals of the districts in which they work (Adams, Heywood, & Rothstein, 2009). Performance-based pay systems are the most relevant to this study and will therefore be the focus of the literature review.

Depending on the compensation structure, performance pay is also referred to as variable pay and merit pay, and is considered to be at least one component of effective compensation plans. Odden and Picus (2008) support a salary structure that is designed to support the goals of the district, and believe that rewarding teachers based on student achievement motivates teachers to improve student learning. Performance pay can be awarded to an entire school based on campus student performance, to individual teachers based on the performance of students in their classrooms, or a combination of campus awards and teacher awards. It is believed that providing whole-school bonuses eliminates competition among the teaching staff, and that individual awards cause unhealthy competition and negatively impact morale (Odden & Picus, 2008).

While the school-wide payouts are less controversial, Odden and Picus (2008) recommend “designing bonus programs for individual teachers as well as groups of teachers” (p. 415).

Support for Performance-based Pay Systems. Springer and Gardner (2010) are also in support of performance-based pay systems that award teachers as a means to improve instructional quality and consequently student learning. Data from a 1996 study by William Sanders was utilized to emphasize the need for effective teachers, citing “a difference of 50 percentile points in student achievement between students who encountered three consecutive years of teachers at or above the 80th percentile of performance” (Springer & Gardner, 2010, p. 11). A later study completed by Hanushek and Rivin in 2004 was also used to support the impact of effective teachers, explaining that students who have effective teachers for five years in a row are able to close the achievement gap that exists among students who qualify for free or reduced lunch (Springer & Gardner, 2010).

Both prior studies are used to bring context to support the argument of the positive impact that performance pay will have on awarding effective teachers. It is stated that “pay for performance will tend to attract and retain individuals who are particularly good at the activities to which the incentives are attached, and they will repel those who are not” (Springer & Gardner, 2010, p. 12). In connection to their statement, performance pay could therefore impact teacher retention decisions of effective teachers, which would then positively impact student achievement.

Also a proponent of performance pay as a means to improve the quality of teachers, Lavy (2007) examines both the benefits and drawbacks of performance-based salary structures. The benefit of performance pay is its positive impact on productivity and efficiency. In regard to efficiency, performance pay aligns incentives with expectations of teachers, schools, and

students. Lavy (2007) states that pay incentives “provide teachers or schools with powerful signals about what is valued and what is not” (p. 90). Efficiency is also improved through performance incentives by addressing the gaps between teachers’ efforts and their perceptions of what is important for student learning. Performance pay motivates teachers to engage in activities that result in student learning gains despite their hesitation to complete the task due to more workload (Lavy 2007). Lavy (2007), like Springer and Gardner (2010), believes that an effectively designed performance pay system will recruit and retain effective teachers while naturally discouraging ineffective ones. Also, efficiency is improved because performance pay will motivate teachers to continue to improve their craft through professional development, which also will impact achievement. Productivity is increased by encouraging better governance on the part of administrators, because campus leaders must monitor closely and evaluate the effectiveness of their teachers and the quality of instruction on their campuses (Lavy, 2007).

Criticism of Performance-Based Pay. The potential negative effects of performance-based pay systems include measurement problems, negative effects on teacher collaboration, and focus on only tested curriculum and students with the highest probability of meeting performance goals. Establishing agreed upon goals and then accurately assessing the progress toward those goals can be problematic. This is true for both objective and subjective measurements (Lavy, 2007). The most commonly used measures of teacher performance in relation to student achievement or student growth on standardized assessments are not reflective of the all of the factors that influence student achievement (Briggs & Domingue, 2011). The value-added model is used most frequently in large school districts with the goal of measuring the causal relationship between the teacher and student performance from one school year to the next, using only student achievement data on standardized assessments to determine the

effectiveness of the teacher in adding value and growth to students' learning (Briggs & Domingue, 2011). It is also complex to "identify the contributions of previous teachers" (Lavy, 2007, p. 92). These performance measures result in increased criticism for performance-based pay due to the single-measure of teacher performance being student achievement on standardized assessments.

Lavy (2007) also brings unintended consequences of performance pay to light, such as teachers only teaching the subjects and curriculum that will be used for measurement. Often referred to as "teaching to the test", focusing performance measures solely on student achievement on standardized tests can cause a narrowing of the curriculum to only tested subjects and curriculum. With such a disproportionate amount of weight being placed on these specific student assessments, "other valuable activities might get slighted" (Podgursky & Springer, 2007, p. 928). This can lead to students not receiving an interdisciplinary curriculum that includes social science and fine arts because of the emphasis on achievement in math and reading. Performance pay can also create an environment that encourages teachers to focus instructional time and interventions on the students who can make the most progress toward to specified measurable goals, which can lead to the extremely high and low academic students receiving the least effective instruction for their learning needs. (Lavy, 2007).

A final criticism of performance-based pay is the negative impact it has on teachers' behaviors. Jones (2013) investigated the impact of incentive pay on teacher effort, cooperation, and retention by using data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) from 2003 and 2007. The intent of the research was to determine how teacher behaviors changed in regard to actual hours worked, as well as time spent on collaborative activities, when a pay incentive was available. Evidence from the study indicates that performance pay impacts teacher behaviors in a

variety of ways, both positive and negative. It is concluded that teachers who work in performance pay districts work 12% fewer hours per week than teachers in non-performance pay districts, and also spent more time pursuing other job opportunities. Jones (2013) also states that teachers' participation in non-paid activities decreases in performance pay districts. While motivation to participate in non-compensated activities appears to decline, teacher attrition rates also decline significantly in districts with performance pay structures (Jones, 2013).

Performance pay impacts teachers' behaviors, most notably when it comes to retention. With the goal of retaining effective teachers to increase the quality of instruction, the Jones (2013) study supports performance pay as a tool to do so. It does, also, shed light on unintended consequences such as lack of effort or motivation to participate in unpaid activities, all of which impact student achievement. This further supports Jones's statement that "since teachers respond to incentives, careful consideration should be given to how performance pay is implemented" (Jones, 2013, p. 163).

In order for performance pay systems to achieve the desired results of student achievement and teacher retention, Marsh and McCaffrey (2011) suggest essential components to ensure a successful program. These components include the need for teachers to understand clearly the program design and functionality, believe they are capable of earning a substantive award within a reasonable timeline, and perceive that the system is fair and therefore commit to the program. Supporters of awarding performance pay based on value-added measurements of teacher quality believe that pay incentives motivate teachers to improve student learning. Critics believe that performance pay motivates novice teachers more than experienced teachers who prefer to work in higher socioeconomic neighborhoods and academically successful campuses. Critics also suggest that merit pay has no proof of success in making teachers more effective

(Alexander et al., 2015). While there are various perspectives on teacher salary structures, all of the literature finds at least some positive aspects of performance-based pay. The policies that govern personnel practices and funding for compensation of teachers significantly influence the quality of education in school districts, and should therefore be created at the district level to meet identified needs. These personnel policies should focus on processes that are designed to recruit, develop, and retain teachers in order to improve student learning and reach instructional goals (Alexander et. al, 2015).

Performance-based Pay Systems in Practice

Performance pay systems are a popular component of public education reform, but the design of these systems vary drastically from state to state and even district to district. Variations occur in compensation awards that range from large group, small group, and individual pay outs based on student achievement (Springer & Taylor, 2016). Differences also are seen also in measures used to determine effective performance, with some using value-added measures and others utilizing yearly district-set student achievement standards. Understanding the effective characteristics of past and current systems is essential for policy development and implementation.

Tennessee Career Ladder Evaluation System. In an early study completed by Dee and Keys (2004), an evaluation of the merit pay system in Tennessee was completed with the goal of determining if the performance pay system actually rewarded effective teachers as indicated by student achievement. To evaluate the argument that performance pay systems do not adequately determine and award effective teachers, their study analyzed data from the Tennessee Career Ladder Evaluation system and the Project Student Achievement Teacher Ratio (STAR) class-size experiment. The career ladder system provided opportunities for teachers to earn salary

rewards for student achievement along with non-salary rewards such professional leadership responsibilities, and no quota was established for the number of teachers eligible for receipt of monetary and non-monetary awards (Dee & Keys, 2004). Project STAR was an experiment with class size reduction with seventy-nine schools across the state. Teachers in this study were randomly selected and consisted of a mixture of career-ladder and non-career ladder teachers.

The results indicate that the career-ladder teachers, also identified as effective teachers, did have a greater impact on student achievement in math by three percentage points but no statistical impact on reading achievement. However, the results reveal that the merit pay system in Tennessee was relatively accurate in rewarding effective teachers who had a positive impact on student performance. Also, the career ladder teachers that were identified as novice and probationary had a stronger impact on math achievement than veteran teachers. This suggests the program's effectiveness in recruiting effective teachers (Dee & Keys, 2004). Based on these findings, performance pay systems that award individual teachers based on their students' performance do impact student achievement. While the impact is low, rewarding effective teachers with merit pay can result in continued increases in student achievement through teacher motivation.

North Carolina Bonus Program. Focusing on the need to increase quality instruction by retaining effective teachers, Clotfelter et al. (2006) conducted an analysis of the effectiveness of North Carolina's performance pay system that spanned from the 2001-2002 school year through the 2003-2004 school year. The program was designed to recruit and retain qualified math, science, and special education teachers in middle schools and high schools that were hard-to-staff due to the student populations. The pay incentive was a permanent \$1800 bonus for remaining at their assigned school and in one of the positions identified. The study was designed

to measure the impact of incentive pay in retaining teachers at low-performing and high-poverty campuses. (Clotfelter et al., 2006).

The results of the study reflect that incentive pay positively impacted teachers' decisions to remain at the campuses in their North Carolina district. An average of \$1800 per year "reduces turnover rates of the targeted teachers by roughly 12%" (Clotfelter et al., 2006, p. 4). The teachers who were retained due to the incentive were mostly those with ten to thirty years of teaching experience, with little evidence supporting the impact on novice teachers. It was also revealed that the percentage of teachers retained due to the incentive pay could have been higher, but misunderstanding about the program led teachers to leave without clarity on their actual eligibility for the award (Clotfelter et al., 2006). North Carolina discontinued this program after just three years due to the discontinuation of funding, so the long term impact on student achievement was not measured. However, this study does provide evidence that incentive pay can motivate teachers to remain in their position, leading to higher retention rates of effective teachers and therefore possibly impacting student achievement.

Large-Scale Performance Pay Programs. In 2007, Podgursky and Springer evaluated several large-scale salary programs that utilize performance as a means to compensate teachers. Specific performance-based teacher pay programs were reviewed in Denver, Texas, Minnesota and Florida, all with variations in the program structures and amounts of pay-out awarded. Denver's Professional Compensation Systems for Teachers (ProComp), Minnesota's Q-Comp program, and Florida's Merit Award Program (MAP) had a salary schedule that provided teachers opportunities to earn performance pay based on student achievement and performance evaluation as well as their knowledge and skills. Texas's Governor's Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG) awarded teachers based on objective measures of student achievement only. Theoretical

arguments both for and against performance-related pay programs were presented and empirical research on teacher effect studies and actual performance-based experiments were compared to reveal a mostly positive effect of teacher incentive programs on student achievement (Podgursky & Springer, 2007).

Through analysis of the multiple performance pay systems in practice as of 2007, Podgursky and Springer (2007) find that incentive-based systems motivate and attract teachers who prefer to prosper under that type of compensation plan, and that retaining effective teachers does require some type of incentive or performance pay. While there is no conclusion drawn on how merit pay impacts student achievement through their study, they do emphasize the fact that if traditional salary schedules are not replaced with ones that have some aspect of performance tied to compensation, “districts will find themselves devoting ever larger expenditures to schedule-driven pay increases that are unlikely to have effect on student achievement” (Podgursky & Springer, 2007, p. 945). This study does not reveal any correlation between performance pay and student achievement, but it does encourage a performance pay system to attract and reward, and hopefully retain, effective teachers, which will consequently impact student achievement.

New York City School-Wide Performance Bonus Program. Evidence on the effects of performance pay on math and reading student achievement was analyzed by looking at data in the public schools in New York City that participated in the School-Wide Performance Bonus Program. In this performance pay system, teachers received bonuses based on overall school performance rather than the performance of students in their individual classrooms (Goodman & Turner, 2011). This group award design was implemented to reduce the competition of teachers and increase collaboration, which supports one of the drawbacks that Lavy (2007) refers to when

using a performance-based system that pays individual teachers based on the achievement of students in their classrooms.

