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**School Superintendents' Perceptions of Teacher Pay for Performance Programs**

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**School Superintendents' Perceptions of Teacher Pay for Performance  
Programs**

by

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**Treatise**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements

For the Degree of

**Doctor of Education**

**The University of Texas**

**May 2018**

## Acknowledgements

I must take a moment to acknowledge all the people who supported me through my doctoral coursework and dissertation writing. Without them, I would never have seen this thing through to completion!

- Thank you to my supportive parents, Mike and Laura Kirkpatrick, who instilled in me a strong work ethic and drive to succeed. Growing up they always knew when to push me harder because I wasn't performing at a level that they knew I was capable of and when to take a step back and let me develop into an independent problem solver. They were my first teachers and I'm eternally grateful for their continued support.
- Thank you to my *family* (friends who are family), Brad, David, Gillian, and Nikki for being my emotional support through this process. The nights out I gave up due to school work are finally paying off! Even though three of the five of us now live in different states, our bond is strong, and we will always have each other's backs!
- Thank you to my ATX Ladies, Paige, Megan, Stacy, and Norma, who befriended me when I made the move to Austin to pursue this degree. Their unconditional love and social planning kept me sane through the most difficult times managing a new full-time job and full-time graduate studies. Although I only lived in Austin for three years, I know we will forever be friends!
- Finally, thank you to all my coworkers in Dallas, Austin, and Fort Worth who have graciously put up with my days off to attend class, covering activities so I could study or write, and cheering me on throughout the process!

# **School Superintendents' Perceptions of Teacher Pay for Performance Programs**

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There has been a renewed interest by local, state, and federal entities in teacher pay for performance programs. Billions of federal dollars have been given to states and school districts to develop programs to reward high-quality teachers based on student academic achievement test scores. Despite mixed-outcomes in data in the current literature, districts continue to develop and implement teacher pay for performance plans. School superintendents' voices have been absent from the current discourse in the pay for performance literature. School superintendents are uniquely situated to provide valuable insight of their perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs they have implemented in their respective districts. This study was approached from a qualitative, phenomenological lens used to describe superintendent perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs. The research conducted attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do superintendents perceive teacher pay for performance programs in their districts?
2. How have superintendents' perceptions changed throughout the pay for performance program implementation?
3. How do superintendents determine the success of teacher pay for performance programs in their districts?
4. For superintendents, what is the essence of experiencing a pay for performance program?

This study followed a qualitative, phenomenological research to gain an understanding of the perceptions of participants who all experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), in this case, leading a school district that has adopted a pay for performance structure designed to recruit and retain teachers. Interviews with superintendents who had participated in the implementation of a district teacher pay for performance program were the primary data sources. Analysis included open coding procedures using qualitative data analysis software. Documents and member checks were used to triangulate data. Findings from this study could be used by school districts that might be contemplating implementing pay for performance programs.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Context of the Study

With the recent increases in accountability measures by state and federal entities, historically underperforming schools continue to struggle to make the grade (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Drastic measures have been taken by some district superintendents to provide support for underperforming schools including reconstitution, incentives to recruit and retain teachers, and bonus pay based on increases in student academic achievement scores (Craciun & Snow-Renner, 2002). There are many models of pay for performance in practice because school districts are given the autonomy to develop the specific pay structures for educators (Kolbe & Strunk, 2012; Sawchuk, 2008). Although the pay structures might look different from district to district, the general goals are the same: to improve student achievement by recruiting and retaining the best-qualified teachers to serve in the highest need schools (Kolbe & Strunk, 2012).

In order to examine the credibility of performance pay programs, we must first understand the importance of high quality teachers and the reasons why districts are struggling to recruit and retain them. According to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), a teacher is considered highly qualified if they “have a bachelor’s degree, full state certification or licensure, and prove they know the subject they teach” (“New No Child Left Behind Flexibility,” 2004, para. 13). Although NCLB defined the term *highly qualified teacher*, great variation in the impact on student achievement among teachers who meet this definition can be found in practice.

There are many reasons teachers choose to leave a particular position or the profession altogether. Some of the most reported causes are lack of support from

administration, issues with student discipline, the lack of teacher input on school decisions, and low salaries (Ingersoll, 2001). Whether teachers leave for these reasons or others, schools are having a difficult time retaining teachers from year to year. Teacher retention has been shown to impact student academic performance (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). The variation in learning outcomes for students depends greatly on the teacher instructing them: “The magnitude of the differences is truly large, with some teachers producing 1.5 years of gain in achievement in an academic year while others with equivalent students produce only 1/2 year of gain” (Hanushek, 2010, p. 467). As a result, students might not be able to recover from receiving multiple years of instruction from poor quality teachers (Hanushek, 2011).

The federal government has recognized the potential impact of recruiting and retaining high quality teachers and has developed programs which allow districts to develop incentive and reward structures using federal funds to subsidize teacher compensation systems (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2014b). One such grant, the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), has awarded approximately \$1.9 billion to states and school districts since 2006 (DOE, 2014a). However, it is unclear if such programs are fulfilling the intended purpose and whether school districts are being successful in recruiting and retaining high quality teachers.

This chapter provides the rationale, purpose, problem statement, and research questions of the proposed study. An overview of the methodological approach including epistemology, methodological approach, and research questions is included. Key terms are defined, and the assumptions and significance of the study is discussed.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Many states and school districts have received billions of dollars of federal grant funding to incentivize employment in low performing schools and rewarding teachers whose classroom practices lead to increased student academic achievement scores (e.g., DOE, 2016). For these incentive programs to function as intended, struggling schools should be able to recruit and retain the best teachers and show their students' achievement scores as improving (Goldhaber & Walch, 2012). Interest in offering teachers some form of pay for performance remains at the forefront of education reform (Gratz, 2011). With the large amount of money being invested in pay for performance programs, it is important to evaluate programs to determine if the intended goals of current pay for performance plans are being met.

Much of the current literature (e.g., Fryer, 2011; Glazerman, Protik, Teh, Bruch, & Max, 2013; Goldhaber & Walch, 2012; Sojourner, Mykerezi, & West, 2014; Yuan et al., 2012) relies heavily on quantitative data to support or refute the success of pay for performance plans. Glazerman et al. (2013) investigated transfer incentives for high performing teachers using a multisite, randomized experimental design and found that the program produced positive effects on teacher transfers to specific schools, teacher retention, and student academic achievement scores. Goldhaber and Walch (2012) analyzed the impact of a pay for performance program in Denver on student achievement scores using student-level and teacher-level student academic achievement data and found some of the “awards do successfully target teacher effectiveness” (p. 1082). Winters, Greene, Ritter, and Marsh (2008) chose Little Rock, Arkansas schools for a

differences-in-differences design and determined that the pay for performance program improved student academic achievement outcomes. In a Minnesota study, Sojourner et al. (2014) found pay for performance yielded positive effects on student achievement and teacher productivity.

Not all researchers agree on the efficacy of pay for performance programs, however. Fryer (2011) used a randomized trial to determine that financial incentives for teachers had no positive impacts on teacher retention or student achievement in New York City schools. Similarly, Yuan and colleagues (2012) found that pay for performance incentive programs in three randomized survey data studies did not affect teacher motivation or practices. The current literature, therefore, has not portrayed a clear-cut answer for whether school districts should implement pay for performance programs.

Much of the variation in pay for performance program evaluation outcomes might be attributed to school or district-level implementation and program design. There is some research focused on the perceptions of teachers in pay for performance programs (Vanderbilt University, 2007; Wells, Combs, & Bustamante, 2012), but the perceptions of other stakeholders, such as school superintendents, is lacking.

Superintendents, as key players in developing and implementing pay for performance programs, have their own perceptions of pay for performance programs. Their voices are absent from the discourse, even though their perspectives need to be part of the discourse as key informants in educational leadership. Superintendents, as leaders who have experienced the implementation of pay for performance programs, can provide

insight for other stakeholders who are considering implementing performance-based pay in their own districts.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe superintendents' perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs in their respective districts. For this study, teacher pay for performance was defined as a program implemented by a school district where teachers are offered monetary compensation based on student academic achievement scores (Gratz, 2009). Focusing on superintendents, as the leaders of school districts and with the decision-making ability to develop and implement pay for performance programs, allowed acquisition of a better understanding of their unique experiences during program implementation. Their experiences might have provided insight about the challenges and opportunities of implementing a pay for performance plan from school district leaders' perspectives. Other superintendents might be able to use data from this study to determine if implementing a pay for performance program is appropriate for their school district and avoid implementation pitfalls described by the superintendents in this study.

### **Research Questions**

The research conducted attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do superintendents perceive teacher pay for performance programs in their districts?
2. How have superintendents' perceptions changed throughout the pay for performance program implementation?

3. How do superintendents determine the success of teacher pay for performance programs in their districts?
4. For superintendents, what is the essence of experiencing a pay for performance program?

### **Research Design**

Social constructivism is an epistemological approach that values the “subjective meanings of [participants’] experiences-meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). The goal of social constructivism is to understand how individuals construct meaning from their life experiences (Creswell, 2013). This study seeks to understand how individuals make meaning of their experiences related to leading a district while implementing a pay for performance program.

This study followed a qualitative, phenomenological research design to gain an understanding of the perceptions of the superintendents with the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In this case, the superintendents have been responsible for leading a school district while a pay for performance structure was in place to recruit and retain teachers. This type of research allows the voices of superintendents to be heard and includes rich descriptions of the experiences they conveyed about executing pay for performance programs. This phenomenological research design provided information likely not to be evident if quantitative methods were used. This study focuses on superintendents in school districts in Texas who have been superintendents during the implementation of a pay for performance program. Criterion sampling was used to obtain a group of five superintendents (Creswell, 2013). The researcher determined that

sufficiency was reached with the five participants, so no further recruitment was necessary (Seidman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were utilized to uncover the participating superintendents' perceptions of the pay for performance programs they had experience implementing (Seidman, 2013). Data analysis consisted of qualitative coding techniques described by Maxwell (2013) and Saldana (2016). Organizational, holistic, and theoretical coding occurred using transcripts of voice-recorded interviews (Maxwell, 2013; Saldana, 2016).

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the terms below have been defined for clarity.

**Highly qualified teacher:** Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2011, a teacher is considered highly qualified if they: “have a bachelor’s degree, full state certification or licensure, and prove they know the subject they teach” (DOE, 2014a, para. 13).

**School superintendent:** The leader of a school district who is ultimately responsible for all 10 functions of school districts (Olivarez, 2013).

**Student academic achievement scores:** Student performance indicators on state-wide standardized tests, such as the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR; Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2016a).

**Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF):** A federal grant that has awarded money to states and districts to develop and implement pay for performance programs (“Funding Status-TIF,” 2014).

**Teacher pay for performance:** This type of incentive program, also known as performance pay, is implemented by a school district to offer teachers increases in monetary compensation based on student achievement scores (Gratz, 2009).

### **Assumptions**

This study is based on various assumptions about the superintendency and superintendents' involvement in pay for performance programs implementation. School superintendents across the United States are tasked with overseeing the 10 functions of school districts (Olivarez, 2013). Because of this oversight of operations, this study is based on the assumption that the superintendent has the ultimate decision-making authority to develop, implement, and maintain a pay for performance program. Shared decision making might have contributed to a performance pay program design, but the researcher assumes that the superintendent has played an integral role and has had to approve the program and its details for implementation as the leader of the district. Another assumption of this study is that superintendents' perceptions of performance pay programs is important for determining whether a district pay for performance plan is continued, expanded, refined, or discontinued.

### **Significance and Rationale**

Schools and districts are spending millions of dollars on pay for performance initiatives that might not be meeting the goals of teacher performance pay. The significance of the study involves the opportunity to provide a detailed understanding of school district leaders' perceptions of current teacher pay for performance programs. The data relied solely on superintendents' self-reported perceptions as part of producing an in-

depth understanding of their lived experiences within the phenomenon of implementing a teacher pay for performance program. This study might provide valuable insight for school districts contemplating implementing pay for performance programs. They might choose to further research pay for performance models depending on the superintendents' experiences or to abandon the idea of pay for performance as a way to increase student achievement on standardized tests.

And for districts planning to implement a pay for performance model, the findings could influence the production of future pay for performance programs. Descriptions of successes and challenges school superintendents faced during program implementation can help other districts determine what has worked well elsewhere and what pitfalls to avoid during their own program design and implementation. This study might provide other school districts, school boards, and governmental agencies valuable insight into how to spend taxpayer dollars in a way to attain a greater impact on student achievement outcomes. If superintendents do not perceive the outcomes of their pay for performance programs as beneficial to school districts, money could potentially be reallocated to affect other in-school factors that can contribute to increased student academic success.

### **Summary**

This chapter introduced the context of performance pay programs as an approach districts are taking in an attempt to increase the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers in their schools. Few qualitative studies (e.g., Lundstrom, 2012; Mahony, Menter, & Hextall, 2004; Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2011) have looked at pay for performance programs and none of them have included superintendent perspectives. A

brief overview of methodology, as well as definitions, researcher assumptions, and the significance of the study have been included, as well. The following chapter provides an examination of the relevant literature relating to the history and utility of pay for performance programs and highlight the need to focus on the perceptions of superintendents.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter provides a review of relevant literature related to pay for performance programs employed with teachers, the evolution of these programs in the State of Texas, and current evaluations of pay for performance program usefulness as a means to recruit and retain teachers and improve student academic achievement performance. The lack of research using superintendents' perceptions because they are the leaders of districts involved in pay for performance programs is highlighted in this review. The chapter begins with the historical context of federal legislation relating to teacher pay for performance programs and Texas' attempts at measuring teacher quality using state-recommended teacher evaluation systems.

### **1983's A Nation at Risk**

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) is the most recent federal legislation affecting America's public schools, but it is far from the federal government's first attempt to address the quality of education for all children in the United States (DOE, 2015). Dating back to 1983 and the National Commission on Excellence in Education's (NCEE) report *A Nation at Risk*, politicians expressed deep concerns about negative educational statistics including the country's number of functionally illiterate adults, the decline in standardized test scores, and the increase in remedial math and English courses required for students entering college to create an impetus for school improvement. The NCEE concluded multiple problems regarding content, expectations, time, and teaching needed to be addressed nationally and offered specific recommendations for each issue it raised.

Although the specific recommendations in *A Nation at Risk* called for high quality standards, rigorous high school graduation requirements, high expectations for students, and increases in instructional time, the NCEE (1983) shaped many policies that have been implemented by all states in their public school systems over the last 30 years.

The NCEE recommended ways to support teaching and to improve teacher quality. The NCEE (1983) provided the following seven recommendations:

1. Persons preparing to teach should be required to meet high educational standards, to demonstrate an aptitude for teaching, and to determine competence in an academic discipline. Colleges and universities offering teacher preparation programs should be judged by how well their graduates meet these criteria.
2. Salaries for the teaching profession should be increased and should be professionally competitive, market-sensitive, and performance-based. Salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions should be tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review so that superior teachers can be rewarded, average ones encouraged, and poor ones either improved or terminated.
3. School boards should adopt an 11-month contract for teachers. This would ensure time for curriculum and professional development, programs for students with special needs, and a more adequate level of teacher compensation.
4. School boards, administrators, and teachers should cooperate to develop career ladders for teachers that distinguish among the beginning instructor, the experienced teacher, and the master teacher.

5. Substantial non-school personnel resources should be employed to help solve the immediate problem of the shortage of mathematics and science teachers. Qualified field individuals including recent graduates with mathematics and science degrees, graduate students, and industrial and retired scientists could, with appropriate preparation, immediately begin teaching in these fields. A number of our leading science centers have the capacity to begin educating and training teachers immediately. Other areas of critical teacher need, such as English, must also be addressed.
6. Incentives, such as grants and loans, should be made available to attract outstanding students to the teaching profession, particularly in those areas of critical shortage.
7. Master teachers should be involved in designing teacher preparation programs and in supervising teachers during their probationary years. (pp. 30-31)

The second and fourth recommendations both alluded to the need to differentiate teacher pay based on evaluations of performance and prompted states to deviate from the most common teacher salary scales whereby teacher pay became based on “‘steps and lanes’ that date from the industrial era” (The New Teacher Project [TNTP], 2014, p. 1). “Teachers earn raises by climbing another ‘step’ on the salary scale every year, and by advancing to different ‘lanes’ determined by the degree they hold” (TNTP, 2014, p. 1). Although the NCEE (1983) published the recommendations in *A Nation at Risk*, deciding that specific details of how to address the teacher quality concerns was left to the individual states. Even though the states made individual efforts for 18 years, the federal

government under the administration of President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 into law in January of 2002 (NCLB, 2002).

### **The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**

NCLB (2002) was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB placed great national emphasis on teacher quality and provided national regulations for determining ways to measure students' academic outcomes. Under NCLB, all teachers had to be *highly qualified* to teach a specific content area. A highly qualified teacher was defined under NCLB as follows: "1) A bachelor's degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) prove that they know each subject they teach" (DOE, 2004, para. 14). Besides requiring all teachers to be highly qualified, NCLB mandated that all public schools must conduct yearly state achievement testing. Schools and districts that had a large proportion of economically disadvantaged students had to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or undergo sanctions that increased in severity with every subsequent year of failing to meet AYP (NCLB, 2002).