The school-wide performance bonus program in New York City targeted 158 high-needs schools that were defined as serving grades kindergarten through eighth grade and having high percentages of English Language Learners, special education students, and students on free or reduced lunch due to financial disabilities. Campuses were eligible to earn school-wide lump sum pay-outs based on student performance on the state math and reading exams, as well as school environment measures such as safety and student attendance. For schools who received the performance bonuses, a campus committee comprised of four staff members determined how the performance pay would be distributed to the staff. When compared to the control schools, or those who did not participate in the performance pay program, the 158 schools who did participate did not make significantly higher gains in student achievement (Goodman & Turner, 2011). Based on their analysis, “on average, students in these groups fared just as well whether they attended a school that was participating in the bonus program or one in the control group” (Goodman & Turner, 2011, p. 70).

Further discussion on the study leads the authors to believe that the structure of the performance pay system in New York is the problem, citing the whole-school payout lacks the monetary strength to motivate teachers. The statement is made that “some teachers may conclude that exerting additional effort will produce little difference in the overall performance of the school” (Goodman & Turner, 2011, p. 71). The findings suggest that whole-school performance pay has a stronger impact on campuses with smaller student populations, because the payouts are larger for teachers and they are able to work more collaboratively due to size. In schools with larger populations, whole-school bonuses based on student performance do not

motivate teachers or impact student achievement because the overall payout is smaller and the environment is too large for tight teacher collaboration (Goodman & Turner, 2011).

REACH Performance Pay Program. Recently, Balch and Springer (2015) analyzed Austin Independent School District's (AISD) REACH teacher incentive pay program, which compensated teachers based on value-added performance tied to student test scores. Initially started in the 2007-2008 school year as the Strategic Compensation Initiatives, then renamed REACH the following year, the program awarded variable pay to teachers based student achievement, professional development, and recruitment and retention. The focus of this study was to evaluate the relationship between student learning objectives and value-added performance with the purpose to identify best practices in measuring teacher effectiveness, which is ultimately tied to performance pay (Balch & Springer, 2015).

The research focused on how REACH impacted student achievement over its first two years and how student learning objectives, set collaboratively with the campus principal, connected to teacher value-added performance. The findings from the study reveal gains in student test scores in the first year of implementation of REACH but mostly stagnant results in the second year. However, the REACH schools did out-perform non-REACH schools in regard to student achievement on state standardized assessments. It was also revealed that no relationship exists between the number of student learning objectives met by teachers and their effectiveness as determined by value-added test scores (Balch & Springer, 2015). This leads to a possible contradiction between performance pay for mastery of campus-based student learning objectives and student achievement on state standardized assessments.

Teacher Attrition

From an organizational perspective, teacher turnover results in staffing shortages and inadequate school performance. The majority of research on teacher attrition examines individual characteristics of teachers rather than the character and conditions of the organizations in which teachers work. Ingersoll (2001) investigated the role that teacher turnover plays in staffing shortages at schools as well as the teacher turnover rate at different types of schools. The study revealed that staffing problems vary greatly among different types of schools within the same jurisdiction, even though schools are drawing from the same supply pool of candidates. In some instances, schools within the same metropolitan area have waiting lists of qualified candidates for their openings while other schools within the same proximity have difficulty recruiting and hiring qualified teachers for their open positions.

Schools that report difficulties in filling their vacancies are the same schools that have above-average turnover rates. These school-to-school differences are often due to high poverty rates of more than 50%, with teacher attrition 50% higher in the higher-poverty public schools than low-poverty public schools (Ingersoll, 2001). Consequently, urban schools across the nation have a large portion of inexperienced and underqualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). For the teachers in urban, high-poverty public schools, turnover is most attributed to job dissatisfaction such as low salaries, student discipline problems, lack of support from administrators, and lack of student motivation (Ingersoll, 2001).

High-Poverty and High-Minority School Attrition. The attrition of teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools has been studied in several states including New York, Texas, Georgia, and North Carolina. The results of the studies show similar trends in teacher decisions to leave schools with high concentrations of poor students and minority students. In a study of New York schools, Lankford, Loeb, and Wykoff (2002) examined the variation in teacher

attributes across schools to identify schools that have the least qualified teachers and to determine how the distribution of teachers is impacted by attrition and transfer. The results identified several factors that influence teacher attrition decisions including salaries and non-pecuniary school characteristics such as student demographics (Lankford et al., 2002).

Clotfelder, Ladd, and Vigdor (2010) also studied how salary and student demographics impact teacher attrition decision in North Carolina. Studies in Texas (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004) and Georgia (Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007) extend the study of teacher attrition beyond student demographics to identify student achievement as a factor that influences teacher retention.

Teachers systematically favor higher achieving, nonminority, non-low income students over high-poverty, low performing campuses with high concentrations of Hispanic and black students. Schools serving large numbers of academically disadvantaged, black, or Hispanic students lose significantly more teachers to other districts and other professions than affluent or low-poverty schools with higher academic achievement (Hanushek et al., 2004). While student achievement and poverty influence teacher attrition, the racial composition of the school is the factor most consistently linked to teacher mobility. According to Lankford et al. (2002), qualified teachers leave schools where the proportion of nonwhite students is at least 75% greater than the schools they are transferring to and transfer to schools where the portion of poor students is 50% less. This is evident in the nine-year attrition rate in North Carolina, as effective teachers at campuses with at least 80% nonwhite populations have an attrition rate of over 80% (Clotfelder et al, 2010).

Findings from the literature indicate that in New York State, 17% of nonwhite students have teachers who are not certified to teach, compared with 4% for white students. Also, 28% of

teachers of poor students have teachers who failed the certification exam compared with 20% for non-poor students (Lankford et al., 2002). Correlations between school achievement and teacher characteristics in New York schools were also evident as less qualified teachers were more likely to teach in low-performing urban schools. In Texas, 20% of teachers in schools in the bottom achievement quartile leave their school each year compared to 15% of teachers in the top quartile (Hanushek et al., 2004). Scafidi et al. (2007) provides evidence to support these findings by stating that teachers are more likely to leave their schools if the school is their first teaching job and has low test scores, high-poverty, and high proportions of minority students. This results in the lowest achieving students being more likely to have new and inexperienced teachers, adversely affecting academic achievement. Lankford et al. (2002) also examined the turnover rate in large urban areas in New York and found it to be higher than suburban areas, as only 29% of teachers were in their same urban school five years after starting compared with 43% in suburban schools. These high exit rates impact the quality of instruction students are receiving in urban schools.

When moving across districts, the salaries are between 4 and 15% higher and within the New York City region, teachers who transfer districts experience a salary increase of between 12 and 22%. In most cases, starting teacher salary is the same across districts in large metropolitan areas and does not take into account student demographics (Lankford et al., 2002). Similar to New York, North Carolina faces the same trend of the higher the nonwhite population, the harder it is to staff the school with qualified teachers, but higher salaries make it easier to do so. The required salary to hire a teacher with a majority nonwhite student population is suggested to be 4.7% higher than a more white school. However, Clotfelter et al. (2010) indicate that salary differentials are powerful in retaining teachers in their initial teaching positions but less powerful

in retaining strongly qualified teachers with high certification test scores, undergraduate degrees from quality universities, and three or more years of teaching experience. For salary differentials to impact teacher retention decisions, the salary increase must be significantly higher, ranging from a 10% increase to a 58.3% increased depending on the percentage of nonwhite students (Clotfelter et al., 2010).

More qualified teachers seize opportunities to leave difficult working conditions and move to more appealing environments. Therefore, urban schools are systematically receiving less qualified teachers than their suburban counterparts which causes a disadvantage to urban students. Lankford et al. (2002) concludes that policies that focus on the improvement of low-achieving students but ignore the teacher labor market are unlikely to impact the disadvantaged poor, urban students. The greater the segregation of schools, particularly race segregation, the higher required salary differentials needed to retain effective teachers (Clotfelter et al., 2010).

Discussion

Performance pay and incentive pay programs vary across the nation, but share the same goals of rewarding, recruiting and retaining effective teachers to increase student achievement. The review of literature surfaces the complexity and challenges of creating and implementing a performance-base pay system that accurately identifies and awards effective teachers and results in higher rates of teacher retention and improvement in student achievement. The literature analysis reveals that performance pay does impact student achievement and teacher retention, although program design and payouts differ greatly, further impacting the results of each program. While the actual measured impact on student achievement is relatively positive, there are limited studies that analyze just the impact of pay incentives on student achievement. It appears that this is due to the variations in the performance pay structures.

Also important is the effect of performance pay on teacher behaviors. The literature indicates that teacher turnover is reduced when performance pay is awarded, but unintended consequences also occur such as lack of collaboration due to the competitive aspect of individual awards. Those two findings seem to contradict each other. Effective teachers are retained, yet they are not motivated for extra duties or collaboration. Also contrasting is that performance pay retains effective teachers but decreases their motivation depending on the structure of the pay-out. Finally, it appears that novice and probationary teachers respond more positively to individual performance pay bonuses based on student achievement than do experienced teachers. Experienced teachers, on the other hand, tend to be impacted by retention bonuses.

Future policy implications suggest a need for a locally developed performance-based pay system that will meet the recruitment, retention, and student achievement needs of the specific district. Research indicates that teacher behavior is changed by pay incentives, therefore, the key for policy development is determining which incentives have the most impact on retention of effective teachers. With the evidence of new and probationary teachers being motivated by individual bonus pay tied to student achievement, and veteran teachers preferring a retention bonus, it is worth further investigation to determine how to structure a performance pay system that provides differentiated awards to retain both novice and veteran teachers. However, the research on teacher attrition at campuses with large portions of minority and poor student narrows the focus for future studies.

The literature is not vigorous enough to prescribe how performance-based pay systems should be designed and implemented uniformly in order get the desired results of teacher retention and improved student achievement. For policy development, it is clear that districts must have specific and intentional purposes for performance pay and then set student

performance goals that are objectively measurable. The measurement instrument that determines effectiveness must be valid and reliable, and all measurement goals, results, and resources should be communicated clearly to teachers to ensure they are understood. Without transparency and fairness, the performance pay system can lead to the unintended consequences that were discussed previously, like competitiveness and lack of motivation. When these elements are in place, and effective teachers are awarded for student performance in a system they understand, identifying how these performance incentives influence their retention decisions should advise district policy. The most notable gap that exists in studies involving performance-based pay programs is how the elimination of such performance-based incentives influences effective teacher retention in schools that already face adversity in retaining teachers due to high-poverty rates, high-minority populations, and low academic achievement.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to study how the elimination of performance pay influences teacher retention decisions at hard-to-staff schools was sense-making theory. Sense-making theory is “defined as behavior, both internal and external, which allows the individual to construct and design his/her movement through time and space” (Dervin, 1983, p. 3). Sense-making theory provided the framework for examining and understanding the teacher behaviors associated with performance-pay losses.

One assumption of sense-making theory is that behaviors are responsive to changes within specific situations, therefore making behavioral decisions situationally and contextually bound (Dervin, 1983, p. 6). The context of this research study was low-performing schools with high portions of poor and minority students, and pairing that with the situation of effective teachers losing performance pay in these schools, makes understanding how teachers’ behaviors

are influenced within this context and situation particularly important in facing the challenges of high rates of teacher attrition.

As data was collected and analyzed, sense-making theory was applied to best explain how teacher retention behaviors are influenced by the elimination of a performance-based pay system. Also applicable to this study is the concept of loss aversion, in which teacher pay incentives are framed in terms of losses rather than gains (Fryer et al., 2012). Fryer et al. (2012) found that giving teachers lump sum payments at the beginning of the school year and then taking it away at the end of the school year if their students did not meet performance goals had a greater impact on teacher behavior and student achievement than did performance bonuses received at the end of the year that were linked to student performance. While end-of-year performance pay is the type of compensation lost by teachers within this study, the concept of losing the payment they once received is loss aversion within this context. Sense-making theory, coupled with the concept of loss aversion, provided an approach to this qualitative research study that allowed for a comprehensive look at the influence of performance-pay elimination on teacher retention decisions and student achievement.

Conclusion

The extent to which teacher attrition decisions are influenced by school characteristics such as student demographics directly impacts policies for the retention of effective teachers in high-poverty and high-minority campuses. The relationship between compensation and retention of teachers at such hard-to-staff schools, which are also academically low-performing, has been studied from the perspective of retention bonus influence, but there is no evidence as to how teachers respond to performance pay for student achievement at these campuses. In instances where effective teachers are identified and awarded for student achievement at low-performing

schools with high portions of minority and poor students, the extent to which that performance pay directly influences their retention decisions has important policy implications for school leaders.

Teachers prefer to work in schools that are academically high performing and have low populations of poor and minority students. As districts struggle to staff low-performing, high-poverty, and high-minority schools with effective teachers, performance-based pay programs other than simple retention bonuses are worthy of review for policy development. The extent to which performance-based pay influences the behaviors of effective teachers in academically challenged, high-poverty, high-minority schools directly influences teacher attrition and student achievement and should therefore inform policy decisions for teacher retention. Based on the available literature, further study was needed to determine the impact of the discontinuation of performance-based pay on teacher retention in hard-to-staff schools. As a theoretical framework, sense-making theory provided the foundation for understanding how the elimination of performance pay influences teacher retention decision in these such schools. Also, the concept of loss aversion provided an additional lens to explain how teachers make sense of losing performance pay they once received for student achievement.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Epistemology. For the purposes of this study, the epistemological stance of constructionism was used. Crotty (1998) describes constructionism as the view that “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (p. 43). Crotty (1998) also explains that constructionism is a reality based on experience and brings together both objectivity and subjectivity; therefore, the subject and the object are always united. Based on this description, the reality constructed by teachers as they experience the elimination of performance pay is seen as a phenomenon based on the interaction between “subject and object” (Crotty, 1998, p. 45). Crotty (1998) further explains that the relationship between the subject and object as they experience the world is how meaning is developed.

Theoretical Perspective. The theoretical perspective used for the purposes of this study was interpretivism. Complimentary to the epistemological stance of constructionism, the interpretivist framework “attempts to understand and explain human and social reality” (Crotty, 1998, p. 66-67). This approach also “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Through this perspective, paired with the conceptual framework of sense-making theory, teachers’ perceptions of the elimination of performance pay within the context of high-minority, high-poverty schools can be best understood. Sense-making theory focuses on how people construct sense based on connections between situations and information (Dervin, 1983), which has its foundation in constructionist reality and interpretivist perspective. Teachers within this study have information and experience with losing performance pay, and understanding their information and experiences within the context of high-minority, high-poverty schools, provided a unique perspective on how these influence retention decisions.

Methodology. A qualitative phenomenology was used to better understand the influence of the elimination of performance pay on teacher retention decisions at high-poverty, high-minority schools. Qualitative studies are most appropriate when there is a problem or issue that needs to be explored and to better understand the contexts and situations in which the participants experience the problem or issue (Creswell, 2013). Further, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that qualitative research designs allow for the researcher to “speak from within a distinctive interpretive community that configures, in its own special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act” (p. 18).

Phenomenological research calls into question what is taken for granted and assumed and instead calls for putting our meaning systems aside and opening ourselves to the phenomena that emerges (Crotty, 1998). This type of study describes the common meaning for a group of individuals of their experiences of a concept or phenomena (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological study was appropriate since the intent of this research was to determine how teachers are influenced by the elimination of a performance pay system. Consequently, this study sought to describe what the participants had in common as they experienced the phenomenon of losing performance pay. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

For urban high-poverty, high-minority middle schools in Southeast Texas-

1. To what extent does the elimination of performance pay influence teacher retention decisions?
2. How do teachers perceive the influence of performance pay on student achievement?
3. How do teachers make sense of their experience with performance pay?

Creswell (2013) further describes two approaches to phenomenology which are hermeneutic phenomenology and empirical, transcendental, or psychological phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology was used for the purposes of this study. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of the participants and the interpretations of those experiences. In this phenomenological approach, the process is both descriptive and interpretive as the researcher makes “meaning of the lived experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 1729). Creswell (2013) recommends that data used for phenomenological studies be multiple in-depth interviews with the participants as well as additional sources such as observations and journals. Following this recommendation, this study consisted of three interviews with the participants and reflective journaling was used to capture tone and body language.

Sampling Method. Creswell (2013) recommends a narrow sampling strategy for phenomenological studies to ensure that all participants have experienced the same phenomenon being studied. Criterion sampling is suggested as the most effective strategy for identifying participants who have all experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The criterion used to identify teachers for this study were as follows: teachers within the Southeast Texas School District who received performance pay for at least the previous two school years, and teachers who are currently teaching at the identified high-poverty, high-minority middle schools eligible to receive performance pay for student achievement on the STAAR during the 2016-2017 school year.

In order to identify the participants, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 performance pay data was gathered from the Southeast Texas School District’s accountability department. There are currently twenty-one elementary schools and four middle schools that are participating in the final year of the performance pay program, all of which are high-poverty, high-minority

campuses. The performance pay data from the school district allowed for identification of participants who met the previously stated criteria. The middle schools with the highest concentration of teachers who meet the criteria were selected. The geographic location of the schools did not impact the data collected, because all schools had the same criteria of at least 75% economically disadvantaged students and at least a 50% minority student population.

In order to maximize variation, teachers were selected from all grade levels and subjects that are currently eligible to receive performance pay. The grade levels and subjects included sixth, seventh, and eighth grade reading and math, eighth grade science, and eighth grade social studies. Participants in the study were identified as receiving a performance pay award payout for both the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years respectively. Maximum variation sampling ensured that the findings were reflective of different perspectives (Creswell, 2013) of the participants' experience with the phenomenon of losing performance pay.

Data collection. Seidman (2013) recommends a three-interview series to allow “both the interviewer and the participant to explore the participant’s experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning” (p. 20). As suggested by Seidman (2013), the three-interview series process was followed. The first interview focused on the participants’ work history to understand their experiences as a teacher within all school environments and their past experiences within the context of high-poverty and high-minority schools. The second interview focused on the participants’ present lived experiences with performance pay and high rates of student achievement within the context of their current school setting. Finally, participants were interviewed a third time and the interview was designed to have participants reflect on the meaning of their experience with performance pay. This addressed the “intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life” (Seidman, 2013, p. 22).

Data was collected using one-on-one, semi-structured interviews and ranged between thirty and forty-five minutes. The semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility in asking follow-up questions when more detail was needed to clearly describe the experiences of the participants. An interview protocol was followed as a guide and further questions were asked based on participants' responses. All interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. Digital voice recordings allowed for downloading and storage to a computer device for later transcription and transfer to word processing programs and the subsequent data analysis program (Saldana, 2011).

Reflective journaling was also used as a means of data collection. During the interviews, key words and phrases spoken by the participants, as well as laughs, pauses, and non-verbal signals, were written down and were later included in the reflective journal entries. Saldana (2011) states that in qualitative studies, "the primary task is researcher reflection on the data to capture the essence and essentials of the experience that make it what it is" (p. 8). Reflective journaling, paired with the interview transcripts allowed for a true description of both the verbal and non-verbal aspects of the interview (Seidman, 2013). After reviewing the recordings and journals of the three interviews, follow-up interviews were conducted as needed for clarity and further elaboration on the descriptions of the participants' experiences with the elimination of performance pay

Data Analysis. The interviews with the participants were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. By using this transcription program, interviews were transcribed into a Word document. Seidman (2013) suggests that researchers who transcribe their own interviews come to know their data better. Analysis of the initial participant interview transcriptions, paired with analysis of the reflective journals, led to the need for follow-up interviews on a few occasions.

The first step in analyzing the text from the interviews was to conduct a close read of the transcripts and bracket the passages that are of the most interest and aligned with the purpose of the study. This reduction of interviews was the beginning of analysis and making meaning of the data (Seidman, 2013). The following step was the interviews being analyzed using process coding, which identified words to capture actions (Saldana, 2011). Creswell (2013) recommends developing a list of statements about how the participants are experiencing the phenomenon, extending the identified words to statements to better capture experiences.

The initial codes from the interviews were classified into categories that reflected the emerging themes of experiences and perceptions of the teachers in regards to the elimination of performance pay. The themes were then be placed into similar clusters to develop theoretical constructs to transform the “phenomenon’s themes into broader applications” (Saldana, 2011, p. 109). Following the process described by Saldana (2011), a descriptive analysis followed with a written description of what and how the participants experienced the phenomenon, resulting in a textural and structural description of their experiences.

Saldana (2011) also recommends that any field note writing, which will inform the reflective journals, also be analyzed and coded using the categories identified through the analysis of the interviews. The purpose of analyzing the reflective journals is an “open reflection on the phenomena and processes suggested by the data and their analysis thus far” (Saldana, 2011, p. 98). In this study, the reflective journals were coded using the categories that emerged from the interview transcription analysis. Each of the three interview sessions, along with the analysis of field notes and reflective journals, were transcribed and analyzed within a three-week window after each component of the three-interview series.

The final stage of data analysis and interpretation was identifying and explaining what meaning was made by myself throughout the data collection and analysis process. In reflecting on my experience with the research, the questions of how I made sense of it, how I understood it, and what connections were made allowed for proposing “connections among events, structures, roles, and social forces operating in people’s lives” (Seidman, 2013, p. 131).

Strength of Methods. The focus of a phenomenological study was on understanding the experiences of individuals around a phenomenon. The researcher analyzed the data collected through in-depth interviews to develop a description of the common experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This research study was focused on how teachers’ experiences with the elimination of performance pay influences their retention decisions, therefore making a phenomenological methodology the most appropriate. A strength of this methodology was in the selection of the participants, as they are selected based on having experienced the same phenomenon. In this study, all of the participants received performance pay for at least the previous two school years and will no longer be eligible to receive the compensation for student achievement following the 2017-2018 school year. Further strengthening the methods was the shared experience with the phenomenon within the same context of high-poverty, high-minority schools.

The data collection method of in-depth, individual, semi-structured interviews, paired with reflective journaling, were an additional strong point in methods. Such methods allowed for deep analysis of the participants’ experiences and also allowed for follow-up questioning when needed. Using a semi-structured interview protocol provided an opportunity for probing when more detail or clarity was needed to better understand the experiences of the participants.

Finally, verbatim interview transcription ensured that all information provided by the participants was accurately recorded for analysis.

Limitations of Methods. Interviews can be difficult when participants are shy or are hesitant to speak and share experiences openly (Creswell, 2013). In this study, rapport could have influenced the participants' responses and their ability to openly share their experiences. Because there was no previous relationship with the participants, establishing rapport with the participants prior to conducting the interviews was critical to ensuring authentic responses.

Creswell (2013) discusses the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the unequal power dynamic that will exist between the participants and me, which will establish the rapport necessary for open dialogue and expression. The unequal power dynamic in this study was my role as a principal compared to their roles as teachers. The perception of power and possible relationships with the participants' principals could have influenced their responses, as they may have felt that they should provide a safe response rather than detailed responses about the experiences and retention decisions. This was where the establishment of rapport was most critical.

Trustworthiness and Quality. The strategies used to promote trustworthiness included verbatim interview transcriptions and triangulation of data between the three-interview series and the reflective journals. Verbatim interview transcriptions ensured that participants' experiences were documented accurately and reflective journals provided further information about body language and the unspoken elements of the environment like tone. These together allowed for theoretical constructs that existed from their experiences to emerge. This "construct validation" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251) recognized the constructs that exist rather than imposing theories and constructs on the participants or the context.

Positionality. Creswell (2013) explains the needs for qualitative researchers to position themselves in their writings, which “is the concept of reflexivity in which the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study” (p. 222). My position in regard to performance pay and its influence on teacher retention in high-minority, high-poverty schools is unique in that I have been a teacher, assistant principal, and principal within the same performance pay system as that of the participants. My role as principal has given me the most perspective on the influence of the performance pay system on both teacher retention and student achievement, mostly through the observations of and interactions with the teachers on my campus. My experience biases me against ending compensation programs in urban school districts with large numbers of schools that are hard-to-staff due to poor academic performance and large portions of poor and minority students.

Also, I served on the committees that first determined who would be awarded performance pay and what categories eligible employees would be assigned to when the performance pay program was redesigned in 2007. Later, I served on the committee to determine the instrument for measuring teacher effectiveness after the contract ended with the organization whose instrument utilized value-added measurements of student progress. Both of these committees provided me with a perspective that is influenced by understanding the current system in regard to its strengths and weaknesses, but nonetheless knowing the complexity of the system and its difficulty for teachers to understand.