### **2009's Race to the Top**

President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) as a law "designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors, including education" (DOE, 2009, p. 2). Through ARRA, competitive federal Race to the Top grants totaling over \$4 billion stimulated efforts and rewarded schools:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;

- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. (DOE, 2009, p. 2)

This significant investment to fund school improvement showed the federal government's continuing desire to support programs focused on improving educational outcomes and rewarding high teacher quality (DOE, 2009).

### **The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015**

The recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) became known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) when President Obama signed it into law in December of 2015 (DOE, 2015). The desire for every student to have access to a high quality education has once again been thrust in the political spotlight. ESSA reduced the amount of federally mandated student academic achievement targets and eliminated the prescribed interventions for schools failing to meet the NCLB-required achievement levels. However, much of ESSA's focus remained on highlighting academic achievement gaps between subpopulations via yearly state testing and requiring state-level interventions for the lowest five percent of schools (DOE, 2015). The ability of states to reward high-performing teachers based on student academic achievement scores is one area where ESSA does not deviate from NCLB (DOE, 2015). This part of ESSA demonstrated the federal government's continued desire to provide financial compensation to high quality teachers.

## **America's Concern with Teacher Quality**

With the recent increases in accountability measures by state and federal entities, historically underperforming schools continue to struggle to meet student achievement targets (Childs & Russell, in press). Drastic measures have been taken by some districts' superintendents to provide support for underperforming schools including incentives to recruit and retain teachers and bonus pay being tied to academic achievement score increases (Kolbe & Strunk, 2012). Many models of pay for performance are used in practice because school districts have the autonomy to develop specific pay structures for educators according to local needs (Kolbe & Strunk, 2012). Although the pay structures can look different from district to district, the general goals are the same and include improving student achievement by recruiting and retaining the best-qualified teachers to serve in the highest need schools (Kolbe & Strunk, 2012).

In order to examine the usefulness of performance pay programs, an understanding of the importance of high quality teachers and the reasons why districts are struggling to recruit and retain them is necessary. According to NCLB (2002), a teacher is considered highly qualified by holding "a bachelor's degree, full state certification or licensure," and proving knowledge of the subject taught through an examination (DOE, 2004, para. 13). However, teachers who meet this definition educate students who have great variation in academic skills and achievement. Some teachers might leave the profession because they are unprepared to handle the stresses related to educating culturally and linguistically diverse students (Moir, 2003).

Teachers also choose to leave the education profession due to lack of support from administration, issues with student discipline, the lack of teacher input on school decisions, and low salaries (Hayenga, 2015; Ingersoll, 2001). When schools suffer from teacher attrition, principals have a difficult time retaining teachers, leading to major implications on student academic performance (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008). The variation in learning outcomes for students depends greatly on the teacher instructing them, but traditional proxies for teacher quality such as advanced degrees and years of experience do not necessarily account for the differences among teachers (Hanushek, 2011). Regardless, “the magnitude of the differences is truly large, with some teachers producing 1.5 years of gain in achievement in an academic year while others with equivalent students produce only 1/2 year of gain” (Hanushek, 2011, p. 467). As a result, students, let alone the entire student body of a single school, might not be able to recover from multiple years of having poor quality teachers (Hanushek, 2011).

The DOE (2014a) recognized the potential impact of continually recruiting and failing to retain high quality teachers. The DOE (2014a) developed programs to allow districts to develop incentive and reward structures as part of grant programs that subsidized teacher compensation systems. The DOE’s (2014b) Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) has awarded approximately \$1.9 billion to states and school districts since 2006. However, the TIF program’s success with fulfilling the intended purpose of teacher retention as well as school districts’ successes in recruiting and retaining high quality teachers remains a mystery (Chiang et al., 2015). As the federal government passed laws and released reports supporting financial compensation of high quality teachers, Texas

independently developed its own teacher evaluation systems as a measure of teacher effectiveness (TEA, 1991).

### **Texas Teacher Pay Programs**

Individual school districts in conjunction with their school boards have the authority to set pay scales for teachers. Also, the TEA has encouraged differentiating teacher pay in multiple ways. In the mid-1980s a statewide career ladder was implemented (TEA, 1991), and more recently, funding via competitive state grants has provided greater incentive for districts to design pay for performance programs (Springer, Lewis, Ehlert, Podgursky, et al., 2010; Springer Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Gronberg, et al., 2009; Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Taylor, et al., 2009).

#### **Career Ladder**

Shortly after the release of *A Nation at Risk*, United States Secretary of Education Bell (1983) called for the development of career ladders to give teachers opportunities to receive raises based on performance instead of having to leave teaching for private enterprise positions when they desired to increase income. Texas responded by implementing the Texas Teacher Appraisal System (TTAS) to appraise teachers' performance for promoting the value of the career ladder (Allen, 1988). Although the career ladder was implemented with the intent to reward the highest quality teachers as determined by their supervisor using the TTAS, support for the program was not high among participants (Allen, 1988; TEA, 1991). Transferring between districts was discouraged by the program's rules, meaning if a teacher left one district to work in another he or she could lose his or her place on the career ladder (Allen, 1988). In an

evaluation commissioned by the Texas legislature, the TEA's (1991) survey data showed over 66% of the responding teachers wanted to abolish the career ladder. The career ladder ended for Texas teachers after the 1992-1993 school year (Moses et al., 1998), but the ability of teachers to earn performance based pay made a resurgence in the early 2000s through several state grants.

### **State Grants**

In the era of NCLB, the State of Texas began using grants to encourage school districts to develop pay for performance programs for teachers. The Governor's Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG) was a three-year grant provided to 99 Texas schools (Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Taylor, et al., 2009). The criteria for participation required schools to have both of the following: (a) a high poverty rate measured by the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, (b) a record of high academic achievement denoted by having a state accountability rating of Recognized or Exemplary based on student academic achievement scores during the 2004-2005 school year (Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Taylor, et al., 2009).

Similarly, another state grant, the Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG), had almost identical criteria for participating schools. For TEEG, schools only had to be in the top half of economic disadvantage campuses, and schools had to reapply for eligibility annually (Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Gronberg, et al., 2009). Both GEEG and TEEG programs sought to reward teachers already teaching students within high achieving high poverty schools. Due to school funding cuts by the Texas legislature, Texas provided funding for both GEEG and TEEG after the 2008-2009

school year (Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Taylor, et al., 2009; Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Gronberg, et al., 2009).

Unlike GEEG and TEEG, the District Awards for Teacher Excellence (DATE) program was a competitive grant dispersed to Texas school districts rather than directly to schools. DATE did not have restrictions on which districts could apply for the funds (Springer, Lewis, Ehlert, Podgursky, et al., 2010). Districts could develop pay for performance programs in all district schools or could choose a select group of schools considered low performing based on DATE grant criteria (Springer, Lewis, Ehlert, Podgursky, et al., 2010). DATE gave districts flexibility to use pay for performance to impact the recruiting, retention, and rewarding of teacher in schools with a history of poor performance instead of simply rewarding good teaching in high achieving schools. DATE ended in the 2012-2013 after the Texas Legislature killed its funding (Stutz, 2013). Texas has not continued to fund any large grants such as GEEG, TEEG, or DATE since 2013, but multiple school districts have continued experimenting with pay for performance programs using other funding sources such as the federally funded Teacher Incentive Fund (DOE, 2014; Springer, Lewis, Ehlert, Podgursky, et al., 2010).

### **Texas Teacher Appraisal Systems**

Due to mounting pressure from federal mandates focused on student academic achievement and on the elimination of achievement gaps among subpopulations of students, the ability of school districts to effectively evaluate teachers to determine teacher quality has become increasingly relevant (Hazi & Rucinski, 2009). In Texas, the first statewide formal evaluation system was developed shortly after the release of A

Nation at Risk. Texas' program was known as the Texas Teacher Appraisal System (TTAS). The TEA (1991) has since refined this initial attempt at a state-endorsed appraisal system twice.

In 1984, the Texas legislature required that a teacher evaluation system be adopted “for career ladder purposes, improvement of instruction, and contract renewal decisions” (TEA, 1991, p. 1). The TTAS consisted of observable classroom teaching domains, and a professional development and responsibility domain (TEA, 1991). Under TTAS, teachers were observed at least twice by their supervisors and at least twice by another evaluator, followed by a summative conference (TEA, 1991). According to Ovando and McCleary (1991), although TTAS was a state mandated evaluation system, it was possible for principals to implement the evaluation system in such a way to supervise teachers while addressing their individual needs.

In 1997, the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) adopted teacher proficiencies that had been developed over the previous 4 years, beginning with a survey of Texas educators, to determine the skills all educators should possess (State Board for Educator Certification [SBEC], 1997). The newly developed proficiencies became the basis for a new teacher evaluation system. The Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) was similar to TTAS in that teacher actions were broken down into domains and criteria, but PDAS's domains provided greater focus on professional development activities and on student-centered instruction (Ovando & Ramirez, 2007).

Beginning in the 2016-2017 school year, the state of Texas moves out of the pilot phase and into full implementation of a new appraisal system, Texas Teacher Evaluation

and Support System (T-TESS), to replace PDAS (TEA, 2016b). T-TESS consists of “goal setting and professional development plan, the evaluation cycle (including: pre-conference, observation, post-conference), [and a] student growth measure” (TEA, 2016b, p. 4). Like its predecessor programs, TTAS and PDAS, T-TESS contains a rubric for scoring classroom observations, although the T-TESS rubric is much more descriptive than the ones used for TTAS and PDAS (TEA, 2016b). T-TESS also provides an intensive focus on professional development activities similarly to PDAS. However, the requirement of a student growth measure is unique to T-TESS (TEA, 2016b, 2016c). Thus far, Texas has not widely implemented tying teacher evaluations to student growth. It remains unclear exactly how school districts will implement this aspect of T-TESS.

As pressure has increased to ensure all students receive a high quality education, Texas worked to redefine teacher quality through its statewide evaluation systems. In the last 30 years, Texas adopted three increasingly complex systems to appraise teacher performance, the newest of which includes the student growth measures (TEA, 2016b) that were previously only tied to teacher bonus pay (DOE, 2014b; Springer, Lewis, Ehlert, Podgursky, et al., 2010; Springer Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Gronberg, et al., 2009; Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Taylor, et al., 2009). As Texas experimented with ways to measure teacher quality, state and federal monies were issued to reward the performance of high quality teachers through pay for performance programs (DOE, 2014b, Springer, Lewis, Ehlert, Podgursky, et al., 2010; Springer Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Gronberg, et al., 2009; Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Taylor, et al. 2009).

## **Evaluations of Pay for Performance Programs**

States and districts are taking advantage of billions of dollars of federal grant funding to incentivize employment in low performing schools and rewarding teachers whose classroom practices lead to increased student academic achievement scores. If these incentive programs operate as intended, struggling schools able to recruit and retain the best teachers should display increases in students' achievement scores. Although differentiation of teacher pays is not a new topic in the educational field, districts have developed renewed interest in offering a pay for performance program. With the large amount of money being invested in pay for performance programs, it is important to evaluate programs to determine if the intended goals of such plans are being met. Quantitative data has been used to support or refute the success of pay for performance plans (Glazerman et al., 2013). Glazerman et al. (2013) looked at transfer incentives for high performing teachers using a multisite, randomized experimental design. Glazerman et al. concluded the program had positive effects on reducing teacher transfers to specific schools, increasing teacher retention, and improving student academic achievement scores.

Literature associated with teacher pay for performance programs includes somewhat positive findings even though it is too soon to know the lasting impacts of these programs on teacher recruitment and retention (Springer, Lewis, Ehlert, Podgursky, et al., 2010). Springer and Gardner (2010) describe the evaluations of pay for performance programs as having painted a "mixed picture" for policymakers and call for additional research (p. 14).

## **Who is Using Performance Pay and What They Say About It or Why They Use It**

Some school officials in Texas' Houston Independent School District said standardized test score gains occurred because of the school district's merit pay program and teacher feedback suggested the opportunity to earn bonuses based on students' academic achievement scores was attractive to teachers, but added "it's too soon for us to know how [TIF] is impacting retention" (Sawchuk, 2008, p. 11). Stelle, Murnane, and Willett (2010) reported the North Carolina Governor's Teaching Fellowship grant positively impacted teacher recruitment but not teacher retention rates.

Tienken (2011) stated that the practice of using pay for performance to put pressure on teachers and districts to increase student achievement scores has caused them to engage in practices that are, in essence, "gaming the system" (p. 153). Holding struggling students back from entering grades with high-stakes accountability testing, counseling students to drop out or get a GED prior to testing, and only focusing on students who are close to the passing standard at the expense of all students are just some of the reported practices documented (Tienken, 2011). States that have been at the forefront of pay for performance initiatives have boasted increases in the percentages of students who are passing state standardized tests, but scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have not increased as significantly (Tienken, 2011). Elpus (2011) also warns of negative consequences of teacher performance pay such as competition, instead of collaboration, among teaching staff and outright cheating by teachers to improve student test scores. With a strong focus on achieving a specific score, the incentive of performance pay might actually negatively impact teaching quality

in favor of less desirable traits such as teaching to the test (Levin, 2011). Brewer, Myers, and Zhang (2015) echo the sentiment that pay for performance might negatively influence teacher collaboration. When performance pay schemes target individual teachers as opposed to groups, teachers might respond by closely guarding lesson plans and activities in order to gain an advantage over their peers (Brewer et al., 2015).

Evidence from other disciplines might shed light on whether pay for performance programs are likely to meet their intended objectives (Hulleman & Barron, 2010). Performance incentives can increase quantity, but not necessarily quality as seen in manufacturing, but not in service industries (Hulleman & Barron, 2010). In the financial sector, large bonuses were awarded for the number of loans given to potential homeowners (Donlevy, 2008). The quantity of home loans increased with the incentive, but the only because loans were given to individuals with lower credit scores leading to high numbers of unsound mortgages (Donlevy, 2008). The financial system virtually collapsed when the bottom fell out of the housing market and the Federal Reserve had to intervene (Donlevy, 2008). The incentives led to high quantity, but lower quality. With the complexities of educational systems and the desire to increase teacher quality, pay for performance plans might not adequately address the need for increased quality (Hulleman & Barron, 2010). There seems to be a pervasive public view that businesses operate on performance pay, therefore, educational system should too (Hulleman & Barron, 2010). In actuality, only sixteen to thirty percent of respondents on large national and international surveys reported any type of performance pay (Hulleman & Barron, 2010). Levin (2011) agrees that few industries rely on measured outcomes to pay employees.

States and school districts are partnering with teacher unions with a history of strong opposition to teacher pay for performance to implement plans that include compromises both sides support (Koppich, 2010). Koppich (2010) reports that both the National Educators Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) nationally only support supplemental compensation for teachers for increases in teacher knowledge and skill, teaching in schools who are difficult to staff and added professional responsibilities. Neither union supports pay based on student academic achievement scores (Koppich, 2010). AFT makes an exception if the rewards based on student performance on high-stakes tests are school wide and not for individuals (Koppich, 2010). Even though both unions have national policies against pay for performance, local and state affiliate chapters of the organization in Colorado, New York, Tennessee, and Texas have collaborated closely with districts to adopt pay for performance plans (Koppich, 2010; Springer & Gardener, 2010).

### **Studies with Positive Outcomes or Evaluations of Pay for Performance**

Various studies of school districts in North Carolina, Kentucky, and Texas showed promising results but not conclusive findings, often due to lack of control groups for student academic achievement score growth due to these programs, not other factors (Lavy, 2007). The findings were somewhat more positive for the Talent Transfer Initiative for which 9 out of 10 teacher vacancies targeted were filled by high performing teachers from other district schools (Glazerman, Protik, Teh, Bruch, & Max, 2013). The program was filled with high quality teachers based on value added data, leading to a positive impact on elementary school test scores in reading and math (Glazerman et al.,

2013). However, Glazerman et al. (2013) found no statistically significant impact for middle school achievement results, and the retention of teachers recruited was not statistically significantly different from non-program participants after the incentive ended.

Sojourner et al. (2013) determined that there was an average of a three percent standard deviation gain in student achievement across districts in Minnesota who implemented the state's Q-Comp program. The program also altered the current teacher appraisal and professional development systems of the school districts so the positive impacts could have been attributed to the comprehensive system change instead of on pay for performance alone (Sojourner et al., 2013). The local context of pay for performance programs might help to explain the variation in the pay for performance evaluation literature. Equivalently, the Benwood Plan, which was touted as a successful pay for performance program in Chattanooga, Tennessee, boasted significant gains in student achievement, but the ability of incentives and rewards to recruit high quality teachers was overestimated (Silva, 2008). Instead, a systematic plan to improve teacher quality through mentor programs and instructional support staff, and new, collaborative school leadership supported plan success (Silva, 2008). This idea of a comprehensive, system-wide reform is also described by Slotnik (2010) as being imperative to the success of a pay for performance program. Focusing more on changing factors within schools that make a difference in teaching and learning and for teachers and students might be critical in pay for performance program success (Slotnik, 2010).