My position as principal during the study not only allowed me to have first-hand experience with the performance pay program, but to engage in conversations with teachers and administrators about the program structures for payout and teacher effectiveness. It was important that I acknowledged my contextual experience and knowledge so that I could remain

open to understanding the teachers' experiences with the performance pay program without my own biases influencing the questioning.

Ethical Considerations. The most important ethical issue that had to be addressed in this study was anonymity. Due to the nature of the study focusing on teachers' decisions to stay at their current school, the participants identity was protected throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting by the use of pseudonyms. Therefore, no documents have identifiable information about the participants. This was communicated to the participants to ensure that they were aware of the fact that their identity will remain confidential and felt comfortable sharing their experiences without the risk of their current principal knowing of their statements. Participants received no benefits or rewards for participation, and their participation was voluntary. Also, given my positionality as principal and former committee member, it was important that I was aware of my potential for bias and intentionally excluded it in the data collection and analysis processes. To avoid the perception of deception, my role as principal was explained to the participants. Finally, all protocols of the Institutional Review Board were adhered to all times during the study.

Significance. Teacher attrition at high-poverty, high-minority schools has an impact on the quality of instruction that students receive. These hard-to-staff schools are, therefore, academically low-performing and continue to struggle with recruiting and retaining effective teachers. This research study was needed to inform district policy on performance pay system design and implementation. The literature indicates that teacher turnover is reduced when performance pay is awarded although variations in program design and payout structures influence retention differently. Future policy implications suggest a need for a locally developed performance pay system that will meet the recruitment, retention, and student achievement needs

of the specific district. Research indicates that teacher behavior is changed by pay incentives, so the key for policy development is determining which incentives have the most impact on retention of effective teachers.

In most cases, performance-based pay systems eventually disband due to loss of funding, which is the case for the Southeast Texas School District. In the last year of funding from the Teacher Incentive Fund grant program, teachers within the group of identified schools will no longer receive funds for student achievement, which is the intent of the performance pay. These schools were identified for the performance pay grant due to having high portions of students in poverty as well as poor academic performance.

This study was necessary to determine the possible impact of the elimination of performance pay on the teacher attrition at these schools. It is important to develop an understanding of how performance pay influences teachers' retention decisions at hard-to-staff schools to inform policy development for retention and to determine alternatives to the grant-funded performance pay programs that will influence retention. Further, it is important to fully understand how teachers perceive the influence of performance pay on student achievement. Results of the study will advise policy development on current performance pay systems and future performance pay systems by understanding the impact of discontinuation at high-poverty, high-minority schools.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine how effective teachers make sense of performance pay through their experiences with the elimination of an established performance-based pay system, and how these experiences influence teachers' retention decisions in academically low-performing schools with high portions of economically disadvantaged and minority students. Specifically, this phenomenological study presents the lived experiences of urban middle school teachers who were recipients of performance pay for consecutive school years in a now-eliminated system. Their experiences were studied through the following questions:

For urban high-poverty, high-minority middle schools in Southeast Texas-

1. To what extent does the elimination of performance pay influence teacher retention decisions?
2. How do teachers perceive the influence of performance pay on student achievement?
3. How do teachers make sense of their experience with performance pay?

Chapter three described the methods and procedures to identify the influence of the elimination of performance pay on teacher retention decisions and student performance at high-poverty, high-minority schools. Chapter four presents the findings that evolved through analysis of the collected data. This qualitative phenomenological study used a series of three face-to face semi-structured interviews, field notes, and reflective journaling to determine the findings. Prior to presenting the findings of this study, the nine participants will be described, all of which served as middle school teachers within the Southeast Texas Independent School District. To protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms are used for the participants and the school district.

Description of Participants

The nine participants in the study all served as middle school teachers within the Southeast Texas Independent School District. Each of the schools in which the teachers taught were both high-poverty and high-minority campuses that served student populations of at least 75% poverty and 50% minority. Of the nine participants, five were female and four were male with years of teaching experience ranging from three years to twelve years. Each of the participants received performance pay for at least the past two consecutive years due to student performance in the core subjects taught. The participant group consisted of three English Language Arts teachers, three Social Studies teachers, two Math teachers, and one Science teacher. The following is a brief description of each participant as well as a table summarizing his or her teaching experience and years of experience with performance pay. Pseudonyms are used for each participant to ensure anonymity and trustworthiness.

Katie is a seventh grade Reading teacher who has been a teacher for four years. All four of her years of experience have been at the same school, subject, and grade level within the Southeast Texas Independent School District. She served as the English Language Arts Department Chair and was named the 2017 Teacher of the Year for her campus. She received the maximum amount of performance pay possible each school year.

A sixth grade Math teacher and Math Department Chair, Wendy, has been at her current school within Southeast Texas Independent School District for three years. Prior to that position, she spent five years as a high school Science teacher in a neighboring district, serving all five years in an alternative school that was also high-poverty and high-minority. Performance pay was awarded to her the past two school years.

James also serves as a 6th grade Math teacher and has been in his current position and school for two years. He previously taught 6th grade Math at another middle school in the same district for four years before transferring to the current school due to proximity to home. He has a total of eight years of experience, all teaching Math, with one year in a neighboring school district. Also, his teaching experience has all been in high-poverty and high-minority schools, and he received performance pay for six years.

Jenny just completed her eighth year as a teacher, with six at her school and all in 6th grade English Language Arts. Prior to teaching in the Southeast Texas Independent School District, she taught high school English in a neighboring school district in a school that was also high-poverty and high-minority. She received the maximum amount of performance pay every year she has been in her current position.

The only Science teacher in the group of participants, Greg, has been a teacher for four years. He has been in his current position and school for one year, teaching 8th grade Science. The previous three years were served in two other middle schools within the Southeast Texas Independent School District and all were Science positions. Both previous schools were also high-poverty and high-minority schools, and he received performance pay for two years.

Justine has four years of teaching experience, all at the same campus and all in 6th grade English Language Arts. She has one year of student teaching experience in a neighboring district. She received performance pay every year except one, which was due to her attendance and not student performance. Each time she was awarded performance pay, it was the maximum amount possible.

A former teaching assistant, Derek has four years of teaching experience. Each of his years of teaching experience have been at the same campus teaching 8th grade Social Studies. He

also served as a special education teaching assistant at the same campus for one year prior to beginning his teacher career. He received performance pay each year and was awarded the maximum amount each time.

As a Teach for America fellow, Stacy has been at her current school for three years. She serves as the Social Studies Department Chair and teaches 8th grade Social Studies. She also serves as the new teacher liaison and is tasked with supporting them in their new roles. Stacy received performance pay the past two years, missing out her first year due to low student performance.

Devin is a twelve-year veteran teacher and teaches 8th grade Social Studies. All twelve years have been at the same school, with the first ten years in 7th grade Social Studies. He was awarded as the Teacher of Year for his campus in 2015 and serves as the Social Studies Department Chair. He received the maximum amount of performance pay since the program was established in 2007.

Table 1

Participant Description Summary

Pseudonym	Subject Area	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Experience with Performance Pay	Maximum Amount Received
Katie	ELAR	4	4	\$10,000
Wendy	Math	8	2	\$7,500
James	Math	8	6	\$12,000
Jenny	ELAR	8	6	\$10,000
Greg	Science	4	2	\$3,200
Justine	ELAR	4	3	\$10,000
Derek	Social Studies	4	4	\$10,000
Stacy	Social Studies	3	2	\$8,500
Devin	Social Studies	12	10	\$12,000

Emergent Themes

Data collected through the three-series interview process provided a rich description of the participants' lived experiences with the phenomena of the elimination of performance pay. Interview transcripts, reflective journals, and field notes were analyzed first through the reduction process to identify meaningful statements and reflections aligned to the study. Through process coding, the excerpts were then analyzed to identify frequent and relevant words and actions that resulted in initial codes and categories. The code response frequency is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Code Response Frequency

		Participants									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
											totals
Codes	Appreciation	9	0	2	8	6	2	5	1	10	43
	Under-Compensation	3	8	5	5	4	1	1	0	3	29
	Monetary Incentives	11	5	11	14	8	3	5	4	4	54
	School Culture	3	3	10	1	10	0	1	2	6	36
	Self-Motivation	13	6	7	5	6	6	5	2	8	58
	Self-Efficacy	10	5	6	5	5	9	5	2	5	52
	Test Accountability	3	5	4	5	5	4	12	13	7	58

Participant Pseudonym Coding for Table 2
 1-Katie 2-Wendy 3-James 4-Jenny 5-Greg 6- Justine 7- Derek 8-Stacy
 9- Devin

Emergent themes were developed during the coding process. The three themes that evolved through the data relating to how teachers make sense of their experiences with the phenomenon of the elimination of performance pay were the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, teaching to the test, and the sense of self-efficacy. For the purpose of this research study, intrinsic motivation refers to a teacher's decision to provide effective instruction because

they find it enjoyable and find satisfaction in doing so (Gange & Deci, 2005) and extrinsic motivation refers to monetary awards for job performance. Teaching to the test refers to teachers directing their instructional practices toward a specific body of content knowledge or a specific set of cognitive skills in order to raise their students' performance on the STAAR (Popham, 2001). Self-efficacy refers to a teacher's beliefs in their own capabilities to organize and execute the task of teaching (Bandura, 1989).

The first theme, the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, incorporates the significance that teachers place on monetary incentives as it relates to their decision to perform their jobs effectively. The core of this theme relates to how teachers experienced performance pay as a motivator for improved student academic performance, and how the experience with the elimination of performance pay influences retention decisions for themselves and their colleagues. Value is placed on performance pay as an award for student growth. Participants express appreciation for receiving the award while also knowing that a monetary award was a possibility every school year. Participants express that while performance pay was appreciated, it was only one motivator for job effectiveness, with the second motivator being their self-motivation. Teachers suggest that the elimination of performance pay will impact the retention of those teachers who are significantly motivated by monetary incentives.

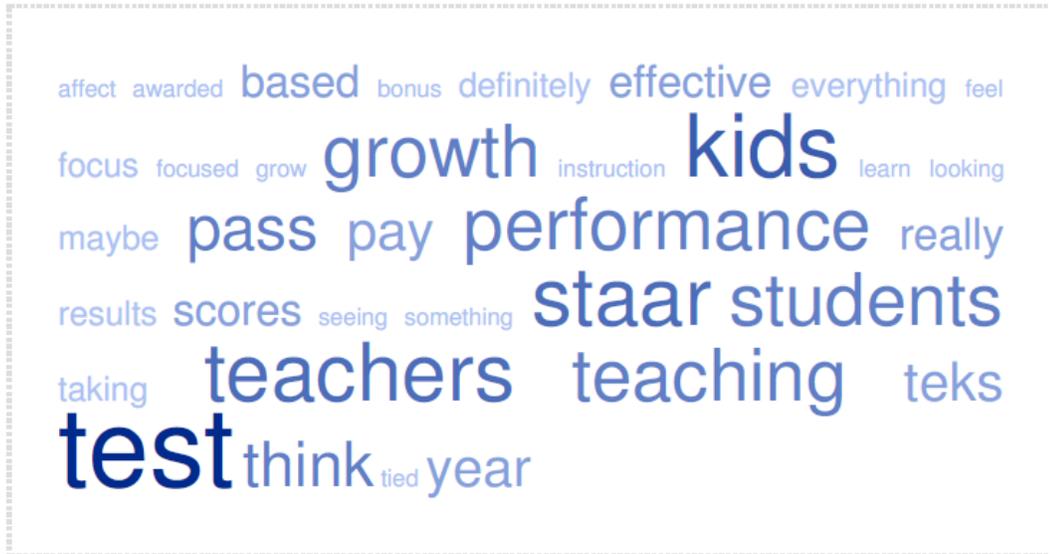


Figure 2. Theme 2 Participant Word Frequency Cloud

The third theme, the sense of self-efficacy, describes teacher perceptions of his or her effectiveness as experienced through the interactions with performance pay. The influence of the participant interactions with performance pay as it relates to his or her own sense of effectiveness is the core of this theme. Participants value the performance pay they received for being identified as effective teachers and feel appreciated as a result. Teachers believe that they are effective without the performance pay incentive and that performance pay served a means for their hard work to be acknowledged.