In a pay for performance study of Little Rock, Arkansas schools, teachers who were previously less effective showed the most improvement under the incentive pay structure after one year (Winters, Greene, Ritter, & Marsh, 2008). Winters et al. (2008) study used a differences-in-differences analysis method to determine that the program did improve student academic achievement outcomes. Similarly, an evaluation of the Teacher Incentive Fund found, after two years of implementation, that the program produced only small positive effects on student achievement scores (DOE, 2014a; Chiang et al., 2015). Interestingly, the differences in scores across districts was statistically significant (DOE, 2014a; Chiang et al., 2015).

Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Taylor et al. (2009) reported the Texas GEEG Program produced less teacher turnover after the first year of implementation compared to non-program schools. Unfortunately, Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Taylor et al. (2009) observed no evidence of noticeable differences in retention after that point. Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Taylor et al. also recounted inconclusive student achievement gains overall, but each district had designed its award structures differently which could have had an effect on retention behavior. Springer, Lewis, Ehlert, Podgursky, et al. (2010) reported the DATE program in Texas offered a greater improvement in students' scores on the state mandated academic achievement test than in non-DATE schools.

Goldhaber and Walch (2012) analyzed the impact a pay for performance program in Denver had on student achievement scores by using student-level and teacher-level student academic achievement data and found some of the “awards do successfully target

teacher effectiveness” (p. 1082). Goldhaber and Walch, in their analysis of the Denver ProComp program, offered inconsistent findings across grade levels and subjects for student growth, potentially due to the fact that some of the ProComp bonuses did not relate directly to improvements in teacher quality. On the other hand, Fryer (2011) used a randomized trial to determine that financial incentives for teachers had no positive impacts on teacher retention or student achievement in New York City schools.

Similarly, Yuan et al. (2012) found that the incentive programs in three randomized trials using survey data did not affect teacher motivation or practices. This literature had not portrayed a clear-cut answer for whether school districts should implement pay for performance programs.

### **Studies turning up evidence critical of pay for performance**

Some of the literature reports problems for pay for performance programs. For instance, a mixed-methods study of New York City’s teacher bonus system found that the program did not have any effects on student academic achievement scores (Marsh et al., 2011). Fryer (2011), in a study of the same New York City program, reported statistically significant negative impacts on achievement scores in middle school math and English and lower graduation rates in implementation schools. However, Fryer (2011) failed to demonstrate any statistical significance regarding pay for performance impacting elementary student achievement or teacher retention. Kelly, Tejada-Delgado, and Slate (2008) determined superintendents to be more likely to provide non-financial incentives to teachers than financial ones, but the study was not designed specifically to determine superintendents’ views of pay for performance programs. Furthermore, Kelly et al. used

only survey data and did not follow-up with open-ended questions that might have allowed for greater understanding of the superintendents' views.

In a report analyzing the underlying theory of incentives including whether teachers changed their behavior when performance-based incentives were available in three controlled trials, Yuan et al. (2013) showed “teachers did not consider their programs as motivating” (p. 14). Another study found no evidence that students of teachers enrolled in the ProComp program had greater achievement gains than students of teachers not enrolled (Goldhaber & Walch, 2012). The results from early implementation of Chicago’s Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) failed to display evidence that student achievement or teacher retention was positively affected by TAP (Glazerman, McKie, & Carey, 2009). Similarly, Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Taylor, et al. (2009) provided an evaluation report of the TEEG as having no evidence of a positive effect overall on teacher turnover. However, Springer, Lewis, Podgursky, Ehlert, Taylor, et al. found the following:

The receipt and size of actual bonus awards had a strong impact on teacher turnover in the first cycle of TEEG; the probability of turnover fell as the size of the bonus award grew. However, many TEEG teachers received bonus awards so small that the program likely had a negligible or negative impact on their probability of turnover. (p. iii)

### **Conclusion for Pay for Performance Studies Based on Current Study Purpose**

Very few studies addressing pay for performance programs have reported perceptions of stakeholders in rich, descriptive detail through use of mixed method or

solely qualitative research approaches. Wells, Combs, and Bustamante (2012) conducted a mixed methods study to “explore teachers’ perceptions of their professional behaviors when they worked in schools that awarded team performance pay” (p. 95). Wells et al.’s research design included a survey with open-ended questions to determine teachers’ perceptions and found teachers perceived an increase in collaboration. Burns, Gardner, and Meeuwssen (2009) also used a mixed methods approach that included both surveys and interviews to determine teachers’ and principals’ attitudes about pay for performance and the pilot implementation of the REACH teacher incentive program in Texas’ Austin Independent School District. Although teachers reported the program did not hinder collaboration among colleagues, a majority of teachers did not believe the program effectively discerns what are effective versus ineffective teachers (Burns et al., 2009). Further, Marsh et al. (2011) used surveys, interviews, and site visits to focus on the outcomes and impact on student performance that the implementation of a New York City pay for performance program had. Marsh et al. reported mixed outcomes in which many of the participants in the qualitative portion of the study contradicted themselves multiple times during interviews when asked to respond to questions about bonus pay and whether it was a viable incentive.

Although mixed-methods studies have given some participants in pay for performance programs a voice, very few qualitative studies have been done on this topic. Researchers in England, Sweden, and India have conducted qualitative studies to evaluate teacher pay for performance programs. In England, Mahony, Menter, & Hextall (2004) used document analysis, interviews, and case studies to determine the emotional impact

of a new performance-based pay system on teachers. In Sweden, Lundstrom (2012) used interviews of teachers to determine their perceptions of a teacher pay for performance program and labeled the system counterproductive. However, in India, Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2011) used interviews as the primary data source and determined teachers had a positive opinion about linking pay to performance, which increased with exposure to a pay for performance program.

Even though the current literature does not conclusively support teacher pay for performance programs, districts continue to experiment with the development and implementation of them. One reason districts might implement teacher pay for performance programs is due to public opinion on the current teacher salary scale used by the majority of the public school districts in America (TNTP, 2014). The salary scale mainly formulated according to teacher experience and academic degree status rather than on teacher job performance (Hanushek, 2007). Politicians and others often wish to use market-based strategies as a way to recruit and retain teachers, but as the literature has shown, no one way to implement pay for performance is truly 100% effective. With the political pressures created by the federal government's interference in states' teacher appraisal systems, the importance of the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers remains particularly relevant.

### **Lack of Research Regarding Superintendents' Perceptions of Pay for Performance**

Much of the variation in pay for performance program evaluation outcomes might be attributable to school or district-level implementation and program design, suggesting a need for data from upper level administrators and stakeholders. Although studies have

highlighted the perceptions of principals and teachers about teacher pay for performance programs, the voices of superintendents do not appear in the literature. Wells, Combs, and Bustamante (2012) focused on teachers' perceptions about pay for performance programs, even though stakeholders including school board members and superintendents have not been heavily targeted for research. Superintendents, as key players in developing and implementing pay for performance programs, have their own perceptions of the credibility of such plans, yet their voices are absent from the discourse. Superintendents, as the school district leaders experienced with the implementation of pay for performance programs, could provide insight that might be used by other school districts' stakeholders interested in implementing performance-based pay in their own districts.

### **Conceptual Framework**

A theoretical framework including both Olivarez's (2013) ten functions of school districts and Lane and Hamann's (2003) effective policy implementation framework was used in order to study superintendents' perceptions of pay for performance. The ten functions of school districts (Olivarez, 2013) provide insight into the various operations a superintendent is tasked with overseeing. The ways in which superintendents determine the success of and make sense of pay for performance (research questions three and four) are directly related to their dynamic leadership role within school district functions. The policy implementation framework (Lane & Hamann, 2003) is a model of policy implementation that describes what is necessary for successful educational policy implementation. This framework is particularly relevant to this study for addressing the

first and second research questions that specifically focus on superintendents' perceptions of pay for performance during program implementation. It is important to understand how the implementation of a pay for performance program is situated within the 10 district functions to inform the way superintendents can think about pay for performance programs.

### **The Ten Functions of School Districts**

**Governance operations.** The superintendent is responsible for directing the governance of the school district and the processes of the management of district operations (Olivarez, 2013). The superintendent must ensure that the district is run in accordance with the Texas Education Code (Olivarez, 2013). A district's school board operations include guidelines that dictate how the superintendent and the board work together to implement its school district's instructional program (Olivarez, 2013).

**Curriculum and instruction.** The superintendent is responsible for providing the schools with a state-adopted curricula and the professional development required for teachers to successfully implement all curricula (Olivarez, 2013). Subjects' curricula guides with district-level adaptations and programs that address learning differences among populations are essential to the implementation of the district instructional program (Olivarez, 2013). Curricula that are tightly aligned with the standards tested on each of the annual statewide tests are used to enable students to receive the educational experiences necessary for academic achievement (Contino, 2012). Thus high-quality curricula might play a role in the success of a district's pay for performance program.

**Elementary and secondary campus operations.** The superintendent manages this function by overseeing the planning and supervision of student learning at all of a school district's campuses including traditional and non-traditional schools, such as dropout recovery centers, magnet schools, schools for pregnant and parenting students, and charter schools (Olivarez, 2013). Continual feedback across all disciplines is an essential component of this function (Olivarez, 2013). Site-based decision making teams develop the planning and monitoring of educational services with "consideration of special populations, including, but not limited to programs for students with limited English proficiency, special education needs, behavioral and/or conduct disorders, and learning differences such as dyslexia" (Olivarez, 2013, p. 21).

**Instructional support services.** State-required instructional supports that include counseling, academic, social, and psychological services and fall outside of the general curriculum are included in this school district function. Access to school library services and opportunities for students to be involved in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities all fall under the instructional support function (Olivarez, 2013). The instructional support services function encompasses wrap-around services for students and their families, such as health services, community outreach, and coordination with outside agencies for additional supports. This support function insures that districts provide resources for the appropriate development of the whole child. This function has become more critical in recent years as more students from homes of poverty attend the nation's schools (NCCP, n.d.).

**Human resources.** The human resources function encompasses all aspects of human capital management (Olivarez, 2013). Hiring staff, employee compensation, benefits, appraisals, and terminations fall within the human resources function of school districts (Olivarez, 2013). Specific policies and procedures insure compliance with federal employment guidelines, such as the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) as well as the Highly Qualified teacher and staff requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Olivarez, 2013). Structures for new employee induction and retention fall into this function (Olivarez, 2013).

**Administration, finance and business operations.** The administration, finance, and business operations function refers to the budget allocation and management of district financial resources (Olivarez, 2013). Superintendents actively address planning for a school district's future financial needs as well as maintaining the daily financial operations of the school district (Olivarez, 2013). Superintendents also oversee district income and expenditures daily, weekly, monthly, and annually because of having the ultimate responsibility for the district's fiscal security (Olivarez, 2013).

**Facilities planning and plant management.** This function involves maintenance and operation of existing district facilities as well as evaluating the need for new or renovated ones (Olivarez, 2013). When new construction is warranted, superintendents are involved in the selection of architects and contractors as well as the planning of buildings to meet the ever-evolving needs of K-12 educational facilities (Olivarez, 2013). The facilities planning and plant management function includes planning for increases or

decreases in student enrollment using demographic and other census-related projections to best utilize district resources (Olivarez, 2013).

**Accountability, information management, and technology services.** The accountability, information management, and technology services function “encompasses the related structures, and processes that integrate communication, data collection, and analyses, and administrative monitoring of all aspects of the organization addressing accountability for meeting both academic standards and federal and state compliance requirements” (Olivarez, 2013, p. 32). The ongoing collection and storage of multiple sources of data must be managed by the school district to address these mandates (Olivarez, 2013). Student information systems refer to electronic programs for maintaining detailed information on each student’s academic performance and demographic characteristics and are necessary for effective school district functioning.

**External and internal communications.** In order for school districts to be successful, effective communication is required (Olivarez, 2013). Internal communication refers to the structures and media in which all levels of district operations communicate within the organization (Olivarez, 2013). External communication involves providing information to and soliciting information from stakeholders outside of the school district, such as community members and parents. The superintendent often supervises department, such as public affairs, or central communications, that is responsible for disseminating positive information about school district operations to the public to while reducing any negative perceptions of the district found among the community’s stakeholders (Olivarez, 2013).

**Operational support systems—safety and security, food service, and transportation.** The operational support systems function of school districts supports the non-educational needs of students and staff (Olivarez, 2013). The planning and practicing of procedures for emergency events as well as implementing preventative safety measures in classrooms are integral parts of the safety and security aspects of this function (Olivarez, 2013). Planning and implementing the child nutrition program includes providing meals that meet federal nutrition guidelines and is a critical component of the operational support systems, because schools must have cafeterias for serving meals (Olivarez, 2013). The district bears the responsibility for ensuring students arrive to school on time and home safely through a transportation, or busing, program, which can be handled within the district or contracted to outside providers (Olivarez, 2013).

### **Effective Policy Implementation Framework**

Lane and Hamann (2003) developed a framework based on the “roll of the individual in the process of policy implementation” and the “understanding of the complex environment” of educational policy implementation (p. 4). Through these lenses of understanding, Lane and Hamann (2003) provided a theoretical framework that includes strategies to be used by policymakers and implementers. The framework provides a descriptive model to explain effective policy implementation. Form and content of the policy, policy communication, and policy implementation capacities are the three essential components of Lane and Hamann’s framework.

**Form and content.** Successful educational policy implementation must start with a policy that makes sense and is easy for stakeholders to understand (Lane & Hamann, 2003). The content of a policy should connect to or extend upon other reform efforts or initiatives in order to avoid a variety of interpretations (Lane & Hamann, 2003). The policy should also be justifiable so that teachers and others understand why implementing the policy is in the best interest of students (Lane & Hamann, 2003). When asked “why should we implement X policy,” the policy itself should provide the impetus for action (Lane & Hamann, 2003). The policy must also “be legitimate, in that the policy must be perceived as the credible and right thing to do” (Lane & Hamann, 2003). Finally, a successful educational policy must be integrated with other policies and practices related to school improvement initiatives (Lane & Hamann, 2003). In order for policies to have the characteristics of coherence, justifiability, legitimacy, and integration, flexibility allows for district-level adaptation (Lane & Hamann, 2003).

**Policy communication.** Policies can be communicated in a variety of ways, but most importantly, they should be “communicated in a way that respects the knowledge and situational expertise of the individuals being asked to implement it” (Lane & Hamann, 2003). Those who are expected to implement a policy should be allowed time and opportunities for sense-making with peers to develop a collective understanding of what they are being asked to implement (Lane & Hamann, 2003). Without this important step, individuals intuitively or deductively interpret policy expectations based on personal experience (Lane & Hamann, 2003). Both time and resources should be invested to insure stakeholders develop a collective understanding of policy components; relevant

resources must be provided to employees for reference during this process (Lane & Hamann, 2003). A policy intermediary might be used to facilitate discussions addressing policy content (Lane & Hamann, 2003).

Policy intermediaries carry the dual burden of policymaker and policy implementer while promoting theirs and others' understanding of a policy (Lane & Hamann, 2003). Oftentimes, a policy intermediary is someone who acts as a liaison between policy makers and those tasked with implementation (Lane & Hamann, 2003). For example, "between state departments of education and school districts, between districts and schools, or even in the school between the principal and classroom teachers" (Lane & Hamann, 2003, p. 20). Policy intermediaries effectively communicate policy objectives and craft stakeholders' views of the policy when possessing the four capacities described by Lane and Hamann (2003) as role awareness, systems and networks approach, building relationships, and contextualize understanding.

Policy intermediaries must understand they hold a dynamic role as an intermediary (Lane & Hamann, 2003). They require the ability to implement various strategies, depending on the situation and audience, as they facilitate the sense-making of the policy with stakeholders (Lane & Hamann, 2003). They maintain both an outsider's critical eye and an insider's credibility (Lane & Hamann, 2003). The actual strategies employed vary according to stakeholders, experiences, and local context, but the intermediary maintains a constant awareness of the dual role in the policy implementation process (Lane & Hamann, 2003).

Policy intermediaries must take a systems and network approach to leverage resources in complex educational systems (Lane & Hamann, 2003). Their understanding of district operations can be used to support school personnel in the implementation process (Lane & Hamann, 2003). Intermediaries with a systems and network approach can act as advocates for program implementers and provide valuable information to district or state leaders about how personnel are understanding and implementing the policy (Lane & Hamann, 2003).

Relationship building is another capacity effective policy intermediaries must possess (Lane & Hamann, 2003). The ability to build strong working relationships with other implementers at various levels of an organization “allows for the transmission and understanding of policy messages that would otherwise not occur” (Lane & Hamann, 2003, p. 23). The intermediary’s role as a supporter of policy implementation might elicit different reactions and responses from a classroom teacher than a state official would (Lane & Hamann, 2003). The ability of the intermediary to build relationships allows for credibility from implementers when messages are communicated (Lane & Hamann, 2003).