Figure 3. Theme 3 Participant Word Frequency Cloud

Theme One: Influence of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

All participants described value in the performance pay system as motivator for job performance. Emphasis was also placed on the value of self-motivation for effective teaching practices, which participants believed to motivate themselves and their colleagues differently. Through shared experiences with the receipt and elimination of performance pay along with interactions with and observations of their colleagues with the same experiences, the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation emerged as a major theme regarding teachers’ perceptions of retention decisions and student performance.

Motivation and teacher retention. When discussing the influence of the elimination of performance pay on teacher retention decisions at high-poverty and high-minority schools, participants all believed that it will mostly influence teachers motivated by monetary incentives. Katie stated that:

I think it was a good motivator. So when you are awarded by the district by them seeing that you are actually making a difference with student achievement and student growth,

then being awarded that was a really good incentive. But with it being gone, those teachers are probably just going to go to higher paying districts versus struggling in this district when they could be getting paid two or three thousand dollars more just fifteen extra minutes away.

James echoed the same belief on the influence of monetary incentives on teachers' retention decisions:

I don't think a lot of teachers have that deep-down desire or a self-drive. I just think that some of them need some incentive. I think it just has to do with drive and commitment. I think most of them stayed around because of incentives. Since it is not there anymore, I think they will leave to either go to some other district that pays more or just find another career.

Greg further explained how the elimination of performance pay will impact colleagues in their teaching practices and retention decisions:

I just feel like it exposes more people. Just the ones that are teaching for the money. You may lose some of those people. Also challenging is now you may have to be self-motivated, so that's going to get a lot of people.

Also supporting the belief that many teachers' practices and retention decisions are motivated by monetary awards, Stacy stated:

It takes more than just turning on the lights and giving them a lesson. Some people believe that they should be rewarded financially for that, which is fine. So for them, if they are not going to receive that money, it's a disincentive to stay. Ultimately you will see less motivation, more teacher absenteeism, teachers leaving tougher schools.

Wendy echoed the sentiments of the other participants by sharing her perception of the challenges that the district will face as a consequence of eliminating performance pay:

Being able to hire and retain good teachers that were dependent on the bonus. Compared to other districts, if that is a thing where money is a factor, teachers will look to other districts because of the program going away.

Motivation and instructional practices. Participants also discussed how instructional practices will be impacted by the elimination of performance pay. Through their informal observations and interactions with colleagues, as well as reflecting on the own practices, participants believe that those teachers motivated by monetary incentives will make changes to their instructional practices. Jenny provided insight it to how teachers' behavior will change regarding instruction:

I don't think they are going to put as much as effort as they were before. Because I know there are teachers who will stay with kids after school for hours or will come before school, or pull them out of class, actually making that effort to make sure the kids get it. I don't think we will see a lot of that anymore with that performance pay gone. Because now it's like why?

Devin echoed the same sentiments by sharing his perception of the lack of extra effort that will result as a consequence of eliminating the monetary incentive:

I don't know if teachers will really have the drive to get them into tutorials or that nature.

James also shared the same belief in regard to effort:

If they have kids that drive them insane, I just don't think they will have the drive to push this kid because they know their pay isn't depending on it. I think they will probably take a few steps back commitment wise.

Greg offered a variation of this perception by providing examples of the changes that are possible:

I assume that maybe some teachers are going to take shortcuts and maybe not focus on things they should because they know they aren't getting a bonus. But I assume that some teachers were so focused on the bonus that now they will resort to taking short cuts or not doing lesson plans.

Katie provided further examples of perceived instructional changes and teacher behaviors connected to extrinsic motivation and how it will impact students:

Those teachers who are not genuinely motivated to teach kids, I think they are going to get in there and just give the kids busy work, and they are going to teach at the kids rather than actually teach the kids. I think that's the most frightening part, especially being in a district that is low income. I think it's going to impact instructional practices along, along with the attendance, along with the initiative to want to grow professionally and develop professionally. It's all in a circle. You need all of those key factors in order to be a better teacher. So, without that, or without being motivated, it's going to affect the kids. I feel sorry I guess for the minority students who have teachers who are not motivated, you know, to genuinely teach them.

Self-motivation and instructional practices. The majority of the participants discussed how their experiences with the receipt and elimination connected to their motivation to provide effective instruction to their students. Some viewed the performance pay bonus as acknowledgement of their self-motivated hard work, and others viewed it as an incentive to improve the practices. Wendy asserted that:

I kind of feel like if you are here for the right reasons, you want your kids to do well and succeed. So regardless of how much you are getting paid, it should not affect how you teach. I go into each year with the mindset that I am going to do better than the year before. Money doesn't really impact anything for me in terms of bonuses or whatever. I just feel like if you love what you do, and you are at a level where you want grow more, then you will do what's necessary each year to make changes as you see fit.

Like Wendy, Stacy focused on her own motivation and effort:

I am going to give 100% regardless. When I received it I was like, oh ok, my kids did well.

Devin echoed the same sentiment when reflecting on how the performance pay bonus motivated him:

I mean, I work hard regardless, I know that's something that I do. And in my position sometimes you have to go the extra mile. For me, it didn't matter, I was going to go the extra mile. I'm going to have tutorials even when we don't have a certain allotted day. I'm going to have tutorials regardless so that doesn't affect that. So for me I am going to be self-driven.

Like Devin, Derek explained his experience with the performance pay bonus as a motivator:

When I took the job I had no idea about ASPRE or bonus money, so I never pinned my hopes on it after the first year. It was just a bonus. No, the bonus never really even enters my mind. It's more of a pride thing I guess. I didn't become a teacher because I was in it for the money, and maybe other teachers are in binds, I don't know. I think if some teachers are basing their decisions on whether or not they are going to get a bonus, I think maybe they are indifferent or apathetic to just helping kids out.

The possibility of the performance pay bonus motivated some of the participants such as Justine, who stated:

It kind of made me push me a little more. I think it was because I needed my kids to grow so I could get money.

Greg shared the same experience with performance pay as a motivator to give extra effort:

Once I found out that I could get it, and how much money people were making, it definitely made me want to try harder. Not saying that I wasn't trying hard before, but you know, when you are used to doing what you are comfortable with and then you realize that if you change certain things then you can get \$5000.

Jenny also pointed out examples of the extra effort exerted in order to receive the performance pay bonus:

It gives you that incentive to make sure your kids are doing what they have to do. It gives you a sense of I need to be here, I need to do this for these kids because you are getting that pay. Like I said, at the beginning it was \$10,000. Who wants to miss an extra day for \$10,000? It's just not worth it. I think it gave you that extra incentive of this kid needs to be in tutoring or spending that extra time with the kids who are struggling because you know you have something tied to it.

James echoed the same sentiment:

It's a motivator. It drives me to get the job done. It definitely drives me to the students who the district predicts not do to well for to put most of my energy and practices into them. I think that's the most important thing because that's where that money comes from.

Motivation and teacher attendance. Another common thread that emerged within the theme of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation was that of teacher absenteeism. The performance pay system required that teachers have no more than ten total absences during the instructional year in order to be eligible for performance pay. Participants reflected on their own attendance practices and those of their colleagues, with many participants supporting the belief that teachers who are motivated by monetary incentives will increase the days that they are absent. Wendy stated:

The first year when I was here, it was like well I can't take off that many days because with TPCAP you can only do zero to nine or you can't go over ten. Where as this year it was, uh, we aren't getting TPCAP. So second semester, after spring break, I feel like a lot of teachers were burned out, and so they just kind of really didn't care if they were absent or not or how many days they had been absent.

Jenny expressed the same perception in regard to an increased absentee rate for teachers who are motivated by performance pay:

Before you would be on your dying bed, but you would be like, I can't miss more than 10 days. I've got to be there. Now it's like, cough one time, and oh I can't make it. I don't think attendance will be taken as seriously because there is nothing keeping you there. I know those teachers who have days that rolled over, like that have 50 plus hours that they accumulated, they are going to start taking those days. Especially if you have extra days accumulated. Maybe not if you only have 10 days because more than that would start docking your pay. Then you are not going to miss. But the teachers who have those additional days, I know teachers who have 40 plus hours, they are going to start using

those. Because there is nothing keeping them, there is not TPCAP, so I might as well use those days and spend that extra time with my family.

James shared a similar reflection:

Definitely, it's going to affect my attendance probably. I mean I usually wait until April to start taking my days, but there are days when I pushed myself, and maybe I shouldn't have. I should've taken a day off, but because I knew I was so far away and that there was a big gap, I made the sacrifice. But it will probably increase. Not past attendance, but I will probably take more early days in the year.

Further supporting the notion that teacher absenteeism will increase due to the elimination of performance pay, Greg stated:

I do feel like it will affect attendance. I don't know the difference between state and local, but I guarantee you that teachers are going to be well versed on- I got state time and I got local time so I can do this. So yeah, I definitely feel like it's going to affect attendance.

When asked about his understanding of the ten-day attendance requirement to be eligible for performance pay, Greg explained:

I thought that was just to keep your job period. So yeah, I heard something about ten days, but I thought it was just to keep your job period. So me, I was just always cautious like I can't miss more than ten days. But some teachers would need a day off a month. But I was just always conscience of the ten days, ten days, but I didn't know it was for the pay.

While not motivated by performance pay, Derek acknowledged the impact the its elimination may have on the attendance of his colleagues:

I assume it will, not for me personally, but other teachers who know they can take more than 10 days and that it won't affect their bonus money, they will probably take more than 10 days.

Devin identified the connection between performance pay, attendance, and school morale when reflecting on the attendance practices of teachers following the elimination of performance pay:

I think it depends on the place. The morale, things of that nature, because if a place has low morale already, and people were getting performance pay, then yes. You know I already knew that it was going to be eliminated next year, and I didn't see if affected people that much. Now after STAAR I see a lot of people take off [laughs]. But I think teachers know that they are still responsible for that. But just like kids are kids, we are human, so we do need that peace of mind. So I don't know how much it will affect it. I think it depends on the school. In this district, I will say that it will affect it.

The first theme, the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, describes how teachers experienced performance pay as a motivator. It established that teachers perceive monetary incentives as a motivator that influences teacher behaviors including attendance, instructional practices, and retention decisions. Teachers equally recognize their self-motivation to provide effective instruction to meet the needs of their students.

Theme Two: Teaching to the Test

A consistent thread in most of the participant interviews was the intertwining of instructional practices, alignment to the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), and receipt of performance pay. Through reflection on their own practices and informal observations and conversations with colleagues, the theme of teaching to the test emerged.

Instructional practices and performance pay. Participants all emphasized the alignment between performance pay and mastery of the STAAR objectives. Participants discussed the prevalence of targeting specific students and objectives in order to earn the bonus. Stacy voiced her concerns about the link between performance pay and teaching practices:

I think for teachers I have talked to, it is very significant. They show up, they teach the TEKS, they differentiate for the purpose of getting money. Look, if it helps kids learn, then go for the gold. That's great. But if it results in teaching to the test and neglecting all students, then please get rid of it by all means.

She further described her perceived impact on instructional practices as a consequence of eliminating the performance pay program:

Perhaps less teaching to the test. So maybe more whole group instruction. And it could cause more cavalier instruction, less targeted instruction because they know they won't get awarded for teaching the TEKS.

Katie supported the practice of aligning practices to attain STAAR mastery:

Let me make sure that I am doing this so that this kid can pass or grow, paying extra attention to those kids who need to grow. And doing the trainings and professional development needed to grow in order to keep the \$10,000.

Wendy also discussed teachers' behaviors and instructional practices that ensure students master the STAAR and earn performance pay:

It definitely motivates teachers to do better because the achievement is tied to what they will receive. For STAAR testing and the attendance rate with the teachers will definitely make you want to be here, because if you are here, your kids are learning. And you know that you are able to focus on the bubble kids or the kids that are low, the kids who you

know may skip because you are not here or whatever. So, it holds you more accountable and the kids as well. Some teachers look at the TEKS to see what will be tested and focus on that. I know this is going to be on the test, so let me do extra things whenever it comes to these TEKS, so they get it, and I can maximize the amount of money I receive.