All policy intermediaries work highly contextualized circumstances and environments (Lane & Hamann, 2003). Understanding the local factors likely to influence policy allows intermediaries to remain credible among policy implementers (Lane & Hamann, 2003). Also being aware of district or state-level issues is equally as important to understanding of the local context (Lane & Hamann, 2003). By using the

capacities described by Lane and Hamann (2003), intermediaries fill the gap between top-down directives and local control.

### **Integration of Theoretical Frameworks**

The use of both Olivarez's (2013) and Lane and Hamann's (2003) frameworks might generate an opportunity for gaining a greater understanding of how each school district and its school superintendent function when interacting with the policy implementation constructs and the capacities of the superintendent as a policy intermediary. When superintendents implement a policy in a school district, the characteristics of effective policy implementation are in action within specific school district functions and the capacities of a policy intermediary are simultaneously interwoven throughout the dynamic leadership role of the superintendent within the ten functions. Figure 1 provides a composite image of how these frameworks could interact during policy implementation within a school district.



and creation of a plan for implementation. Once the form and content of the policy is developed, the plan is communicated to both employees within the district and to community stakeholders who are external to the district which. For this stage of policy implementation, the internal and external communications district function applies to the process. Depending on the type of policy implemented, other functions, such as curriculum and instruction or administrative, finance and business operations, could hold major roles in policy formation, content, and implementation. Specifically, with pay for performance programs, the financial sustainability of the initiative forms a primary concern for the future of the policy. The policy intermediary capacities required of superintendents include role awareness, systems and network approach, building relationships, and contextualize understanding during policy implementation and are expected to appear within the data provided by each superintendent in conjunction with evidence of overseeing each of the 10 functions of the school district.

### **Summary**

This chapter has provided a historical overview of the evolution of pay for performance programs in Texas and the federal legislation that has provided the impetus for new pay for performance programs. Evaluations of current and past pay for performance programs have not provided stakeholders with a clear answer as to whether these programs are meeting their stated objectives. The lack of qualitative research related to school superintendent perceptions of pay for performance programs was highlighted and a conceptual framework combining Olivarez's (2013) school district

functions and Lane and Hamann's (2003) effective policy implementation was described.

The following chapter includes the detail of the research methods followed in this study.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The federal government has given billions of dollars to states and school districts to develop programs to reward high quality teachers. Although the current research has provided mixed results when evaluating teacher pay for performance programs, districts continue to design and implement them. Absent from the discourse are the voices of school superintendents who have been involved in implementing teacher pay for performance programs. This study illuminated the perceptions of these important stakeholders and provided useful information to others who are considering designing and implementing a similar program. This chapter outlined the methodological approaches employed in this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe superintendents' perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs in their respective districts. For this study, teacher pay for performance was defined as a program implemented by a school district where teachers are offered monetary compensation based on student academic achievement scores (Gratz, 2009). Focusing on superintendents, as the leaders of school districts and with the decision-making ability to develop and implement pay for performance programs, provided opportunities to gain a better understanding of their unique experiences during pay for performance program implementation. The research questions were:

1. How do superintendents perceive teacher pay for performance programs in their districts?

2. How have superintendents' perceptions changed throughout the pay for performance program implementation?
3. How do superintendents determine the success of teacher pay for performance programs in their districts?
4. For superintendents, what is the essence of experiencing a pay for performance program?

### **Research Design**

Social constructivism is an epistemological approach that values the “subjective meanings of [the participants’] experiences-meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). The goal of social constructivism is to understand how individuals construct meaning from their life experiences (Creswell, 2013). This study seeks to understand how individuals make meaning of their experiences related to leading a district while implementing a pay for performance program.

This study followed a qualitative, phenomenological research design and to gain an understanding of participants who have all experienced the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), in this case, being a superintendent of a district that adopted a teacher pay for performance program designed to recruit and retain teachers. This design is particularly relevant to this study due to the fact that the body of literature has not deeply explored the perceptions of school superintendents who have been engaged in the implementation of teacher pay for performance programs.

The benefit of this qualitative study design is that it provides a detailed understanding of perceptions of leaders of districts whose voices have not yet been heard

in the current teacher pay for performance literature. Quantitative methods would be unable to describe the human experiences this research intends to produce (Moustakas, 1994). The ability of qualitative methods to “search for meanings and essences of experience rather than measurements and explanations” (Moustakas, 1994, p 21) is suited for this study because of the complexity of educational systems and the superintendents’ roles within them. The data is comprised of self-reported perceptions of participants to develop an in-depth understanding and rich, descriptive accounts of their lived experiences during the phenomena of implementing a teacher pay for performance program.

### **Participant Selection**

Criterion sampling was the primary method for participant selection (Creswell, 2013). This type of selection allows the researcher to select candidates who fit all of the specific study criteria. All of the participants selected to participate meet the following criteria for inclusion in the study: Participants were/are a superintendent of a public school district in Texas during the implementation phase of a teacher pay for performance program. By setting these criteria for participants, there was an attempt to gain data from as many participants as possible that have similar experiences with the pay for performance phenomenon in question. This method of sampling was most appropriate as these individuals are best suited to provide insight into the research questions asked (Maxwell, 2013). Although it was difficult to know how many participants would be “enough” in qualitative research, the concepts of sufficiency and saturation of information were used to determine when an appropriate level of participants has been

reached (Seidman, 2013). Sufficiency refers to the number of participants that would allow others who are not study participants to “connect to the experiences of those in it” (Siedman, 2013). Saturation of information is reached when the researcher begins hearing the same information already gleaned from participants (Siedman, 2013). A group of five superintendents who fit the study criteria were interviewed and sufficiency and saturation were achieved with this study sample.

### **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

#### **Interviews**

After the Institutional Review Board at The University of Texas approved the research design, individual interviews were used to collect data related to the research questions of this study. Interviews were selected as the primary data source for this phenomenological study because only by talking with individuals can one attempt to understand their constructions of the phenomena that they have experienced (Seidman, 2013). The study proposal initially included two semi-structured interviews. An initial interview and a second interview protocol focused on the construction of new insight after participants had an opportunity to reflect on the first interview process. Due to difficulties in scheduling on the part of the participants, the two protocols were combined to allow for one comprehensive interview. Each of the interviews was semi-structured allowing for specific questions to be asked of all participants but also for the conversational give and take, which often occurs between a qualitative researcher and an interviewee. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for data analysis purposes. An interview protocol was developed for the comprehensive interview.

Development of open-ended questions were aligned with the research questions of this study. The interview questions were piloted with two colleagues who have knowledge of the superintendency for review and credibility purposes. They scrutinized the interview protocol to make sure the questions made sense, were not leading, or showed researcher bias. This necessary step helped protect the participants from unintentionally encountering researcher beliefs. Questions were edited for the final study after the pilot review.

### **Journaling**

The researcher kept a journal to jot down notes, questions, and emerging themes as another form of data that was reviewed and referred to during the data analysis process. This reflective process was not concerned as much with the recording of information, but as a way to develop a better understanding of the topic of study (Maxwell, 2013). These memos were unedited in their infancy because writing as if able to communicate to others might hinder the process of true reflection (Maxwell, 2013).

### **Researcher Role**

The researcher is familiar with the methodology employed during this study through doctoral coursework in qualitative methods, and understands the importance of positionality in the qualitative research process. Although the researcher has not been a superintendent, she aspires to be one someday. She has also had extensive experience in teacher pay for performance programs both as a teacher and an administrator. The fact that she had insider knowledge provided a way to connect with interview participants who might have shared similar experiences with pay for performance. However, she had

to be aware of her biases and give careful consideration about how they could have shaped the analysis of the data (Maxwell, 2013). As Creswell (2013) describes, “To fully describe how participants view the phenomenon, researchers must bracket out, as much as possible, their own experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 81). Eliminating researcher bias is not a goal of qualitative research as the researcher is the primary instrument, but coping with bias through awareness is critical (Maxwell, 2013).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

#### **Coding**

After all interviews were conducted, Rev.com, a recording and transcription service, was used to provide transcripts of each session. The researcher then listened to them while taking notes to “develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). After reviewing all of the interviews, transcriptions were loaded into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. The data were analyzed by coding excerpts into both organizational and theoretical categories (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). Joseph Maxwell (2013) described the categories in the following way:

Organizational categories function primarily as bins for sorting data for further analysis. ... Theoretical categories [are] ones that explicitly identify the *content* of the person’s statement or action - what they actually did or meant. These latter categories can often be seen as subcategories of the organizational ones, but they are generally *not* subcategories that, in advance, you could have known would be significant, unless you are already fairly familiar with the kind of participants or setting you’re studying or are using a well-developed theory. (p. 107)

Organizational coding, also described by Saldaña (2016) as descriptive coding, proceeded with the use of initial codes related to the dynamic superintendent policy implementation framework and research questions one through three:

- Governance Operations
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Elementary and Secondary Campus Operations
- Instructional Support Services
- Human Resources
- Facilities and Plant Management
- Administration, Finance and Business Operations
- External and Internal Communications/Policy Communication
- Operational Support Systems—Safety and Security, Food Service, and Transportation
- Form and Content
- Perceptions Before Implementing Pay for Performance
- Perceptions During/After Implementing Pay for Performance
- Measures of Pay for Performance Success

These codes were an appropriate starting point to sort interview data into categories as the study desires to describe superintendents' experiences of leading districts through the lens of the ten functions of school districts (Olivarez, 2013) and the process of effectively implementing educational policies (Lane & Hamann, 2013). The final three codes were

related directly to perceptions of pay for performance and how superintendents measure the success of pay for performance programs (research questions one, two, and three).

Further data analysis used the process of holistic coding to develop codes related to the participants' experiences (Saldaña, 2016). After the first two rounds of coding, data were analyzed into theoretical codes "based on the researcher's understanding of what's going on" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 108). In summary, organizational codes were pre-determined by the researcher based on the theoretical framework and research questions to be used for the initial round of coding. Codes related to the actual experiences and perceptions of the subjects were developed during the second round of coding. During the final round of coding, the researcher developed overarching themes based on the individuals' perceptions of pay for performance.

### **Limitations**

First, the qualitative research design reduces the findings' transferability among all superintendents and all teacher pay for performance programs. Readers must determine if information gleaned is relevant to a similar context in another district to determine transferability (Hays & Singh, 2011). The data relied solely on superintendents' self-reported perceptions as part of producing an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences within the phenomenon of implementing a teacher pay for performance program. The scope of the research was limited to superintendents and did not provide information about other stakeholders' perceptions of pay for performance programs. Instead, the ultimate goal was to provide rich descriptions of the perceptions

of the selected participants who have all experienced leading districts with teacher pay for performance programs.

### **Delimitations**

This study was delimited in several ways. One such delimitation was focusing solely on Texas public school superintendents' perceptions and not those of teachers, school administrators, or others with school district leadership positions because the perceptions of superintendents have not yet been deeply explored by researchers. Interviews were conducted with only superintendents in Texas who have implemented pay for performance programs, and the results might not be transferrable beyond the context of Texas' schools. Only superintendents who have led a school district during any implementation phase of a pay for performance program were targeted among the delimitations of this study. Focusing solely on the implementation phase provided insight into the complex process of leading a school district through a substantial policy initiative, in this case, a pay for performance program. Some participants might or might not have directly developed the program, but all participants were school superintendents during some part of program implementation. Similarly, superintendents who became superintendents in a district after a pay for performance program ended were excluded from this study because they did not experience the phenomena of implementation of a pay for performance program and could not speak to the experiences related to the phenomenon.

## **Trustworthiness**

Precautions to protect the credibility of the study occurred to ensure the voices of the participants, and not that of the researcher, shine through in the findings. One such process involved conducting member checks both during the interviews and after data analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checks as asking for feedback from your participants about the conclusions you have developed as part of data analysis. By allowing the interviewees access to researcher thinking and conclusions, they were afforded the opportunity to confirm or clarify the research and ensure that what they meant was reflected in the findings.

Another important credibility precaution was specifically looking for negative cases in the data that did not align with the researcher's beliefs about the fidelity and effectiveness of teacher pay for performance programs. Maxwell (2013) stated:

The basic principle here is that you need to rigorously examine both the supporting and the discrepant data to assess whether it is more plausible to retain or modify the conclusion, being aware of all of the pressures to ignore data that do not fit into your conclusions. (p. 127)

Shedding light on, instead of concealing, data that did not fit nicely into conclusions allows readers and other researchers to trust the conclusions with greater ease.

Debriefing with peers provided an additional method to ensure trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2011). The researcher engaged other doctoral students, professors, and mentors in discussions about findings whereby they for offering suggestions and challenging conclusions (Hays & Singh, 2011).

## **Summary**

This chapter has introduced the methodological approach and specific methods employed in this study. The selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and specific trustworthiness concerns were addressed. Chapter 4 details the results of the study, and Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe superintendents' perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs in their respective districts. For this study, teacher pay for performance was defined as a program implemented by a school district through which teachers are offered monetary compensation based on student academic achievement scores (Gratz, 2009). The research conducted attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do superintendents perceive teacher pay for performance programs in their districts?
2. How have superintendents' perceptions changed throughout the pay for performance program implementation?
3. How do superintendents determine the success of teacher pay for performance programs in their districts?
4. For superintendents, what is the essence of experiencing a pay for performance program?

The findings generated by the data analysis associated with the study are organized into themes that emerged through qualitative data analysis techniques. This chapter also contains general descriptions of each pay for performance program as well as the perceptions of the superintendents who were involved with program implementation. The participants' characteristics and the descriptions of the pay for performance programs are next presented.

## Participants

In order to protect the participants and school districts included in this study, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, their genders were masked, and all identifying information about the school districts and some programs' specific characteristics were redacted from data analysis and reporting. General characteristics about the superintendents' tenures and school district types appear in Table 1. Because participants were recruited primarily by purposeful sampling and approached through informal gatekeepers, the sample is not necessarily representative of all superintendents who have implemented a pay for performance program for the teachers in their districts. However, because of the variation in superintendent tenure and district type, the data reported represents the perceptions of experiences in a range of contextualized circumstances.

Table 1

### *Participating Superintendents' Characteristics*

Pseudonym	Years of Experience as a Superintendent	Years of Experience with Pay for Performance	District Type
Dr. Gina Smith	15	3	Suburban
Dr. Michael Jones	5	3	Urban
Dr. Margaret Rodriguez	20	3	Urban
Dr. Steven Davis	10	7	Rural
Dr. Sandra Martinez	20	10	Suburban/Urban

## Pay for Performance Program Descriptions

Because school districts have the autonomy to create teacher pay for performance programs, pay for performance can look vastly different from district to district. None of the programs associated with this study are identical, including those based on a national model for the pay for performance structure. Three pay for performance programs in this study were developed under the superintendent who participated in the study. A summary of the programs appears in Table 2.

Table 2

### *Pay for Performance Programs' Characteristics*

District by Superintendent	Developed by Current Superintendent	Funding Type at Inception	Program Model Origination	On-going Currently
Gina Smith	No	Grant	Local	No
Michael Jones	Yes	Grant	Local	No
Margaret Rodriguez	No	Local	Local	Yes
Steven Davis	Yes	Grant*	National	Yes
Sandra Martinez	Yes	Grant*	National	Yes

*Note.* \* indicates a change in funding type during the program.

The pay for performance program in Dr. Gina Smith's school district was already underway when she became the superintendent. The program was part of a grant through the Texas Education Agency that paid teachers solely based on student achievement growth on state-mandated standardized tests. The teachers also had to maintain a 10% lower absence-from-work rate to be eligible for the payout. The pay for performance program is no longer operating in this district due to the ending of the grant.

Similarly, the program developed and implemented by Dr. Michael Jones was funded by a grant from the state. The program developed under Dr. Jones included teacher sign-on bonuses and payouts for students' achievement growth on state standardized tests. Teachers involved in this program also had to attend work at a rate equal to or above 90%. As was true for Dr. Smith's program, once grant funding ran out, the district discontinued the program.

Dr. Margaret Rodriguez became a superintendent in her district during the first year of the pay for performance program's implementation. The entire program was developed under her predecessor. The program in Dr. Rodriguez's district was 100% locally funded during the entire length of the program. In fact, it was the only program represented in this study for which local funding was the only revenue source. Another unique aspect of Dr. Rodriguez's program involved teacher scores under this system impacting the salaries of future years of employment rather than teachers simply receiving single payment bonuses once per year. Scores were calculated for each teacher based on students' perceptions measured through surveys, multiple measures of student academic achievement, and performance on the district's formal annual evaluation. The program was currently in its third year of implementation during the interview.

The pay for performance program in Dr. Steven Davis' school district was based on the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) model supported by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET). Teacher payouts were based on the annual performance evaluation using the TAP rubric, student achievement growth data linked to individual teachers, and school wide student achievement growth data. Teachers could

become paid mentor teachers or master teachers under the TAP program. Professionals in these positions received large stipends that further differentiated their salaries and provided them with advancement pathways beyond those available to teachers tracking into school counselor or administrator positions. The program was originally funded by the TIF grant but had continued through 100% support from local funds.

Dr. Sandra Martinez's school district partnered with NIET to use the TAP model of pay for performance. Like Dr. Davis's program, Dr. Martinez's program used both individual teacher and school-wide student achievement data and performance evaluations to determine teachers' payouts, although the weighting of the payout categories differed from school to school. Teachers could also move into mentor or master teacher positions. The TIF grant was the original funding source of this program, but the program had continued through 100% support from local funds. Unlike Dr. Davis's program, this pay for performance program only operated in seven schools throughout the district.

Finally, an important finding about the programs' ongoing statuses was each district's origination for the program model. Two of two national (TAP) models were ongoing at the time of the interviews. One of three locally developed models were ongoing at the time of the interviews. Interestingly, the two TAP models were ongoing at a rural district and a suburban/urban district, while the two discontinued programs had been implemented at a suburban and an urban school district.

## **Findings for Research Question 1: Perceptions of Teacher Pay for Performance Programs**

Two themes emerged from the perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs provided by the participants. The themes emerged from the participants' desire to reward teachers and to be innovative. Those two themes are expressed in this section.

### **Desire to Reward Teachers**

All five superintendents in this study spoke about wanting to use pay for performance as a way to reward teachers. Dr. Smith was not overly excited about continuing to participate in a pay for performance program when she became the superintendent of her district and inherited the program, but she knew participation in the program was the only way to provide financial incentives to her teachers. Dr. Smith explained:

I didn't disagree with the rationale, but it's money that's available for our staff so we ought to participate. And I didn't disagree with that. In other words, the state had set that money aside specifically for that purpose. The only way to get that into your staff's pockets was to participate. I guess I saw it through a lens that I wanted ... these were dollars that were out there, and I wanted to do my best to get it in my pockets of my staff.

Dr. Jones echoed a similar sentiment when he said, "Would I like to pay teachers who consistently have an excellent result more? Yes. I'm not sure we know how to do that legitimately." Dr. Rodriguez stated that she initially believed that moving forward with a pay for performance program was in the best interest of teachers. However, that

due to the complexity of the program, Dr. Rodriguez said, many issues arose throughout implementation:

I wanted it to be fair. I want to know who the good teachers are, and I want to reward them. If you can move the needle, I want to do that. So, my initial perceptions were, “Yeah, this is the right thing to do,” but then the devil’s in the details, and there are a lot of details. I learned that there are a lot of unintended consequences of trying to do something at this big of a scale.

Dr. Davis believed strongly about having multiple ways for teachers to receive bonus money and noted that student growth on standardized test scores was only one way for teachers to earn a payout. Dr. Davis said:

It’s not just paying somebody for test scores. This kid scored this much. It’s also improving teacher performance. And we can see that by their evaluations. Test scores are just 33% of the puzzle. Trying to be inclusive of the whole campus and bringing them all together by rewarding the campus, as a whole, if they succeed. That’s what I like about this system. It’s not just based on student test scores. There are other avenues in order to benefit and to be successful.

Similarly, Dr. Martinez expressed a desire to differentiate teacher pay even though she didn’t believe that teachers were necessarily motivated to perform by the program incentives. Dr. Martinez explained:

Do I think the money is a motivator for teachers to perform and get student performance? No, but it’s nice to be able to pay them more money, especially in our schools, where it’s difficult to work. I want teachers to make more money. I

do not believe that pay for performance is an incentive for a teacher to get more performance. I believe that teachers who perform and who cause students to perform and who have a laser focus on academic achievement as our number one job will do it because it's what they do. I love the idea of paying them more money as a reward for having that growth.

In fact, Dr. Martinez's desire to pay teachers more money was her primary reason for bringing the TAP model to her district as follows:

The reason I was willing to work with TAP, other than I like the instructional model: I think there's a great deal of value there, but my motivation for bringing TAP to the district was to have some money to pay my very hard-working teachers as much as we could possibly pay them.

None of the superintendents in this study are satisfied with the standard way of paying teachers based on years of experience and the degrees they hold. All the superintendents interviewed wanted to get more money to their teachers, particularly their teachers who get the greatest student outcomes. This drive to find additional ways to pay teachers led the superintendents to explore, or continue, pay for performance programs in their districts.

### **Innovative**

Four of the five superintendent participants viewed developing pay for performance programs to be innovative by doing something that had not been tried before. Dr. Smith asserted that she was interested in trying something different, so she was hopeful that the program would be a success. She expressed that the idea of

performance-based compensation being aligned with her primary decision-making process in the following response:

Well, I think I wanted to experiment, so I think I went into it with an open mind. Because I used the Baldrige framework as a filter that I screen all my decision making through. There's a part in the Baldrige framework about setting compensation including performance systems linked to compensation. So, I believe that I had an open mind because I kind of wanted it to work.

Likewise, Dr. Jones was excited to experiment with pay for performance even though he was not fully convinced that it would provide meaningful change. Dr. Jones explained:

Oh, for me it's fun, 'cause I love stuff like that. I like trying new and innovative things. I think that's one of the problems in our business is that we don't really innovate. We just shuffle the chairs. I was really happy to try different things and see what worked. There's no magic bullet, you've gotta keep trying things. I was never convinced it was a viable model, but I wanted to see. And I don't mean our specific model, I mean pay for performance in general. If that would impact outcomes in education. So, I was skeptical if it would work.

Further, Dr. Rodriguez expressed the idea of being an innovator, but being the first to try something no one else has done was not without its challenges. Dr. Rodriguez clarified:

I think that we're still a pioneer. We're still figuring it out. The pioneers get all the arrows in the back, and the people that [sic] follow learn from our mistakes. I

think that it's very important work. These reformers are always looking for a quick fix, "If we just do this, everything else will be taken care of." It's not that. And while I'm proud to be involved in it and figuring it out, I'm also proud of our team that are making sense of it and making it work. We don't want to go back to the old way, but there's this whole concept of recruitment of teachers, retention of teachers, and development of teachers, and how does this play in to that.

Dr. Davis expressed pride in being a part of a program that is not the norm in the educational arena. He felt he had to do something drastic to enact changes in his district due to the number of struggling schools and responded:

Sometimes you have to be, you know, they call it innovative, but you have to be willing to take risks. This was something that was completely different. Even other districts today when they hear performance pay, that's something that maybe is not expected. ... When this came across my desk, I saw it as maybe a tool or just ... we needed to do something different. The first couple of years, we were struggling. We had two unacceptable campuses. The others weren't doing great.

With the current state of education, superintendents felt the need to do something different to positively impact their schools. For four of them in this study, pay for performance was perceived as an avenue of innovation and school transformation. They felt invigorated by being able to try something in their districts that hadn't been done before. Over time, their perceptions of these programs evolved.

## **Findings for Research Question 2: Perception Changes Throughout Teacher Pay for Performance Programs**

A total of ten themes existed in the data regarding the participants' perceptions during and after implementation of their respective teacher pay for performance programs. Each of those themes are discussed in turn here. The first six themes reflect the effects of teacher pay for performance on six of the ten functions of school districts. The next four themes address the challenges of teacher pay for performance. Finally, the impact on the superintendents is presented in this section.

### **Effect of Teacher Pay for Performance on the Ten Functions of School Districts**

Although superintendents were not asked to rank the impact of their teacher pay for performance system on the ten functions of school districts, based on their responses, the researcher ascertained that the programs had the greatest impact on Human Resources, Administration, Finance and Business Operations, and External and Internal Communications. Governance and Operations, Curriculum and Instruction, and Instructional Support Services followed as also being perceived by superintendents as being impacted by the pay for performance programs.

**Human resources.** The human resources department in school districts is responsible for staffing the district with qualified personnel as well as handling employee relations. When issues arise with pay for performance programs in the form of employee grievances, the human resources department facilitates resolutions. This department is also responsible for teacher evaluation systems that can be a component of pay for performance programs. Because of these roles, superintendents work closely with the

human resources department when developing pay for performance programs as well as during crises.

During the development of the program in Dr. Smith's district, "Most of the discussion or debate [about the program] was hammered out and taken to the human resources department." When asked about the role of the human resources department in his district, Dr. Jones focused on the need for additional staff and asserted the importance of working very closely with this department. Dr. Rodriguez reported that the human resources department played the largest role during the pay for performance program in her district as follows:

Well, human resources by far was the most, because they're the ones that had to design the system, implement it, work with the teachers and the principals, have the rubrics, and have the calibration sessions. So human resources carried it on its shoulders.

Similarly, Dr. Davis asserted that human resources was instrumental in "finding the right teachers" and "conveying [the program intricacies] before we hire them to make sure they're a good fit." Because the program in Dr. Martinez's district was not district wide, the human resources department had to navigate having multiple teacher evaluation rubrics as well as the process for hearing teacher grievances involving the program. Dr. Martinez conveyed the following:

Definitely human resources was impacted, because the schools where we have the TAP program—there are some things that operate a little bit differently—so HR had to run a dual system and remember which campus someone was on when

answering a question or when dealing with something. Then, of course, they're also the piece of the organization that first dealt with any grievances or unhappiness that came from it.

**Administration, Finance, and Business Operations.** The pay for performance programs in this study were funded by local funds, grant funds, or a combination of grant and local funds. In Dr. Jones's district, the program was funded by TIF grant funds. When asked why the program ended, Dr. Jones said, "Finance was a huge piece of it, just trying to find the money." The pay for performance program in Dr. Rodriguez's district was funded by local funds which created additional problems because the previous superintendent created a model that was unsustainable as described below:

This was all local, general operating funds that had to be redirected and going from a traditional longevity pay to this new system. There were gonna be winners and losers, and they tried not to have many losers at the front end, so they made it very rich the first year. But then how do you sustain that goal? It had a huge impact financially....We were 100 assistant principals over-formula, and so that had an impact on the finance. We had to work our way out of that.

The funding for the pay for performance program in Dr. Davis's district was initially funded by grant funds and is currently funded locally. Once the state reinstated some of the money lost in a budget shortfall, Dr. Davis decided to set aside money specifically for the program instead of using it for other district operations. Although the money is budgeted every year, Dr. Davis continues to seek additional grant funding to supplement the program and discussed these efforts:

Everybody knows that we're going to set a million dollars in our budget for pay out. It's already been done. We are applying for a TIF grant, another one. If we get that grant, and we'll find out next month; well, it's a 50% match. Everything that we're putting in, the million dollars, we'll get a half-million dollars back.

That's going to be a great asset to us.

Dr. Martinez spoke about the issues of operating a program with grant funding due to the time limits on the grant as follows: "Then, just logistically, the next most impact would've been business operations, especially before we were familiar with exactly how to do it, because it was grant funding, so it was in-and-out money." Because a primary component of pay for performance is funding, it is not surprising that the superintendents in this study acknowledged the significant impact pay for performance programs have on business operations.

**External and Internal Communications.** Four of the five superintendents in this study stated that external and internal communications had an impact on the pay for performance program in their districts. Dr. Rodriguez stated that the pay for performance program "had a huge impact on internal and external communications, because of how we messaged this, and how the teachers felt about it, and how we told the public about it." Dr. Davis regarded the communication to stakeholders about the program as successful and conveyed the following:

I think if you talk to a bus driver or anybody here, they know a little bit about TAP. That's something that the community is aware of. They really embraced it. Many of our business personnel, they also know about it. They seem to be really

supportive. On the internal communications, that was something I always do. I do a message on Fridays, just a little video, just to let everybody know what's going on. And with something like this, I wanted to make sure everybody had a good understanding. We did go campus to campus, and we did this every year, explaining to everybody this is going to be the payout for this year, [and] this is the way it looks. There was one year where we were doing \$4,000 when it was the grant, and we reduced it to \$3,[000] when we didn't have the grant. We had to really explain that to everybody.

On the other hand, Dr. Martinez dealt with confusion among stakeholders because of a lack of communication about the program. Teachers' expectations for payouts were not aligned with the actual program specifics as reported by Dr. Martinez:

Our experience was—there were some rocky moments, and the rocky moments, as most things are—from communication that wasn't as clear possibly as it should've been. I'm not necessarily blaming anybody, but in the beginning when it was all new to us and we began rolling it out, there would be statements made such as, "And some teachers can make as much as \$10,000 more."

That presented the idea that if the kids do really well, you make \$10,000 more, and that was not the case. The structure of TAP is that we have positions that people can interview for, and they're master teachers. They don't have a schedule to teach children. They teach teachers and work with teachers and model lessons, and the pay for that job is \$10,000, in addition to a teacher pay. Then, the next level would be mentor teachers, and they have a \$3,000 in addition to it, but

then the stipend that's paid for student performance to all teachers ranges based on the amount of growth. I remember the first year. I had one campus that the most anyone was paid was \$4,000, which was very good unless you were expecting \$10,000. Then, I had another campus where I think the most anyone was paid was maybe \$850. It was because that campus got a very minimum amount of growth in accordance with what they were supposed to get, so on that campus, the money was not as impactful as it could've been across the district, because people were expecting more, because of the way the program had been rolled out.

Dr. Martinez relied on the marketing department of her school district to help re-brand and improve communications after the first year to improve teacher understanding of the program. For these four superintendents, internal and external communication played a huge role in the stakeholder perceptions of the pay for performance programs, both positively and negatively.

**Governance Operations.** Superintendents are responsible for the governance of the school system in conjunction with their districts' school boards. When embarking on pay for performance program development and implementation, it is important to communicate with and have the support of the school board throughout the process. Dr. Smith described the impact of her district's pay for performance program on governance operations as her wanting to keep the school board well informed. Dr. Smith did not have to convince the board to participate in the pay for performance program because the

previous superintendent had already done so. On the other hand, Dr. Jones had to convince the board that they needed to be innovators in the educational community.

[My job was] convincing the board that this is something we've gotta try. This is an innovation and half the board thought, "Yes," and half the board said, "They're gonna, teachers are gonna fight." So that was the political work that had to be done. I think they had some legitimate questions and concerns, but I don't think, in general, they understood what it entails. And then, I think, initially the union, at first, was quite non-committal and not wanting to go down that road. In fact, I'm pretty sure that was the case. They would influence the board.

Dr. Rodriguez had a similar situation convincing the school board to support the program because:

Of course, governance operations was huge. This board was completely split. Most of them loved it, thought it was a great idea, much better than just paying for somebody for how long they've been living and showing up to work and breathing. But then others were very much against it, and they used all of their political capital to fight it. So, it had a tremendous governance upheaval on the board.

Although two of the superintendents in this study had difficulties convincing their school boards to support a teacher pay for performance program, all of the superintendents were eventually successful in gaining support and implementing their respective pay for performance programs.

**Curriculum and Instruction.** Three of the superintendents in this study stated curriculum and instruction was impacted by the teacher pay for performance program, but for different reasons. For Dr. Rodriguez, the department was practically eliminated because of the amount of money required to finance the pay for performance program and described the situation as follows:

Curriculum instruction, that's kind of a sad situation there. This thing [the pay for performance program] was the end-all, be-all. So, the district had cut out all professional development just so we could afford this thing. So, it was an oversimplified mantra that you have a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every school. But what happens if they're not? What if they're novice and new? There were no tools for the principals to make these teachers better. So, a lot of the teachers said, "I'm outta here. I'm bailing. I'm going somewhere else where I can get some help." So, that had a big impact.

The pay for performance program in Dr. Martinez's district relied heavily on a teacher evaluation. Dr. Martinez reported that the curriculum and instruction department "was affected a little bit, but not as much as some other areas. The greater issue arose with the fact that teachers within the district were being evaluated by two different systems." Dr. Martinez discussed how "C&I adjusted somewhat":

Our curriculum did not change. Some of the methods changed a little bit. Some things merged, but we, after that first year of using the system, we came together, and it really did not have anything to do with the pay piece. It had to do with the TAP rubric and the appraisal of teachers, but we jumped at the opportunity to be a

pilot district for the new teacher appraisal system, and so we dumped PDAS as soon as we could, and we went to the new system, which basically is modeled after the TAP program. Any issue that we had there with any conflict with C&I related to teacher appraisal went away.

Dr. Davis used the curriculum and instruction department to support the implementation of the pay for performance program in his district “because we wanted to make sure we were using research-based techniques. We wanted to be contemporary.” Dr. Davis noted that “the things that we conveyed to teachers to make sure that they were well prepared. They were going to be successful. And that they really believed in what they were doing.”

**Elementary and Secondary Campus Operations.** Two superintendents, Dr. Davis and Dr. Rodriguez, indicated that instructional support services were heavily impacted by the teacher pay for performance program. However, the two superintendents’ descriptions of instructional support services were more aligned to the definition of elementary and secondary campus operations in the ten functions of school districts model. Dr. Rodriguez described how the way the instructional support services personnel in the schools operated completely changed following the implementation of the pay for performance program:

Because how the principals and how the coaches and how they all did their work was completely changed. One of the best things that happened in this system is that principals were required to be in the classrooms all the time. So that’s a great thing. The negative attribute is having to retrain your workforce. The fact that so

many teachers are young and the fact that there's an art and science to learn about teaching. You can't just automatically become a great teacher. There are a few people, maybe 5% of the teachers, are naturals and they're good no matter what, in spite of us. But others have to learn the art and science of teaching, and we have so many new ones. Are they in the right or the wrong schools when they're learning? And the fact that all resources were spent on making this successful at the exclusion of other things that were important to the district. Those were data points that we really looked at. And some of these things were unreasonable.