The practice of teaching to the test is discussed by Justine, who also emphasized how her instructional practices will change now that test mastery is not tied to a monetary bonus:

More teachers not caring and not trying to get these kids from a low level to even maybe on grade level. Now I will have the opportunity to where I don't have to teach to the test, and where I don't just have to focus on the low skills. I can focus on all of them, not just the low ones, and just go over them as needed. I can have more creativity with lessons. But it is really important for them to be able to pass the test and really understand how their thinking goes.

Prior to teaching 8th grade Social Studies, Devin taught 7th grade Texas History that was tested through the Stanford assessment. He reflected on his initial receipt of performance pay and how it influenced his teaching practices:

I realized it had something to do with our scores, our Stanford scores because in 7th grade that's all I could rely on. So probably about my third or fourth year is when we really started working on skills because with Stanford you don't really know what is on the test. They gave us the objectives, so we knew what was going to be tested, and we used to hammer them. We started teaching them skills, and we had to actually focus on subject matter with different types of economies and things of that nature. But we focused on that and it paid off.

Derek openly discussed his focus on teaching to the STAAR although he stated he was not extrinsically motivated. He also discussed his concern about student performance now that STAAR performance is not linked to performance pay:

All that I am focused on, come March and April, I am in panic mode, trying to cover every TEK and every little topic that might be on the STAAR test. It has nothing to do with the bonus; it's the STAAR test. I mean everyone is still taking the STAAR test; it's not like the STAAR test is being eliminated. So, I think maybe again, this idealistic kind of notion that let's all get the kids to pass the STAAR test. In my mind that's how it works. But I assume that some teachers were so focused on the bonus that now they will resort to taking short cuts or not doing lesson plans, not looking at the data or what have you. So, I assume that maybe the scores might go down.

Katie echoed that sentiment:

I think that those achievement gaps that we've been working so hard to close, I think they are going to widen again. Um, I feel sorry I guess for the minority students who have teachers who are not motivated, you know, to genuinely teach them. Now those kids are going to suffer more because they are going to be further and further behind. So, if you are struggling with analyzing theme, and you don't get it, it's going to more of- oh, you don't get it. And, if you don't get it by now, you are not going to get it. Versus, ok, let me see how I can spiral this back in. You know, reflecting on your own feedback and instructional practices. So, I think the kids are going to get more behind.

Instructional practices and attendance. With performance pay linked to teacher attendance, several participants discussed their perception of the impact of their attendance on

instructional delivery and mastery of the tested curriculum paired with how the loss of performance pay will influence teachers' attendance behaviors. Greg stated:

I don't want to miss because I'm like the test is coming up, and I got to make sure they get this. If I'm not there they aren't going to learn. And everyone isn't like that. I'm not saying that's a good way to be; that's just how I am. But if there's no pay, and tests are the way they are, I can take a day off.

Justine echoed the sentiments of Greg and further connected the elimination of performance pay to decreased student performance:

I think that we will see a decline in their test scores. Not my kids in particular, but in general as a whole. Because like I said, everything is like a domino effect. When you take away the performance pay, the teachers are not going to show up, so therefore you have a sub in the classroom. So students are not getting the quality instruction they need. So it's like a spiraling effect, once you take that away, you will see a drop in the test scores.

Jenny further supported this sentiment:

I think with the classroom teacher not being there, I know me personally I do not trust a sub to deliver the lesson like I would deliver a lesson, so I would just rather leave something for them to do than leave actual work for the sub. So, I think student performance will go down, because if the teachers aren't there, they aren't leaving real work they are leaving busy work for the kids to do at that point.

Stacy, Derek, and Wendy placed value on receiving instruction from the teacher rather than a substitute, and how the increased absences will impact student learning. Stacy stated:

Students will openly say that if there is a sub they don't do anything. So, if teachers are absent, learning is going to decrease.

Derek supported that with a similar statement:

I mean when teachers are absent, obviously, and this is not a slight to the subs, they are not going to be getting the same type of instruction they would get when the teachers are here. That's why I try to not miss, I know if I miss they are a day behind. The stuff they are doing I have to go over with them again. So, I know when teachers miss they are getting further and further behind.

Also referring to the quality of instruction due to increased absenteeism, Wendy echoed:

It will have a lot of effects, primarily because of substitutes and just kids knowing what they can and cannot do with the sub. Plus, teachers giving busy work versus instruction just to keep them busy, and they are not really learning things on the days they are not here.

With a more positive perspective, Devin explained that student learning depends on the quality of the teacher and not necessarily their increased absences:

It depends on the teacher and what they leave and what they taught before and after. If they are leaving and leave them just a whatever kind of assignment, no expectations. Of course, the kids need us, but some kids will try harder than others. But again, if the teachers do not leave good instructions for the sub, and they know they aren't going to be there and don't inform their students what they expect out of them. Kids will still give less, but I've seen if you leave good expectations, you will see more work done. So, it can affect it if the teacher is gone like 20 days and just being careless with their absences, then of course it will affect the kids, and then that's going to affect their performance.

Theme two, teaching to the test, explained how teachers perceive performance pay as an influencer of instructional practices. Teachers acknowledged the importance of effectively teaching students in order for them to successfully master the STAAR. Through reflection on their own practices and the practices of their colleagues, the teachers recognized the practices of teaching specific objectives and targeting students in order to earn performance pay. Teachers also acknowledged the possible impact on student learning due to increased absenteeism.

Theme Three: Sense of Self-efficacy

All participants described some level of impact in their sense of self-efficacy from their experiences with performance pay. The impact ranged from a feeling of appreciation for their effectiveness with student growth and achievement to self-realization that they were effective teachers.

Self-efficacy and performance pay. Participants repeatedly referred to how they felt about their own abilities after receiving a performance pay bonus. Specifically, participants shared that they felt appreciated, vindicated, and recognized for doing their job well. Jenny reflected on how performance pay affected her sense of self-efficacy:

I think that it makes me personally feel like I am doing well at my job. Because whether someone comes in and gives you an observation and they destroy you, whatever all the outside forces, when it comes to you, you are in the room with those kids, you know what they need, you are the one making sure they show growth, and when you see that nothing else that has happened outside of that matters at that point. Because you know you have done your job. And to know that you have done the best you can and to receive performance pay on top of that is just the icing on the cake. I think because I received it

every year, it makes me feel like I am impacting these kids, and I am doing a good job. Because some days you just have days where you think this just isn't for me, it's not working, not getting across to these kids, they don't understand. And then they will take a test and out of nowhere score well on it.

Greg discussed his growth as a teacher, and how the receipt of performance pay influenced his perception of his effectiveness:

It definitely made me feel better about it. Like my first year I didn't get it, I was struggling just trying to shadow and follow other teachers. I just didn't know. I had experience working with youth before, but I didn't know how to teach and use all of the strategies, I was just me. And after switching things up and trying to get better and adding this and adding that, it made me feel like I was on the right track and that I was getting better. And now I don't feel like I'm phenomenal, but I'm better than I was, and I'm steadily improving.

Derek echoed the same sentiments:

I think after my second year it was kind of like vindication because my first year I was relying on the experienced teacher. But my second year, I was kind of on my own leading the way here. So, after my second year, after I found out that I was receiving the full bonus, it was kind of like vindication that everything that I had done all year worked. So it made me feel good about the job I was doing, I guess. I think I am a fairly good teacher, and I think that kind of helped confirm or affirm that I know what I am doing. I am kind of new at doing this. But it just proved that what I am doing in there is working I think.

For Katie, receipt of performance pay after her first year of teaching in a high-needs school created a sense of self-efficacy and sense of effectiveness:

It did make me feel good. You know, it made me feel good to receive that. Especially my first year teaching, I received the maximum amount. I was like dang, that was my first year. It made me feel accomplished to say the least. It made me feel like I accomplished my obstacles and challenges with teaching. Especially in a diverse school. You know, since our school is a little more diverse than others. It made me feel like, ok, you can teach this group of kids. So it gave me a diversified perspective of teaching different levels of kids and not just the minority kids. Like wow, these are the kids that a lot of teachers struggle to teach. So, if I am getting this money for teaching these kids, then I appreciate that.

Devin viewed his experience performance pay as a sign of recognition of and appreciation by the district for his effectiveness and extra effort:

You have to understand that teachers can feel beat down and those kinds of things help them. That's a good pat on the back. It's not all about money because we could do something else, but to be able to be awarded for a job well done is good. I think it's just rewarding teachers for students doing well. Like for me I know I have done everything I can, and some kids just don't come to school, and they didn't pass. So, you know it was frustrating, but performance pay was just another pat on the back. It was a nice pat on the back to not only say that I've seen what you have done, we are rewarding the fact that your students did well, or they showed growth.

For Justine, the experience with performance pay confirmed her sense of self-efficacy:

I feel like I'm a pretty great teacher, not to brag or anything. I think it's great because they get awarded for doing something they worked hard and are good at. It's always nice to hear from someone else and not just be boastful of yourself.

Identification of effectiveness and performance pay. All participants acknowledged their own self-efficacy when reflecting on their experiences with performance pay. However, when reflecting on performance pay accurately identifying and awarding effective teachers, participants had mixed views on its validity. Devin explained:

I saw great correlation between teachers that I know were effective teachers and had great instructional practices, and they received it. But I also saw situations where the teacher didn't have any expectations of the child, just didn't, and they would say that they received this performance pay. But there were times where this teacher was working tirelessly and with good instructional practices, but they didn't receive it, but this other person didn't really do anything, and they received it.

Greg's view on its validity was similar to that of Devin:

I just assumed that it was based on tested subjects, but just because you are not in a tested subject doesn't necessarily mean that you aren't effective. I'm sure there are amazing dance teachers out there or even amazing PE coaches that don't just chill and are actually teaching kids fundamentals of sports and stuff. Just as far as being effective, I don't know, there are so many teachers that are effective. I feel like it was based more so on the campus that you were at versus your test scores and all that kind of stuff. I don't feel like it's fair for a teacher who really is trying hard to not get paid because their school didn't do well versus a teacher who isn't necessarily working as hard, and who doesn't have to do as much growing at another campus. But their campus is on fire and doing

well. So, I don't think it did a great job of identifying effective teachers, but that doesn't necessarily mean you get rid of the system, you fix it.

Although the criteria for receiving performance pay was unclear, Katie still supported the system and recognized its awarding effective teachers on her campus:

Based on some conversations that I have had with my colleagues, we would get performance pay, but in their particular grade level they didn't get performance pay. But then their percentage of passing rate would be really high. So that part was kind of confusing, and we didn't really understand that part of it. That was just one encounter that I've had, but for the most part, the effective teachers on campus, they got performance pay.

Derek echoed the same sentiment:

I have heard teachers complain that it's not fair, but we are all teaching the same stuff. And we all have, or some schools may have more impoverished kids, but we are all teaching the same thing. And if you can teach it, you can teach it anywhere. That's kind of a pie in the sky kind of thing. I never thought it was unfair. If you can teach the material, you can teach the material. It's a level playing field basically.

Acknowledging her own effectiveness, Jenny explained her support of the performance pay system, and its accuracy in awarding effective teachers:

I think I have a bias because I have been an effective teacher, so I think it works in my favor. So, of course I am for it. If my kids are showing growth, I don't think it's a problem with awarding a teacher for putting in that extra time and going the extra mile to make sure their kids succeed. From the teachers that I know who received performance pay, I think it was accurate. I don't know all of the teachers in the district who received

it, but the ones I know personally, I do think they were good teachers. I saw them work with their kids and go above and beyond for the kids, so I think it did identify teachers properly.

Theme three, the sense of self-efficacy, described the value teachers placed on performance pay when reflecting on their own effectiveness. Teachers explained how receiving performance pay acknowledged their hard work and effectiveness and also expressed a feeling of appreciation when they reflected on their experience with performance pay. The teachers also described their perceptions of the performance pay system accurately identifying effective teachers.

Summary

Chapter four explored the findings that describe how effective teachers experience and make sense of the elimination of a performance pay system. Interviews with participants identified three themes relating to how teachers make sense of their experiences with the phenomenon of the elimination of performance pay. The three emergent themes were the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, teaching to the test, and the sense of self-efficacy. The narrative of the participants obtained through a series of three semi-structured interviews demonstrated the relationship between the experiences and supported the construction of the three themes. Chapter five will discuss the findings from this chapter and will provide further implications and recommendations for district leaders in implementation and elimination of a performance pay system.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter five presents the findings, implications, and recommendations of this study. This phenomenological study explored how teachers experienced the elimination of a long-established performance pay system. Qualitative methods were used to better understand the influence of the elimination of performance pay on teacher retention decisions at high-poverty, high-minority schools, and those methods are described in Chapter three. The three-interview series process, field notes, and reflective journaling produced the findings of this study. This chapter begins with an overview of the study and is followed by the results to each of the research questions. The conclusions are organized by the major findings through the emergent themes: (a) the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, (b) teaching to the test, and (c) the sense of self-efficacy. This chapter concludes with implications for school districts and recommendations for further research.