Dr. Davis spoke about how the district's central office role in the operation of schools changed based on the pay for performance program:

We do have Master Teachers, but our district office because what we do is district wide is committed. Like right now, once a week, they go visit campuses, they go into classrooms. They give feedback. Once a week they meet with the district TLT team. Those are your principals, your assistant principals, and your Master Teachers. And they talk about the data, what's going on, where do we need to improve? Where does our focus need to be? Like say one week, it might be questioning. Okay, let's give teachers some strategies on higher order questioning. That's really a focus this week. Checking for understanding might be the next week. How do we know students are learning? Giving teachers some strategies. It might be popsicle sticks, or we have technology the active votes. That they're incorporating those types of things. Those are the basic stuff. And then once we get into the complex things of strategies, for example, we have one

called the [name redacted] program, where the university comes. They send professors, and they work with our teachers as well. And talking about best practices, and they model and so forth. Our district team is really, really—I'm going to say—involved. They're in the mix. They're in the trenches, in the classrooms.

Even though this function was explicitly addressed by two of the five superintendents, they perceived that elementary and secondary campus operations was significantly impacted by their district's pay for performance program. Although it could be inferred that all ten functions of school districts may have been impacted by teacher pay for performance programs, the six represented in the data were perceived to have been impacted most substantially.

### **Teacher Pay for Performance as a Fluid Program**

All five superintendents who participated in this study asserted that even the best pay for performance models are not without issues and that it is important to address these items as they arise and make changes to the program's design when appropriate. Dr. Smith involved the staff each year to address issues that had arisen during program implementation and described this process:

It went through multiple, I guess, variations. Because I think almost every year the human resource department was working with the committee to renegotiate the terms of the coming year. I don't know if that was occurring before I got there. So, I implemented that. That is, we are going to do this; we're going to do it

in a way that we involve the staff. We aren't just going to make an arbitrary decision here at central office.

Dr. Jones believed that involving stakeholders and the teacher's union in program development and during implementation helped the district avoid serious issues. When items needed to be considered, the district committee discussed and addressed them, which led to "relative to other districts, we had very, very few problems," which Dr. Jones attributed to it being:

Collaborative going in, and we worked so closely with the union throughout. And then when there were problems with figuring things out, we would meet and regroup immediately. I'm sure there were some initial implementation issues. What if the person left in the middle of the year? Those [departures] became issues as we went along, and we just worked through them.

For Dr. Rodriguez, an issue arose during the first year of implementation that involved the process for achieving the highest teacher ranking. Dr. Rodriguez shared that the program changed during each year of implementation as follows:

When it first started, they would be nominated by their principal, and they would have certain metrics to get in. Now that we're implementing, it has kind of evolved. We're still refining some of the issues. Now, if you had all the money, if you could print all the money in the world, you'd have less issues. We don't have that, and that's a necessary by-product of how this thing works.

Because the original program design in Dr. Rodriguez's district involved the performance of students on a variety of tests, teachers and administrators worried about excessively testing students for the sake of the pay for performance program:

So we've had to modify those [tests]. We now have reduced the number of our own tests. So, we've lessened those. We have fewer benchmark tests. So, we still survey the students in a random sampling of some of them. So, we've had to back off [from implementing] some of the things that were so aggressive that created such an upheaval in the organization. I'm glad that the board has allowed us to fix a few things that didn't make sense from the initial design. We'll continue to revise it. Hopefully, it makes more sense now, and it's more balanced than it was when it first started.

In Dr. Davis's school district, minor things have had to be adjusted each year. Staff members meet to make changes to the program, as Dr. Davis discussed:

There are some rules that are tweaked from year to year. We get together as a staff. We do involve some teachers, and say, "Look, let's make some changes." Like this last year, if you were a master teacher, you have to interview every year. One of the things we did, we said, if you make, I think it was, a 3.5 on your evaluation, then you don't have to re-interview for the position. That way they're not on pins and needles. If you think about it, \$10,000 is a big stipend. And every year you're worried about losing it; I mean, it's not a good feeling. We wanted to make sure if they're really doing a good job and they have a really steady score above the norm, then they don't have to re-interview.

Likewise, Dr. Martinez emphasized that the intricacies of her pay for performance system required continuous examination “because every action you take causes something else to happen. The program is dynamic and continually changing.” As a result, Dr. Martinez said the teacher pay for performance program:

Should always be revisited and looked at and tweaked. It’s an ever-changing, ongoing, moving game. It’s that Jenga game. If you pull this piece out, you’ve got to put something else in, and does this motivate, or does this sustain? What’s more valuable than what? It has to be adjusted as times change. We have to think about things like: do we want to pay extra for time, for skills, for certification, for performance?

The five superintendents in this study agreed that pay for performance programs had some issues arise, but they reported that having structures in place for addressing issues with pay for performance program implementation and design was important. They also emphasized the importance of involving stakeholders in the adjustments to their pay for performance program guidelines as a best practice.

### **Challenges with Teacher Pay for Performance**

Each of the superintendents interviewed for this study cited various challenges were involved with implementing a teacher pay for performance program. Five sub-themes of fairness, complicated, market-based practices in a nonprofit environment, scarce resources, strain on teachers, and unintended consequences represent the challenges with teacher pay for performance. This section details their perceptions of these implementation hardships.

**Fairness.** Two of the five superintendents, Dr. Smith and Dr. Martinez, interviewed for this study cited developing a plan that was perceived by teachers as being fair. They found that perception to be a major implementation hurdle to overcome. Dr. Smith found that, overall, the program was not worth all of the discord it caused amongst staff as follows:

It was a challenge every year. I'm not going to lie: There was a general perception that, yes, it was good to bring in this additional money, but it was a challenge to make it seem fair. It just seemed like we were spending more time trying to justify the fairness of it, in a non-profit environment, than it was worth, quite frankly. So, then, you're trying to make this equal to all these campuses when one is a 20% low socioeconomic and another one is a 60% low socioeconomic. It takes a lot of work to even consider that.

Dr. Martinez noted that her staff did not understand how a school with higher achievement scores could earn less money than a school with lower achievement scores. Because the payouts were based primarily on student achievement growth, the data from the pay for performance program did not mirror the data from the state's academic accountability system. Dr. Martinez described the problem:

We rolled it out a little bit unrealistically, and then the other glitch was because the data that came from NEIT, and the way that it was structured did not necessarily match up with the way that the state rolled out what was then AEIS, so it would be: "Well, why can they get money, and they're just acceptable, not even recognized, but we're recognized and we got less money?" It was because

the money was based strictly on the growth instead of the actual achievement, but after that first year, that worked out, people were pleased with it. It became the norm.

Therefore, Dr. Smith and Dr. Martinez adjusted how their district personnel communicated the pay for performance payout system which helped clear up confusion among staff members for future payout years.

**Complicated.** During their interviews, both Dr. Smith and Dr. Jones mentioned that the pay for performance programs in their districts were complicated. Dr. Smith stated that the school board members had difficulty determining how to add in a performance pay measure in her contract.

I just remember saying, “Well I’ll tell you, if that’s the case then let’s get it in my contract ... let’s build something that goes into my contract.” Well, they couldn’t agree to what the right metrics were for me. So, then I said, “All right, so you can’t do that for me, but you want me to go do that for the staff. If it’s that complicated that y’all can’t agree, then how do you think it’s any less complicated ... it’s even more complicated ‘cause you’re just talking about the aggregation of all these scores.”

Dr. Smith found it interesting that the school board members could not determine how to add in stipulations for pay for performance into her contract even though the board members wanted her to develop a system that was fair for each of the district’s individual campuses.

Dr. Jones said that trying pay for performance at a few turnaround schools was better than trying to implement a program districtwide due to the complexity of the system as follows:

It's too hard to manage on a large scale until you really work through all those kinds of issues, and you can answer all those "what if" questions and the unintended consequences of your plan, or the domino effect that you didn't foresee. So, I think it's foolish to try and do something on a large scale of that nature cause it's complex.

The complicated nature of pay for performance required extensive planning and agreement among decision makers and stakeholders. Implementation on smaller scales, such as in turnaround schools, appeared to be a way to reduce complexity for new programs in one urban district.

**Market-based practices in a nonprofit environment.** Four out of the five superintendents interviewed for this study brought up market-based practices in education. However, not all of them agreed on the effects market-based strategies, such as a pay for performance program, have on school systems. Dr. Smith reported using market-based principles in a non-profit environment as impractical:

You're sticking a methodology that marginally works in the for-profit world, and you're injecting it into the non-profit world. And you're thinking that it's going to work. I think about Papa John's Pizza, and that's for-profit. Their slogan is "better ingredients, better pizza." Well, we don't say, "better students, better results." We get whatever students. Whoever shows up. So, you can't use the for-

profit mind set in this. The kids that we have are the kids that we have. One of our campuses is completely different than another campus.

Dr. Jones shared a similar sentiment regarding the students, but thought it was appropriate to use market-based strategies such as differentiating incentive pay based on the more-difficult-to-fill positions:

In industry, you can control the inputs. In our business, the inputs are the children and you can't control who comes to your door, and you are obligated to everyone who does come. It's not the widget factory. Hopefully not. We also pay more for the hard to fill positions, so science and math teachers got more incentive than say an elementary third grade teacher. So, it was market driven in that regard, education market driven.

Dr. Davis believed paying teachers based on their performance was appropriate and similar to how they would be paid in the business world. Dr. Davis expressed the sentiment:

If I'm a third-year teacher, it's going to take me, let's say, 20 years to make \$10,000 based on [the current] scale. Well, why not give them the \$10,000 now, if they're performing as well as this teacher over here. I mean, that's the way I see it. It's kind of, if you look at the business world, it's pretty much structured that way; where the ones that perform, they get paid more. Using that model, I think has been advantageous for us. The ones that don't like it, they go to other places.

Dr. Martinez reported that school districts can borrow practices from industry, but not all market-based strategies are appropriate for schools. Dr. Martinez indicated a

preference to focus on other ways to recruit and retain teachers based on what motivates them to enter the teaching profession and explained:

It's almost comical to me that very successful businesspeople who understand things that I couldn't even begin to read in a book can think that they can impose upon a public service market the business market model. There are definitely some things we can borrow, but it isn't the same thing. That's why I think it's so important to refer back to theory on organizational health, on motivation of people who choose to become public servants, on those who choose a career based on their heart, not their checkbook, and look for value in everything we can offer. I'm constantly thinking about it because the market is tough. For example, we have a very large second-language learner population. I have a lot of teachers in bilingual ed[ucation], and we pay a \$3,000 stipend for being bilingual. [Name redacted] ISD is next door. They pay a \$5,000 stipend, but they have 20% of the bilingual teachers that I have to have, so they can pay more money because they need fewer teachers. I have to find other ways to keep my teachers here because I can't raise that to \$5,000. I would have to cut something out.

Four of the five superintendents agreed that using market-based or market share strategies in a non-profit or school environment was not feasible. The superintendents recognized that pay for performance needed to be implemented with consideration for organizational health and teachers' motivations for remaining in education.

**Scarce Resources.** All five superintendents in this study made mention of the scarcity of resources for funding a pay for performance program. Dr. Smith noted that

even though the money for payouts for his district's pay for performance program was set aside by the state for that specific purpose, stakeholders viewed the money as a scarce resource that would have been better used elsewhere:

I felt like in a non-profit environment. There was this perception that these were scarce resources. If this wasn't going to this, then we could have it to buy books or we could have it to buy this or that or the other.

Dr. Jones spoke about how after the grant money was gone for his district's pay for performance program, the district would not be able to sustain the program because "it was almost cost prohibitive" leading to questions about "how long were you willing to invest or could you continue to invest in that? And what we really needed to do was expand it and we really didn't have the funds to do that." Similarly, Dr. Rodriguez's program was so expensive that her predecessor had cut out entire departments to fund the program. Dr. Rodriguez had to change the system slowly to add back necessary supports throughout the district:

This thing was the end-all be-all. So, the district had cut out all professional development just so we could afford this thing. So, it was an oversimplified mantra that you have a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every school. But what happens if they're not? What if they're novice and new? There were no tools for the principals to make these teachers better. Now, if you had all the money, if you could print all the money in the world, you'd have less issues. We don't have that, and that's a necessary byproduct of how this thing

works. It kind of evolved. I think it's still better than the straight longevity system, but it's not a panacea, and it's not easy.

Dr. Davis planned for the longevity of his district's pay for performance system by setting aside money once the state gave districts back some of the money that had been cut in previous years. Instead of using that money to fund other programs or salaries, he chose to continue funding of the pay for performance program once the initial grant funding ended as follows:

Well, what happened was, I think it was 2010, when we got cut \$5,000,000. Then we got the TIF grant. It was during that time that we were reducing funds. Then, about three or four years later, maybe it was the next session, the legislature decided to put the money back, or some of it back. During that time what I did is, instead of giving that money all back to teachers, I took a million dollars of the \$2-million we received and said this [money] is going to be our payout. When the grant is over, we'll be able to sustain that.

If the school district were to receive another TIF grant, Dr. Davis was not in favor of using the funds to increase the program payouts to teachers because the funding is not guaranteed for the long run. Nonetheless, Dr. Davis reported:

We are applying for a TIF grant, another one. If we get that grant, and we'll find out next month; well, it's a 50% match. Everything that we're putting in, the \$1 million, we'll get a half million dollars back. That's going to be a great asset to us. One of the things what I've noticed is that teachers are concerned with the basic salary structure. [Name redacted] pays 51, we pay 48. And sometimes I look

at that, even though we give \$3,000 in payout. But sometimes as teachers, they don't process that [amount]. If we get the grant, we might, let's say, give a thousand dollars to their base salary, so that's something they can count on. We'll probably wind up doing that with part of the funds if we can get them. What happens if you increase the payout, then you got to think, "Okay the grant is for 5 years." Well, what happens in 5 years? That's where a lot of districts go wrong. When you get a grant, that's like seed money. And if it's something that's good for kids, you want to try to find a way to sustain it. If I were to add more money into the payouts, I wouldn't be able to sustain it unless the state gave us more money. My thinking is we got to find ways that we can sustain the program.

Dr. Martinez spoke about how her program is supported by local funds now that the grant has run out, but it is a constant struggle to continue funding it. She said, "We're locally funding it. In all honesty, we are probably going to have to slowly back off of that funding, yet at the same time, find ways to differentiate pay across the district." Although all of five superintendents referred to the scarcity of funding for their pay for performance programs, only Dr. Davis found a way to continue funding the program in its entirety without having to scale down the program or discontinue it completely.

**Strain on teachers.** Both Dr. Jones and Dr. Rodriguez mentioned the strain their programs placed on teachers. In Dr. Jones's district, the pressure to increase student academic achievement performance and turnaround schools substantially was so great that some teachers chose to leave the profession, even after they were successful. Dr. Jones elaborated that teachers of turnaround schools:

Burnout very quickly. But what happened is because they were the kind of teachers they were, and because the work was so hard, they were so exhausted and fried at the end of the day, and the money wasn't the reward. It was the personal satisfaction and the joy that they experienced as a group of children and educators. The family spirit that came out of that, but it was such an uphill climb, that people were exhausted. And what we had seen was some of our very best teachers. I'm thinking particularly of the math teacher; he had the highest scores and the highest gains of any teacher in the system, at any school. He left at the end of the year [be]cause he was exhausted. And he went to medical school. I mean he left teaching, which is tragic to me. So, to me, it depends where you do this and what your goal is. We couldn't overcome that. No matter how much support we put in the school, the principal ends up crying, [be]cause it's so exhausting. I remember having to pick him off the floor, more than once over 3 years, literally off the floor.

Dr. Rodriguez discussed efforts to overcome the problems associated with a pay for performance program:

We're still refining some of the issues. There were some that some people thought it was micromanagement. Like that every teacher had to have someone in their classroom 10 times a year, and they had to fill out a rubric, and turn it in. So, a lot of people thought it was overkill. There was very specific way of how you earn these points. So, there's a lot of dissonance, and that's why it's not a perfect science. It's been very interesting trying to implement it. There have been a lot of

positive benefits, but it's also created a lot of upheaval, and managing the politics and managing the emotions has been a huge challenge.

Dr. Rodriguez found that teachers were initially upset over the amount of oversight the pay for performance system imposed because the teachers "felt like the number of observations required of them was excessive." As seen in these two superintendents' narratives, the strain on teachers can be emotionally draining.

**Unintended consequences.** All five superintendents interviewed during this study spoke specifically about the unintended consequences of their districts' pay for performance programs. Dr. Smith reported that the program's design and goals were "just constantly moving. Every time you move one little piece, then another group felt like it was unfair. Now the campus wants to spread it out all over the whole campus, and it's not really performance pay."

As mentioned in the previous section, Dr. Jones found that the stress levels that the pay for performance system placed on the teachers caused some of them to leave the profession, even when these teachers were successful in increasing student academic achievement. Dr. Rodriguez noticed that her district's system led to competitiveness among teachers, even though "teaching is a collaborative profession." Dr. Rodriguez reflected the following:

It's been very interesting in the actual implementation of it. In an education setting, it's very collaborative. So, you have a competitive system in a collaborative environment, and I saw the law of unintended consequences where people were saying, "Well, if I share with you what I'm doing, then you might

score better than I, and since we have limited resources and a targeted distribution, if I give you all my good stuff, you might beat me, and I might not get the money.” The devil’s in the details, and there are a lot of details. Then, I learned that there are a lot of unintended consequences of trying to do something at this big a scale.

Dr. Jones noted that for launching the pay for performance program, the previous superintendent defunded and ended critical instructional supports in order to fund the pay for performance program. The former superintendent also allowed principals to hire extra assistant principals to ease program implementation causing additional financial issues for the district. Dr. Davis added:

And the fact that all resources were spent on making this successful at the exclusion of other things that were important to the district. Those were data points that we really looked at. And some of these things were unreasonable. In fact, we over-hired. The superintendent wanted to make this work so much that he'd tell a principal, “What do you need? What do you need to make this work?” “I just need some more assistant principals.” So, we were 100 assistant principals over-formula, and so that had an impact on the finance. We had to work our way out of that.

Dr. Davis also found that after the first year of implementation, teachers chose to leave the district because of the structure of the program:

What I found was in year 1, I had a lot of teachers who left because there’s some that they didn’t want to be evaluated four times. They didn’t want people in their

classroom. They didn't want to give up their conference period in order to be a part of the TAP system.

Dr. Martinez found that her program paid master teachers so well that her ability to recruit administrators within the district was greatly diminished as follows:

One of the things that was a little bit of a downside was the master teachers are great leaders. That's a position that there is a great deal of very, very valuable PD, instructional training, and that was a tremendous benefit to the entire TAP program, but with a \$10,000 stipend on their teaching salary, those were people that I would want to recruit to become assistant principals, who would've had to take a pay cut and work more days to be an assistant principal. One of the things that I think it's really important to think of when you do implement any type of differentiated pay system is while we all know that great teachers are worth 100 times what they really make, we also know that those great teachers are typically the people who become our great campus leaders, and we can easily find ourselves in a position where they can't afford to leave their 187-day teaching job to take a 226-day administrative job because there's not enough difference in the salaries. What would be really great is if we could pay our principals more money and pay everybody more money, and then we could create that difference, but that is an unexpected consequence, and one that people don't think of. Everybody is out there saying, "Well, let's pay teachers a lot more money." I literally have been unable to recruit some administrators because of the \$10,000 master teacher stipend.

For all the superintendents, pay for performance program implementation appeared to be a moving target or to operate on unstable ground. As Dr. Smith noted about designing a pay for performance program that would reward teachers fairly, every time an adjustment was made to the program, it affected another area of the district.

### **Impact on the Superintendents**

Four participants in this study spoke about the impact that implementing a pay for performance program had on them personally. Each one had an understanding that the problems that developed because of the pay for performance program were simply part of the doing the job of a superintendent. Dr. Smith relied on prior experiences as a superintendent to handle issues that arose with the district's pay for performance program, because having "already been a superintendent for 10 years. It would've been very, very hard if I was a new superintendent. But I was used to the fact that that was ... the stuff that a superintendent does."

Dr. Jones enjoyed the process of implementing a pay for performance system in her district because she wanted to do something different to impact schools. She said, "Oh, for me, it's fun, because I love stuff like that. I like trying new and innovative things." Dr. Rodriguez did not necessarily agree with the philosophy of pay for performance but did recognize that in her current district, addressing the consequences of the pay for performance program was simply another part of doing the job of superintendent. Even though Dr. Rodriguez did not agree with the pay for performance program, she understood she was "a hired hand and I work for a school board, and they wanted to keep this, so I had to make it work. That's my job." With that in mind, Dr.

Rodriguez said, “I do what I gotta do. If I want this job, I gotta implement it. If I don’t want to implement it, don’t take the job. So I have to take the good and the bad with it.”

Dr. Martinez concluded that her district’s pay for performance program was “like curriculum or anything else that has to do with my job, it is an entirely, everchanging endeavor.” Dr. Martinez understood that one of the traits of a successful superintendent involves leading in a dynamic environment. Finally, none of the superintendents in this study reported personally undergoing any negative effects due to their districts’ pay for performance programs.

### **Findings for Research Question 3: Perceptions of the Viability of Pay for Performance Programs**

Five supporting themes were found in the data regarding the participants’ perceptions of the viability of pay for performance. Those themes were identified as the following: (a) measures used to evaluate teacher pay for performance, (b) not worth it, (c) success, and (d) to do it over again. These themes are conveyed in this section.

#### **Measures Used to Evaluate Teacher Pay for Performance**

All the superintendents used multiple methods for assessing their districts’ pay for performance programs. Some of them relied more heavily on qualitative measures, others on quantitative statistics, and some used a combination of the two to determine their programs’ success levels. For example, Dr. Smith relied on quantitative achievement data but put more emphasis on each principal’s feedback about the culture and climate of the campus in order to determine the success the district’s program. Dr.

Smith explained that “obviously student achievement” was an important measure but noted:

What more important to me was the climate in the school. If you had the right leader, which was my job, cause the principal’s job was to take care of the teachers and support the teachers. Our job was to put the right leader in the school so that happened. So, the overall school climate was my primary concern.

Similarly, Dr. Jones focused on the culture and climate of each school as the primary measure of program success and elucidated:

You don’t want the kind of principal that you’d hear talked about now with the pressure of the accountability system. There’s so much pressure on the teachers and so much stress on achievement that you don’t have the kind of school you want. You don’t want that kind of learning environment. So, to me that’s what’s number one. So, yes, if I got results, that was important but what was more important is what kind of learning climate was in that school. How did the teachers and the people that work there feel about the work they were doing? Did they love those kids? We’re kids first.

Dr. Rodriguez looked specifically at teacher retention and the evaluation scores of teachers who chose to leave the district. She used schools’ performance ratings on the state accountability system and the fact that more principals are in the classrooms as measures of program success. Dr. Rodriguez noted that the district had “lost more underperforming teachers than we have high-performing teachers.” She added:

Even though we had a lot of turnover, we lost more unsuccessful teachers than we lost successful teachers. So that was the data we looked at, looking at our turnaround success, getting 25 schools out of Improvement Required, having principals in classrooms on a regular basis.

Dr. Davis relied on the quantitative data processed by NEIT to measure the success of the TAP program on the district's campuses as described:

It's going to be mainly quantitative because it's got to be concrete. When you get to qualitative, sometimes there's some subjectivity in there. Everything that we do is sent to a third party. They take all their [teachers'] data, as far as their evaluations, student test scores. They analyze it, and then they send it back to us. They'll tell us Teacher A scored a 3.5 aggregate on their evaluations. This is how much they're going to make based on the amount of money you have in the pool. The students, this teacher showed one standard deviation, again, more than one year's growth. Now they're subject to higher pay than somebody who didn't see any growth. Everything is sent to that third party, and they send it back to us. Then we share that [analysis] with our teachers.

Dr. Martinez used multiple quantitative data sources as well as qualitative data from principals on TAP campuses to determine the level of success of the pay for performance program in the district:

It's very data-driven, and it is specific to each student, each teacher. You can look at data that shows that this teacher's students get an average of this much growth each year, and the mean over the last 5 years is this. It is all state test data. It's all

STAAR and EOC now, and it was TAKS before, but the raw data, the raw numbers are calculated in the NEIT system a little bit differently than we see coming out of TEA, the TEA system. I rely heavily on those principals to help me determine if they believe that the success is tied to that or to any number of other things. We survey the teachers. My deputy superintendent, who oversees it, makes comparisons with our students. This is a part of the program, and other TAP campuses that look like us. We look at some things like teacher retention, teacher attendance, and student attendance, all indicators of how motivated people are to be here, which ties directly into assessment of a program.

Just as each pay for performance program was unique to a school district, each superintendent relied on a variety of data to determine the effectiveness of each respective pay for performance program.

### **Not Worth It**

Dr. Smith and Dr. Jones offered reasons why pay for performance programs for teachers might not be worth the complex financial investment. Dr. Gina Smith explained as follows:

We're almost spending more time on developing what the payout was for it. That was my perspective. And, you know, there were some threatened grievances almost every year. Everybody has the right to grieve anything on any day, and that's part of the process. But when you start spending all your time and energy on that, you get kind of lose the meaning of it. That was my conclusion after really trying to keep an open mind about it and study it in the for-profit world.

And I eventually shared that with the board. I said it's just not worth all the work we're doing when it winds up being an \$800 a year payout. There were pockets of maybe positive [results], but I think, overall, we just felt like it was outweighing the return on investment [that] was just more negative than it was worth.

Although Dr. Jones admitted the program was a success, he concluded the money was not the primary factor in the turnaround of the schools in his district because of the following:

I don't think at the end of the day it was the reason [we] improved. And the schools did improve, so, but at the end of the day it was because of the type of person that came. And once you get in to a school like that where you have a good example of a dynamic leader who creates a team, who infuses enthusiasm and passion. At the end of the day, that's what it came down to, not because we were paying. That was one issue. The money was the fallout of the work. It was the payoff for them monetarily. But the payoff was not monetary for them. It was the personal satisfaction and the joy that they experienced as a group of children and educators. The family spirit that came out of that, but it was such an uphill climb that people were exhausted.

These data showed that the pay for performance program was not worth the time and energy needed for addressing all the issues associated with it for these two superintendents.

## Success

Four of the superintendents reported that their pay for performance programs were at least somewhat successful. Dr. Jones stated that teacher quality and student achievement both improved during the pay for performance program in conjunction with other changes in the district. Dr. Jones elaborated with the following:

The other issue was even if the teachers came for the pay, and some of them did, simply out of the financial need, but that said, they weren't selected because of that. They were selected because they had the potential to do the job and they were that kind of teacher we were looking for. What happened is, particularly in the most challenging schools, [high school 1] for example, at the end of the day they were extraordinarily successful. If you look at just that particular high school, because they had the greatest gains, and the greatest turnaround, not the first year like [high school 2] did, but ultimately, it was an amazing turnaround of an urban center high school. I would say we accomplished what we wanted to accomplish in turning around those schools. All of them weren't at the level they needed to be when we stopped it. So, we didn't do it long enough for various reasons. But, it did make a difference, I will tell you, but it was the whole. Not just this one thing.

Dr. Rodriguez agreed that the program in her district was successful because of the identification of top educators and the funneling of human resources to the schools in need of the most support. Dr. Rodriguez reported the following:

This evaluation system did help us identify who the best teachers were in three very important areas, so it's very important to know that. And it helped us on our turnaround strategy because we took some of our top teachers and put them in the toughest schools, and they had tremendous gains. We had 25 schools out of Improvement Required in 1 year. Where we got the most gains is where we put the best teachers in the toughest schools, so that was very helpful.

Dr. Rodriguez noted that due to the structure of the program, the teacher evaluation rubric put pressure on teachers to perform their best at all times and concluded:

The good side of that is that there's no loafing. If you've got somebody in your classroom 10 times a year, multiple people in your classroom 10 times a year, it's like you're driving down the street, and you see a police officer and automatically you take your foot off the gas pedal, even though you weren't speeding but you saw a cop. Well, a teacher sees a principal or an administrator in their classroom, they're going to be teaching, they're not gonna be loafing. So, I think it had a positive impact, but it was very intense.

Overall, Dr. Rodriguez saw the program as a success due to the identification of the high performing teachers who, in turn, assisted in turning around some of the most challenging schools. Dr. Rodriguez admitted that while the program "has been somewhat successful," the program was not "fully or completely successful." Dr. Rodriguez admitted however:

The best thing that it did, is that we know who the good teachers are. Now, we don't necessarily have to pay them that way, but we know who they are because this instrument helped us identify them, and it's a much better way of identifying who your better teachers are. And the fact that it helped us with our turnaround strategy. That we were able to take those seven campuses that were multi-year Improvement Required and get great teachers in there. Not only did they change instruction and academic results [but also] one school went from 1,000 discipline referrals to a 100. Well, that just tells you that the kids were engaged with great teachers. So, there's been a lot of positive benefits, but it's also created a lot of upheaval, and managing the politics and managing the emotions has been a huge challenge.

Dr. Davis considered his district's teacher pay for performance program a success because the teachers who generated results were appropriately rewarded for their efforts. Moreover, Dr. Davis' district remained competitive with nearby districts who paid similar teacher salaries, and teachers were retained because of the level of support offered by the pay for performance program. Dr. Davis explained:

Our best teachers were getting significant, I'm just going to say, bonuses. People, who other districts would try to steal, where they have their salaries set, we're able to retain them because our best teachers get paid more than anybody else.

Dr. Davis added that turnover for the district decreased dramatically even though the rural district continued to struggle with teacher retention. Dr. Davis reported that teachers supported the program and discussed:

When you look at our teacher turnover, it's maybe 10% or 15%. That's because of where we're located, but it had never been below 20% before. I feel that this system is something that teachers enjoy. When teachers leave us—we've had several come back because they feel that the support that they get here they don't get, maybe, in other districts, because here, again, it's continuous feedback. The Master Teachers are working with them in order to get them to maximize their potential. They see improvement in their teaching. Then they see improvement at learning as well.

Like Dr. Davis, Dr. Martinez credited the supports provided by the TAP structure and payouts as a primary reason for the success of the program. Stability through continuation of the program helped the TAP campuses become familiar with the expectations of the overall teacher pay for performance program. Dr. Martinez conveyed the following insights:

The campuses where TAP has been in place for several years are very successful. Teachers are comfortable with it. They have learned to and come to expect that stipend that comes at the beginning of the year. They enjoy it. They feel that it's a reward for their hard work. The principals on those campuses like the system. Now that it isn't grant-funded, we've backed off of the original four, yes four, appraisal visits, and so we use the same components that we use district-wide with our T-TESS, which is a little bit reduced. Our new teachers coming into the district really like the support from the mentor and master teachers. It's almost like having clinical assistants for new teachers. It's a very well-planned program.

Dr. Martinez's sentiments on which areas of the program had the biggest impact echoed the statements made by Dr. Jones. Neither superintendent found that the primary reason for program success was the financial incentive to teachers, but instead, they believed the supports the program offered to the teachers were critical to its success. Dr. Martinez expanded on this belief:

Does it cause student achievement? Is student achievement improved? Yes, but I believe the student achievement is probably more closely tied to having the master teachers, the mentor teachers, the professional development, the absolute understanding of how everyone is focused and with a specific rubric. If we took the money away tomorrow, I don't think those campuses would suddenly say, "Well, then, we're not going to get student growth anymore if we don't get the money." They would say, "Gosh, I hate that we're losing the money, but I understand the grant's gone, but this is still some greatness."

Although four of the five superintendents viewed their districts' teacher pay for performance programs as successes, only two of them could sustain the program at the same level of initial implementation using local funds and one of those is looking at scaling back the program. These superintendents saw the comprehensive reform efforts surrounding teacher pay for performance programs as having a significant impact on program outcomes that included teacher retention, teacher quality, and increased student achievement.

## **To Do It Over Again**

Although the superintendents in this study were not specifically asked to describe what they would do differently should they have the opportunity to implement a pay for performance program all over again, all five participants offered insight as to what they would do differently. Among the five participants, Dr. Smith had the least experience guiding the pay for performance program in her district because she entered the superintendent position toward the end of the pay for performance program that had been designed and initially implemented during her predecessor's tenure. Dr. Smith had many thoughts on what she would do differently if provided the opportunity to implement another pay for performance program. Dr. Smith reported she would focus on having multiple measures for success and creating a program that supports collaboration instead of competition as follows:

For us, if we were looking at it moving forward, it would have to be a blended approach between three different buckets of data, if you will. That would be student performance, and at least two or three other methods. Satisfaction and engagement would be a part of it. We would have to be at a certain level of staff satisfaction and engagement for the whole campus for this to be considered.

Dr. Smith detailed how the system she inherited put significant emphasis on one measure of success which was the students' scores on STAAR exams even though the district had worked diligently to convince teachers, parents, and community members other measures of student success were equally as important as the state's tests:

We now measure 19 things, and we measure six of them, very detailed. So, the difference between 7 years ago and today is that now, for us, we have these six things that we're measuring all the time. We have matured ... maybe, that's part of why we decided to get out of it, is because it was going counter to what we were saying. We were saying we need to measure multiple things. We don't need to only measure what the state says is important. But then at the same time, we're going to pay for that. It just seemed like we were saying one thing, but we were doing something else.