Problem Statement

There is a need to identify how the elimination of a performance pay system influences effective teachers' retention decisions at high-needs schools. Performance pay influences teachers' behaviors, and since teachers respond to incentives, careful consideration should be given when implementing and discontinuing performance-based pay programs (Jones, 2013). The current performance pay program in Southeast Texas School District awards teachers for student achievement in schools with historically low academic performance and high rates of economically disadvantaged students. With student achievement as the primary goal of performance pay, an equally important issue that is not yet understood is how teachers perceive the influence of performance pay on student achievement.

The attrition of teachers in high-poverty, high-minority schools in Texas, Georgia, New York and North Carolina reflect the trend of teachers leaving schools with high concentrations of poor students and minority students. Hanushek et al. (2004) explain that schools serving large numbers of academically disadvantaged, black, or Hispanic students lose significantly more teachers to other districts and other professions than affluent or low-poverty schools with higher academic achievement. While economic status and academic performance influence teachers' attrition decisions, Lankford et al. (2002) state that the student demographics of the school has an even stronger impact, as qualified teachers leave schools where the proportion of nonwhite students is at least 75% greater than the schools they are transferring to and transfer to schools where the portion of poor students is 50% less. These attrition trends result in minority and economically disadvantaged students systematically having new and inexperienced teachers, thus adversely affecting academic achievement.

With the intent of performance pay being to increase the quality of teachers to improve student academic achievement, prevent attrition, and retain teachers at high-needs campuses to prevent the trend of effective teachers moving to schools that serve relatively high-performing and economically sound students (Clotfelter, Glennie, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006), the desire for districts across the nation to establish a tighter link between teachers' effectiveness in the classroom and their compensation influences current policy in public schools (DeAngelis & Dang, 2016). While there is no one-size-fits all approach to performance-based pay design and implementation, and the measures used to determine teacher effectiveness vary greatly, the goal of such compensation plans is to award teachers for student achievement. Careful design and implementation are critical to the success of any performance-based pay program, and "the incentive structure created needs not only promote teacher effectiveness but also be fiscally

feasible if the program is to be sustained” (DeAngelis & Dang, 2016, p. 16). Therefore, discontinuing performance pay for teachers who have shown positive impacts on student achievement can have lasting implications within the context of high-needs schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine how effective teachers make sense of performance pay through their experiences with the elimination of an established performance-based pay system, and how those experiences influence teachers’ retention decisions in academically low-performing schools with high portions of economically disadvantaged and minority students. One goal of the study was to understand how teachers perceive performance pay influencing their decisions to remain in their current positions at high-poverty, high-minority schools. A second goal of the study was to explain how teachers perceive student achievement to be influenced by performance pay.

Methodology Overview

A qualitative phenomenology was used to better understand the influence of the elimination of performance pay on teacher retention decisions at high-poverty, high-minority schools. Qualitative studies are most appropriate when there is a problem or issue that needs to be explored and to better understand the contexts and situations in which the participants experience the problem or issue (Creswell, 2013). Further, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that qualitative research designs allow for the researcher to “speak from within a distinctive interpretive community that configures, in its own special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act” (p. 18). The experiences of nine urban middle school teachers were collected, described, and analyzed through a series of three semi-structured interviews.

Each of the participants were middle school teachers in the Southeast Texas School District and received performance pay awards for at least two consecutive school years.

The semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility in asking follow-up questions when more detail was needed to clearly describe the experiences of the participants. An interview protocol was followed as a guide, and further questions were asked based on participants' responses. The first interview focused on the participants' work history to understand their experiences as a teacher within all school environments and their past experiences within the context of high-poverty and high-minority schools. The second interview focused on the participants' lived experiences with performance pay and high rates of student achievement within the context of their current school setting. Finally, participants were interviewed a third time to have them reflect on the meaning of their experience with performance pay. Due to the nature of the study focusing on teachers' decisions to stay at their current school, the participants and school district identities were protected throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting by the use of pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

The interviews with the participants were all transcribed verbatim into a Word document by the researcher. Seidman (2013) suggests that researchers who transcribe their own interviews come to know their data better. The first step in analyzing the text from the interviews was a close read of the transcripts and bracketing the passages that were of the most interest and aligned with the purpose of the study. This reduction of interviews was the beginning of analysis and making meaning of the data (Seidman, 2013). The following step in the analysis process was process coding, which identified words to capture actions (Saldana, 2011). Creswell (2013)

recommends developing a list of statements about how the participants are experiencing the phenomenon, extending the identified words to statements to better capture experiences.

The initial codes from the interviews were classified into categories that reflected the emerging themes of experiences and perceptions of the teachers in regard to the elimination of performance pay. The themes were then to be placed into similar clusters to develop theoretical constructs to transform the “phenomenon’s themes into broader applications” (Saldana, 2011, p. 109). Following the process described by Saldana (2011), a descriptive analysis followed with a written description of what and how the participants experienced the phenomenon, resulting in a textural and structural description of their experiences. These two were then combined into a culminating representation of the experiences of the participants with the phenomenon of losing performance pay within the context of high-poverty, high-minority schools.

Data collected was kept in private and locked desks and computer files. Also, no documents had identifiable information about the participants. This was communicated to the participants to ensure that they aware of the fact that their identity would remain confidential and that they would feel comfortable sharing their experiences without the risk of their current principal or district leaders knowing of their statements.

Limitations of methods. Interviews can be difficult when participants are shy or are hesitant to speak and share experiences openly (Creswell, 2013). In this study, rapport could have influenced the participants’ responses and their ability to openly share their experiences. Because there was no previous relationship with the participants, establishing rapport with the participants prior to conducting the interviews was critical to ensuring authentic responses.

Creswell (2013) emphasized the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the unequal power dynamic that exists between the participants and researcher. In doing so, an

effort was made to establish the rapport necessary for open dialogue and expression. The unequal power dynamic in this study was my role as a principal compared to their roles as teachers. The perception of power and possible relationships with the participants' principals could have influenced their responses, as they may have felt they should provide a safe response rather than detailed responses about their experiences and retention decisions.

Finally, the participant group is a small representation of teachers within the Southeast Texas School District. The researcher was tasked with identifying possible participants from district performance pay documents from the previous two school years. Due to attrition and timing of the data collection during the month of June when teachers are not required to be on duty, the participant group was limited to nine middle school teachers.

Significance. Teacher attrition at high-poverty and high-minority schools has an impact on the quality of instruction that students receive. These hard-to-staff schools are, therefore, academically low-performing and continue to struggle with recruiting and retaining effective teachers. This research study was needed to inform district policy on performance pay system design, implementation, and elimination. The literature indicates that teacher turnover is reduced when performance pay is awarded although variations in program design and payout structures influence retention differently. Future policy implications suggest a need for a locally developed performance pay system that will meet the recruitment, retention, and student achievement needs of the specific district. Research indicates that teacher behavior is changed by pay incentives, so the key for policy development is determining which incentives have the most impact on retention of effective teachers.

In most cases, performance-based pay systems eventually disband due to loss of funding, which is the case for the Southeast Texas School District. In the last year of funding from the

Teacher Incentive Fund grant program, teachers within the group of identified schools will no longer receive funds for increased student achievement, which is the intent of the performance pay program. These schools were identified for the performance pay grant due to having high portions of students in poverty as well as historically poor academic performance.

This study was necessary to determine the possible impact of the elimination of performance pay on the teacher attrition at schools within high-needs schools. It is important to develop an understanding of how performance pay influences teachers' retention decisions at hard-to-staff schools to inform policy development for retention and to determine alternatives to the grant-funded performance pay programs that will influence retention. Further, it is important to fully understand how teachers perceive the influence of performance pay on student achievement. Results of the study will advise policy development on current performance pay systems and future performance pay systems by understanding the impact of discontinuation at high-poverty, high-minority schools.

Summary of Results of Research Questions

This qualitative phenomenological study used an interpretivist theoretical perspective and a constructionist epistemological stance to answer the research questions. Through this perspective, paired with the conceptual framework of sense-making theory, teachers' perceptions of the elimination of performance pay within the context of high-minority, high-poverty schools can be best understood. Emergent themes were utilized to present the participants' perceptions based on their lived experiences with the elimination of an established performance pay system. Themes were organized in a manner that answered each of the following research questions:

For urban high-poverty, high-minority middle schools in Southeast Texas-

1. To what extent does the elimination of performance pay influence teacher retention decisions?
2. How do teachers perceive the influence of performance pay on student achievement?
3. How do teachers make sense of their experience with performance pay?

Theme of the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on retention. The influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation explains the significance that teachers place on monetary incentives as it relates to their decisions to perform their jobs effectively in high-needs schools. The core of this theme relates to how teachers experienced performance pay as a motivator for improved student academic performance, and how the experience with the elimination of performance pay influences retention decisions for themselves and their colleagues.

A major finding from this research study was the determination that teachers perceive performance pay as a motivator for retention at high-poverty and high-minority schools. Teachers suggested that the elimination of performance pay will impact the retention of those teachers who are significantly motivated by monetary incentives. Teachers stated that many of their colleagues lacked self-drive and the commitment to effective job performance and student learning and that they remained at their current campuses due to the possibility of performance pay. For those perceived to be motivated by monetary incentives, it was consistently communicated that retention by the district will be difficult.

Although only one participant expressed that employment would be sought elsewhere due to the elimination of performance pay, all teachers valued the possibility of performance pay as a motivator for effective instructional practices and also valued it as an acknowledgment of their self-motivated commitment to student learning. All of the participants discussed their self-

motivation to ensure that their students mastered the learning objectives but also shared their experience with performance pay as a motivator for extra effort. Examples of extra effort tied to performance pay included before and after school tutorials, regular attendance with limited days off, and differentiated activities based on learning needs.

For retention purposes, the study illuminated the influence of compensation on those decisions. Teachers believe that those extrinsically motivated teachers will move to districts that have higher or equal salary schedules. The salaries in neighboring school districts were frequently referenced when discussing retention decisions. Salaries were described as higher or equal to those of Southeast Texas School District. Also referenced, were higher salaries for teachers with graduate degrees, which the Southeast Texas School District does not award compensation for. Teachers explained that higher or equal pay in the neighboring districts would motivate teachers to seek employment there due to the perception of fewer minority and impoverished students, making their jobs less difficult as compared to their current positions.

The culmination of the teachers' experiences within this theme is the perceived influence of the elimination of performance pay on teacher retention decisions. Ultimately, teachers perceive an increased attrition rate of effective teachers at high-poverty and high-minority schools. Performance pay was not experienced by any teachers as a recruitment incentive, only a retention incentive, as only one participant had knowledge of the performance pay system prior to employment within the district. Knowledge of the performance pay system was acquired through colleagues, and value was acquired through the experience of receiving it as a core academic teacher. Through informal conversations with colleagues and observations of their behaviors, teachers perceive the influence of performance pay on retention decisions to be significant at high-needs schools and anticipate effective teachers to actively seek employment in

surrounding districts with either higher salary schedules or fewer minority and impoverished students. Additionally, teachers perceived that increased compensation, not solely performance pay, would increase teacher retention.

Theme of teaching to the test. The second theme, teaching to the test, demonstrates what participants believe to be the behavior of many teachers as result of performance pay. The core of this theme describes how teachers understand the possibility of performance pay to influence instructional practices. A consistent thread throughout the theme was the intertwining of instructional practices, alignment to the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), and receipt of performance pay.

A second major finding of this study was that teachers perceive that student achievement on standardized assessments will decline as a consequence of the elimination of the performance pay system. Teachers all emphasized the alignment between performance pay and mastery of the STAAR objectives. Open discussion by all teachers revealed the prevalence of targeting specific students and objectives in order to earn the performance bonus. Teachers explained their perceptions that their colleagues will provide less effective instruction without the incentive for performance pay. Examples provided included more whole group instruction, less targeted small group instruction, and less focus on testing strategies and student growth. Teachers also reflected on their own instructional practices and impact on student performance and admitted to changing their practices to be more creative, less aligned to the low-mastery standards, and less focused on the students' prior STAAR performance for growth.

With performance pay linked to teacher attendance, teachers discussed their perception of the impact of their attendance on instructional delivery and mastery of the tested curriculum paired with how the loss of performance pay will influence teachers' attendance behaviors. The

quality of instruction provided by the teachers was consistently referenced as the sole means for students to successfully master the state standards. Teachers perceive teacher attendance rates to decline due to the elimination of performance pay and connect that to a decline in student achievement due to fewer quality instructional days provided to students.

Ultimately, teachers perceive the elimination for performance pay to result in a decline in student achievement on the STAAR. Although teachers recognize the mandate to teach the state curriculum, the autonomy to determine instructional practices aligned to the state standards contributes to their perceptions of change due to mastery no longer determining extra compensation. Additionally, the recognition that student learning occurs when the actual teacher is present led to the conclusion that student learning will decline due to increased teacher absenteeism.

Theme of sense of self-efficacy. The third theme, the sense of self-efficacy, describes teacher perceptions of their effectiveness as experienced through the interactions with performance pay. The influence of the teacher interactions with performance pay as it relates to their own sense of effectiveness is the core of this theme. All teachers described some level of impact on their sense of self-efficacy from their experiences with performance pay.

A third major finding of this study is that teachers make sense of performance pay through their sense of self-efficacy. Teachers repeatedly referred to how they felt about their own abilities after receiving a performance pay bonus. Specifically, teachers shared that they felt appreciated, vindicated, and recognized for doing their job effectively. Teachers explained that teaching students in high-needs schools present challenges with achievement gaps and require intentional differentiation and extra time and emotional energy to successfully lead students to mastery of the

state standards. The receipt of performance pay contributed to their sense of effectiveness as well as their instructional growth.

As much as teachers valued performance pay for their sense of self-efficacy, they had mixed views on performance pay accurately identifying and awarding effective teachers. Based on their observations of STAAR data, teachers saw a disconnect between grade-level performance and the awarding of performance pay. However, through conversations with colleagues and informal observations of instructional practices, teachers recognized a correlation between their perception of effectiveness and the awarding of performance pay. Additionally, a lack of understanding of the metrics for earning performance pay was also acknowledged as contributing to the teachers' perceptions of the validity of the system.

For these teachers, sense was made of performance pay through their sense of self-efficacy. Teachers acknowledged that the receipt of performance pay contributed to their sense of feeling effective. Being awarded performance pay strengthened teachers' perceptions of the skills and commitment necessary for effectively teaching students in high-needs schools and contributed to the confidence in their ability to influence student learning.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

My study presented the experiences of middle school teachers in high-needs schools in a large urban school district in Southeast Texas. The study is timely because "it is a known fact that most large urban districts and many isolated rural districts across the country have teacher shortages, have been forced to hire less-qualified teachers, and have difficulty competing in their markets for good teachers" (Odden & Picus, 2008, p. 397). As a result, teacher turnover is high, which has an impact on student learning due to the lack of consistently effective instruction each school year. Across the United States, approximately half a million teachers leave their schools

each year. Only 16% of this teacher attrition at schools is due to retirement. The remaining 84% of the teacher turnover is due to teachers transferring between schools or leaving the profession entirely (Boyd et al., 2011). In connection to my study, all nine teacher participants perceived performance pay to significantly influence teacher retention decisions and student performance.

School district leaders should create performance pay systems that have longevity in the funding source, have a plan for external funding such as grants, or a phase-out plan so that teachers have time to adjust to the lack of additional compensation. As stated in the literature, many of the large-scale performance pay systems ended due to lack of funding, resulting in discontinuation of performance pay awards for teachers. The performance pay system in the Southeast Texas School District is an example of a system that was established for ten years and was funded through both district funds and the federally funded Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) program grant. With the reduction in state funds and the ending of the TIF grant, the district was forced to eliminate the program although data reflected that retention of core academic teachers increased under the program. In districts with high-needs schools such as the Southeast Texas School District, leaders should examine effective compensation plans in similar school districts that result in high rates of teacher retention. District leaders should also collaborate with campus leaders and teachers to determine what compensation structures will result in the highest rates of retention.

School district leaders should anticipate behaviors under the performance pay system to change following its elimination. Teachers in my study openly communicated the anticipated changes in instructional practices for both themselves and their colleagues as a result of the elimination of the performance pay system. Consequently, teachers who were awarded for student growth and achievement on standardized tests could change their instructional practices

to be less individualized and mastery-focused. This could negatively impact student achievement on standardized assessments. District leaders should consider alternative awards for student achievement to ensure that instructional practices remain aligned to state standards and district expectations. Collaborating with campus leaders and teachers to develop an alternative award system could result in a quality instructional incentive program that motivates teachers to improve student achievement.

Additionally, school district leaders should seek to create an incentive plan for teacher attendance. This study revealed a connection between performance pay, teacher attendance, and student achievement. When teachers are eligible for a performance pay bonus when meeting attendance requirements, their attendance and instructional time provided to students is maintained at high levels. Without performance pay linked to teacher attendance, absenteeism could increase, leaving students with substitute teachers and ineffective instruction. Leaders at the district level should collaborate with campus leaders and teachers to design an attendance incentive program to maximize teacher attendance and quality instructional time.

Recommendations for Research

The literature reveals many studies on teacher attrition at high-needs schools and the impact of performance pay on teacher retention and student achievement in a diverse group of schools and districts. Each of the performance pay systems studied were complex and were stand-alone programs that were locally developed, implemented, and eliminated. Each performance pay system previously studied was examined based on effectiveness during implementation. My study was unique in studying the influence of the elimination of an established performance pay system. With many large-scale performance pay systems being

eliminated in recent years, the opportunity for studying the long-term impacts of their elimination exists.

Future studies of eliminated performance pay systems could include (a) attrition of awarded teachers at high-needs schools three to five years after the elimination, (b) student performance at high-needs schools three to five years after the elimination, (c) perceptions of teachers who remained at their campuses several years after the elimination, and (d) strategies used by school districts to retain teachers and increase student achievement following the elimination.

Summary

This study was conducted to determine how effective teachers make sense of performance pay through their experiences with the elimination of an established performance-based pay system, and how these experiences influence teachers' retention decisions in academically low-performing schools with high portions of economically disadvantaged and minority students. One goal of the study was to understand how teachers perceive performance pay influencing their decisions to remain in their current positions at high-poverty, high-minority schools. A second goal of the study was to explain how teachers perceive student achievement to be influenced by performance pay. Teachers were specially chosen through historical district performance documents to ensure that all teachers had experience with the elimination of performance pay after receiving it for at least the last two consecutive school years. Interviews, reflective journals, and field notes were all analyzed to develop three emergent themes.

The theme of the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation focused on the significance that teachers placed on monetary incentives as it relates to their decision to perform their jobs effectively. The core of this theme related to how teachers experienced performance

pay as a motivator for improved student academic performance and how the experience with the elimination of performance pay influences retention decisions for themselves and their colleagues. Findings through this theme propose that the elimination of performance pay will negatively impact the retention of those teachers who are significantly motivated by monetary incentives. This suggests that district leaders should examine performance pay systems for longevity in the funding source, have a plan for external funding such as grants, or create a phase-out plan so that teachers have time to adjust to the lack of additional compensation. An additional recommendation is that leaders collaborate with campus leaders and teachers to determine what compensation structures will result in the highest rates of retention.

The theme of teaching to the test demonstrates what participants believe to be the behavior of many teachers as result of performance pay. The core of this theme describes how teachers understand the possibility of performance pay to influence instructional practices. Teachers acknowledged the importance of teaching the state standards and believe that many teachers focus solely on mastery of the standards in order to earn performance pay. Teachers suggest that the elimination of performance pay will result in less standards-based instruction and ultimately will lead to a decline in student achievement. This creates an opportunity for school district leaders to develop an alternative award system that motivates teachers to improve student achievement.

The third and final theme of the sense of self-efficacy describes teacher perceptions of their effectiveness as experienced through their interactions with performance pay. The influence of the participant interactions with performance pay as it relates to their own sense of effectiveness is the core of this theme. Participants value the performance pay they received for being identified as effective teachers and feeling appreciated as a result. Teachers believe that

they are effective without the performance pay incentive and that performance pay served as a means for their hard work and effectiveness to be acknowledged.

The need for quality, effective teachers is critical in all schools, but even more so in urban schools with predominantly low-socioeconomic and minority students. The elimination of an established performance pay system tasks school district leaders to create alternative plans for teacher retention and increased student achievement. Three consecutive years of average but effective instruction can completely change the academic trajectory of low-achieving students, moving them from the lowest to the highest quartile in academic performance (Schmoker, 2011). Consequently, recruiting, developing, and retaining effective teachers must be priorities for district leaders.

Appendix A

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Describe your years of experience as a teacher including the numbers of years you have been in your current position.
2. How would you describe your experience with teaching in schools with high minority and high poverty student populations? What thoughts, feelings, and emotions do you have about teaching within this context?
3. How did the school demographics influence your decision to teach in your current school?
4. What were your beliefs about performance pay prior to teaching at your current school?
5. What are your beliefs about effective teachers being awarded with performance pay?
 - a. Do you feel the current system accurately identified and awarded effective teachers?
6. What experiences have you had with performance pay at your current school?
 - a. Did your receipt of performance pay influence you to reflect on your own practices?
7. What feelings and emotions were generated from these experiences with performance pay?
8. Describe your understanding of the elimination of performance pay.
 - a. How were you informed that this year would be the last year that you were eligible to receive performance pay?
9. What changes in your current position do you associate with the experience of losing performance pay?
10. How does the experience affect your decision to remain at your current school?
 - a. Do you anticipate pursuing a teaching position at another school?
 - b. Will you pursue employment in the same district or different district?
 - c. How will student demographics and student achievement influence your employment search?
11. How will the experience of the elimination of performance pay affect your future students?
12. What changes in instruction do you anticipate with this experience?
13. What is the significance of performance pay in regard to student achievement?
14. How has the experience with performance pay affected your values and beliefs as a teacher?
15. What challenges and opportunities do you perceive with the elimination of the performance pay program?
16. How has the experience with performance pay affected your perceptions of teacher effectiveness?
17. What aspects of performance pay affected you the most?
18. How does performance pay make you feel about your own teaching effectiveness?
19. Is there anything else you would like me to know?

Appendix B

IRB USE ONLY

Study Number: 2017-04-0091

Approval Date: 05/02/2017

Expires: 05/01/2020

Name of Funding Agency (if applicable): NA

Consent for Participation in Research

Title: The Influence of the Elimination of Performance Pay on Teachers' Perceptions on Retention and Student Performance at High Needs Campuses

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

Purpose of the Study

You have been asked to participate in a research study about teachers' perceptions on the elimination of an established performance pay system. The purpose of the proposed phenomenological study is to determine how effective teachers make sense of performance pay through their experiences with the elimination of an established performance-based pay system and how these experiences influence teachers' retention decisions in academically low-performing schools with high portions of economically disadvantaged and minority students.

What will you be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in interviews
- Review transcribed data from the interviews

This study will take place in three face-to-face, phone, or interactive video interviews of approximately 30-minutes in length. The study will include up to 15 study participants.

Your participation will be audio recorded.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, findings may be used to inform districts' policies on the development, implementation, and discontinuation of performance-based pay systems.

Do you have to participate?

No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all, or if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin (University) in anyway.

If you would like to participate, please provide a verbal consent to the researcher. You will receive a copy of this form.

Will there be any compensation?

You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you participate in this research study?

Your privacy and the confidentiality of your data will be protected by the researcher referring to you with a neutral alias, not disclosing any information you share to other participants, ensuring the details of the data cannot be traced to participants, and all data will be locked in a secure location.

If it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review the study records, information that can be linked to you will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Your data will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. The data, which will be masked, resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate it with you, or with your participation in any study.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for 2 years and then erased.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher **Keeley Simpson at 903-278-6337** or send an email to **keeley.simpson@utexas.edu** for any questions or if you feel that you have been harmed.

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University Institutional Review Board and the study number is 2017-04-0091.

Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at **orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu**.

Participation

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

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