Aligning district goals and measures to a teacher pay for performance program would be important to embarking on creating another system for Dr. Smith. For Dr. Jones, stability and sustainability were important when implementing and evaluating any district initiative. Dr. Jones stated that "one of the big mistakes that we make is we put things in and take them out too fast. You need to sustain that longer to really make a sound judgment of it. And I think, we did it for 3 years." Although in Dr. Jones' district, the pay for performance program involved a mixture of both sign-on incentives and performance-based incentives. Dr. Jones believed the sign-on incentives represented a better use of funds and thought pay for performance was misused. Dr. Jones reflected on the use of rewards and incentives as follows:

I do think you should be rewarded, but I think where the pay should come in is on the other end. If I can attract the best math teacher, where that's a huge need, we don't have enough math teachers, they aren't good enough. A lot of them that we had, their background in math was minimal, in many instances. So, if you could

take money and put it that way, and then, if they're not performing, they don't have the job anymore. I think that is probably a better investment.

Dr. Rodriguez discussed a desire to design a pay for performance program focused more on the growth of students and collaboration by the campuses' teams. Dr. Rodriguez described this vision:

I would've designed a much different type [of pay for performance program]. The one I was going for was much more: "How much value did you add in the kids that you have?" And then you would include more people getting in on the campus to help do that, instead of it just being so focused on "What did I do?" and "Do I get it?" rather than "[Did] my team [get it]?"

Dr. Davis's district had applied for an additional federal grant so that local funds could be used for other programs or as part of the reward structure for the district's teacher pay for performance program. Dr. Davis focused on the importance of continuing to evaluate the district's set salary schedule to remain competitive with other districts while continuing to sustain the current program:

One of the things what I've noticed [is that] teachers, they are concerned with the basic salary structure. [District A] pays 51; we pay 48. And sometimes, I look at that. Even though we give \$3,000 in payout. But sometimes as teachers, they don't process that. If we get that [federal grant], we might, let's say, give a thousand dollars to their base salary, so that's something they can count on. We'll probably wind up doing that with part of the funds, if we can get them. What happens if you increase the payout, then you got to think, "Okay, there's grant for

5 years.” Well, what happens in 5 years? That’s where a lot of districts go wrong. When you get a grant, that’s like seed money. And if it’s something that’s good for kids, you want to try to find a way to sustain it. If I were to add more money into that, I wouldn’t be able to sustain it unless the state gave us more money. My thinking is we got to find ways that we can sustain the program.

Dr. Martinez believed that teachers should be paid differentially, but that was not the primary reason teachers chose to work in the district. Dr. Martinez believed that investing in other incentives could result in greater teacher retention because those could generate higher teacher job satisfaction as follows:

The incentives to be a high performer come with being valued, being given the freedom to be a decision-maker of your own, having your ideas and your ideals be recognized as being worthy, given an opportunity to grow and move either up in your career or deeper into your area of expertise. Then, the maintenance factors are to pay people enough money that they’re satisfied to live on that money, to be sure we don’t create policies that hamstring them, to work to keep them able to be in attendance and to be happy when they’re in attendance, like offering onsite day care for their children or pet care for their dogs. My beliefs about differentiated pay, and believe me, if I had more money, I would have differentiated pay, they are not necessarily based upon a philosophy that if I can dangle a carrot in front of a teacher of additional money, then they will suddenly be able to be better teachers. Differentiated compensation should be more than just pay for performance. Differentiated compensation should be “let’s find the things that are

valuable to our staff. Let's find the things that are motivating, that are honoring, and that are incentives and build a differentiated compensation package that does all of those things." It both motivates and sustains, keeps people with us, keeps them from leaving, keeps them happy, and also provides rewards, motivation, incentives for performance and for longevity.

In sum, all five participants would have instituted their district's pay for performance programs differently if they could have done it all over again. Both more money and more creative non-monetary reward or support options represented aspects of pay for performance the superintendents would have liked to change in doing it all over again.

#### **Findings for Research Question 4: Understanding the Essence of Teacher Pay for Performance for Superintendents**

Superintendents in this study were asked how they made sense of teacher pay for performance to understand the essence of experiencing a pay for performance program. The way they responded to this personal question provided a variety of insights; however, this research question yielded the theme related to the values of democratic education as they relate to the market-driven realm of teacher pay for performance programs. The examples of data supporting this theme appear in this section.

#### **Values vs. Market Driven**

Dr. Smith had to reconcile that although she was initially trying to get additional funds into teacher pockets, she couldn't see the for-profit model being successful in a non-profit educational environment as follows:

I wanted it to work. I was basing that on the Baldrige framework. Ultimately, I guess, in my mind, how I made sense of where I wound up is that in the non-profit environment you're taking the money away from someone else. So, we're doing this, but that could be that many more dollars that we would spend on this equipment or that equipment or we could run our air conditioners longer, you know, whatever. Then in a for-profit environment, you're getting additional market shares, so these are dollars that we wouldn't have had, if we hadn't have gotten additional market shares, let's spread out the additional market share. That made sense to me, that model, the for-profit, but that wasn't what I was working on. I was working on a non-profit model. The only way I could make sense of it is to say, I just felt like it wouldn't work in a non-profit model.

Dr. Jones was not sure that embarking on the journey of implementing a teacher pay for performance program would work as “a viable model, but I wanted to see. And I don't mean our specific model, I mean pay for performance in general. If that would impact outcomes in education. So, I was skeptical if it would work.” Even though Dr. Jones was skeptical, he was inspired and excited by the thought of being an innovator and trying to do something that had not been done previously and explained:

Oh, for me it's fun, 'cause I love stuff like that. I like trying new and innovative things. I think that one of the problems in our business is that we don't really innovate. We just shuffle the chairs. I was really happy to try different things and see what worked. There's no magic bullet. You've gotta keep trying things.

Dr. Rodriguez had to reconcile the fact that she did not necessarily believe in the idea of pay for performance for teachers and the realization that the school board was fully invested in the program designed by his predecessor. Dr. Rodriguez managed this reconciliation based on philosophical thinking:

I don't know that I agree with it, but I've also learned that I'm a hired hand, and I work for a school board, and they wanted to keep this, so I had to make it work. That's my job. To me, I don't want it because I've seen people lose their religion just to make a little bit of money. And the law of unintended consequences and everybody puts everything they do just to make that money. To me, that's not the right reason. You're supposed to help students get better, so they can have a better life than what they have right now. I philosophically don't want to get paid on that.

Dr. Rodriguez believed in the aspects of the model that enabled teachers to become better for the good of the students and acknowledged understanding what was expected from the board when she began the position and agreed to manage pay for performance. Dr. Rodriguez admitted disliking the "scarcity part of it." However, she liked "the abundance part of it, of making everybody better." Dr. Rodriguez concluded, "I do what I gotta do. If I want this job, I gotta implement it. If I don't want to implement it, don't take the job. So, I have to take the good and the bad with it." Even though Dr. Rodriguez had a choice about continuing the program, she has seen the entire process as a learning experience and has a generally positive outlook for the program in the future:

I don't regret doing this. It's been a good growth opportunity. I like making sense out of things. So, I think we're better off by having it, but it certainly has not been perfect, and I had to take somebody else's idea and make it work. The end of the story is not here yet. We'll continue to revise it. I still have a couple of board members that want us to scrap some things on it, but I think it's here to stay. But hopefully, it makes more sense now, and it's more balanced than it was when it first started.

Dr. Davis strongly believed in the district's teacher pay for performance program and the opportunities for financial reward it provided to the teachers. Dr. Davis offered the following emphasis on the program's ability to motivate teachers to improve their practice:

I'm just going to give you the example once again. If you have two individuals—and one is getting better results, working harder, really improving in the classroom—who have the same experience and the same academic background, to me, there's an inequity that those two individuals get exactly the same. There's got to be some incentive for that second, or even a 5-year, teacher to say, "You know what? If I want to make \$10,000 extra, there's an avenue. There's a pathway in order to do so." Again, [that teacher needs to believe] "I'm going to make sure that I follow the strategies that have been given to me. I'm going to collaborate with my peers. I'm going to look at data. I'm going to do all those little things that are going to help my kids be successful. And ultimately, I'm going to be acknowledged by the compensation."

Dr. Davis reiterated that the issues associated with the current method of paying teachers was based on degrees and years of experience. He believed that using a market-based strategy made his program successful in his district by offering the perspective of “a third-year teacher” who may think:

“It’s going to take me, let’s say, 20 years to make \$10,000 based on that scale.”

Well, why not give them the \$10,000 now, if they’re performing as well as this teacher over here. I mean, that’s the way I see it. It’s kind of, if you look at the business world, I mean, it’s pretty much structured that way where the ones that perform get paid more. Using that model, I think has been advantageous for us.

The ones that don’t like it, they go to other places.

Dr. Martinez disagreed that a market-based strategy is appropriate in an educational setting although she wished she could find more meaningful ways to differentiate pay among teachers:

I believe that every teacher in the state of Texas is underpaid or overpaid. The good ones are grossly underpaid. Those who are doing harm to children are horribly overpaid. It’s always been of great interest to me about how teachers, and all administrators, but how teachers especially are paid. . . I think that it would be so meaningful, and it would so honor the profession to have a way to differentiate pay and provide more pay for those teachers who have that magic and get that achievement out of kids. Those that set them up for success in their lives and build appropriate relationships with them and motivate them and cause them to see themselves as adults that they would never see themselves as who

believe in them beyond them believing in themselves. The teachers who can do that should be getting shares of Apple or something. What it means to me to be involved in any type of differentiated pay planning and pay system and talking about it now is it's ongoing. It should always be revisited and looked at and tweaked, but it should never be structured like the market.

Finally, four of the five superintendents in this study struggled to reconcile their desire to pay teachers more and pay great teachers even better with the fact that the market-based pay for performance systems they created or enacted created dissonance among stakeholders that go against the current democratic educational system. School systems assert that teaching is a team sport and that collaboration is essential, but the pay for performance programs eroded the community by creating competition among teachers, extreme stress due to intense pressure and complicated program requirements. The superintendents in this study also stated that they don't think the performance pay aspect of their systems were integral in the perceived successes of their programs. Furthermore, their responses related to the impact of the pay for performance programs on the superintendent were very technical. Overall, under this theme, the superintendents asserted that their role in the school system is extremely complex and that they must work within a system that is sometimes rigid and may have to participate in programs they don't necessarily believe in because their stakeholders support it. While seeking to understand how they make sense of pay for performance programs, it seems that their internal conflict with pay for performance is much deeper than just doing something because it is just part of their job as district leaders. Dr. Davis was the only negative case

in this theme. He felt strongly in his conviction that the market-based strategies utilized by his school district through their pay for performance program were instrumental in advancing student achievement and recruiting and retaining a high-quality workforce.

On the continuum of strongly against pay for performance programs to strongly in favor of pay for performance programs, Dr. Smith and Dr. Davis are on opposing ends of the spectrum. Dr. Smith had few positive statements about pay for performance programs, while Dr. Davis had few negative statements about pay for performance programs. The other three participants, Dr. Jones, Dr. Rodriguez, and Dr. Martinez highlighted both positive and negative aspects about their pay for performance programs. For these three, their educational values were often in contrast with their pay for performance programs which created a unique tension in their dialogues, especially for the two who have programs operating today.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 explored the themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected to further understanding of school superintendents' perceptions regarding implementation of teacher pay for performance programs. Although pay for performance programs are highly contextualized programs because of localized design and implementation, the beliefs and experiences of the superintendents in the study generated similarities and in-depth understanding. The participants' data yielded supporting themes within each of the three overarching themes of initial perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs, perceptions during and after implementation of teacher pay for performance programs,

and perceptions of the viability of pay for performance programs. Chapter 5 delves further into the significance of this study and contains suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe superintendents' perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs in their respective districts. For this study, teacher pay for performance was defined as a program implemented by a school district where teachers are offered monetary compensation based on student academic achievement scores (Gratz, 2009). To complete the study, this chapter contains the summaries of the study and findings, limitations, discussion, recommendations, and a few concluding remarks.

### **Summary of the Study**

This study was conducted because many states and school districts have received billions of dollars of federal grant funding to incentivize employment in low performing schools and rewarding teachers whose classroom practices lead to increased student academic achievement scores (e.g., DOE, 2016). For these incentive programs to function as intended, struggling schools should be able to recruit and retain the best teachers and show their students' achievement scores as improving (Goldhaber & Walch, 2012). Interest in offering teachers some form of pay for performance remains at the forefront of education reform (Gratz, 2011). With the large amount of money being invested in pay for performance programs, it is important to evaluate programs to determine if the intended goals of current pay for performance plans are being met.

## **Purpose and Scope of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore superintendents' perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs. This study followed a qualitative, phenomenological research design to gain an understanding of the perceptions of the superintendents with the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In this case, the participants were superintendents responsible for leading a school district while a pay for performance structure was in place to recruit and retain teachers. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to uncover the participating superintendents' perceptions of the pay for performance programs they had experience implementing (Seidman, 2013). An interview protocol was used as a basis for each superintendent interview, but each interview process evolved based on the responses from the participant and the follow-up probes by the researcher. Therefore, not all participants were asked the exact same questions during the data collection process. The superintendents who participated in the study represented a range of years of experience as superintendents and represented districts of various types. All five study participants met the study criterion of being a superintendent in the state of Texas during the implementation phase of a teacher pay for performance program.

## **Data Analysis**

The research conducted attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do superintendents perceive teacher pay for performance programs in their districts?

2. How have superintendents' perceptions changed throughout the pay for performance program implementation?
3. How do superintendents determine the success of teacher pay for performance programs in their districts?
4. For superintendents, what is the essence of experiencing a pay for performance program?

Data analysis included the qualitative coding techniques described by Maxwell (2013) and Saldaña (2016). Organizational, holistic, and theoretical coding occurred using the transcripts from the voice-recorded interviews (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). Holistic and organizational coding, also described by Saldaña (2016), proceeded with the use of initial codes related to the dynamic superintendent policy implementation framework and the first three research questions.

Further, multiple rounds of coding allowed for finding patterns related to the participants' descriptions of their experiences (Saldaña, 2016). After the first two rounds of coding, data were analyzed into theoretical codes "based on the researcher's understanding of what's going on" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 108). In summary, organizational codes were pre-determined by the researcher based on the theoretical framework and research questions. Holistic codes related to the actual experiences and perceptions of the participating superintendents were developed during the second round of coding. During the final round of coding, the researcher developed the overarching themes and their supporting subthemes based on the five individual superintendents' perceptions of pay for performance.

## **Interpretation of the Findings**

This study documented in-depth perceptions of superintendents' experiences with implementing teacher pay for performance programs in their districts. Although the participants represented a variety of experience levels as superintendents and were involved in programs in a variety of types of school districts, commonalities were found in many of their responses. This section addresses the meanings of the findings in this phenomenological study that involved applying a constructivist approach to understand how participating superintendents constructed meaning from their experiences with implementing teacher pay for performance programs in their school districts.

### **Superintendents' Perceptions of Teacher Pay for Performance in Their Districts**

Four themes emerged about superintendents' perceptions of teacher pay for performance in their districts: (a) desire to reward the teachers, (b) perceptions of the effect of pay for performance programs on the ten functions of school districts, (c) fluidity of pay for performance program, and (d) challenges with pay for performance programs. Overarching themes were outlined according to the commonalities found among the superintendents' responses during semi-structured interviews. Each theme is interpreted in this section.

**Desire to reward teachers.** Each of the superintendents expressed a strong desire to differentiate pay for the teachers in their districts. The underlying tone they expressed was that the most common way of paying teachers, which is based on years of experience and advanced degrees, did not recognize the differences in student outcomes attained by teachers. In other words, two teachers with drastically different levels of

student success as measured by growth or achievement of standardized test scores could make the same salary if they have the same number of years in education and the same level of postsecondary education. All the superintendents attempted to use pay for performance to reward the higher performing, or more effective, teachers.

**Perceptions of the effect of pay for performance programs on the ten functions of school districts.** The participants in the study found that almost all the ten functions of school districts were or could be affected by a teacher pay for performance program, but they found that some functions were more strongly impacted than others. Specifically, Human Resources, Administration, Finance, and Business Operations, External and Internal Communications, Governance Operations, Curriculum and Instruction, and Elementary and Secondary Campus Operations were discussed most frequently.

**Fluidity of pay for performance program.** All the participating superintendents reported that each of their programs had to be adjusted throughout implementation. Each program experienced implementation stumbling blocks which required constant monitoring and adjustment for subsequent years. Some of the issues reported were with communication, funding changes, issues brought up by employee grievances, and excessive testing of students. Each district handled changes differently, but all reported having an existing structure within the district or developed one for gathering stakeholder input and making program modifications.

**Challenges with pay for performance programs.** Each interviewed superintendent reported that the development and implementation of a teacher pay for

performance program brought with it significant challenges. In an effort to make pay for performance fair to all teachers, programs in some districts became increasingly intricate. With complexity, complete understanding of all aspects of the program was not achieved by all stakeholders.

Another challenge reported by superintendents in their interviews was the scarcity of resources to fully implement pay for performance programs. Grant funding was used in four of five represented districts but finding funding once the grant ended became difficult. Only two of the programs initially grant funded continued to be operational at the time of data collection. The district which has used only local funding since the program's inception has struggled with the impact that the reallocation of funds from other programs to the pay for performance program have had on the entire district.

Each pay for performance program in this study led superintendents to face unintended consequences. One of the unintended consequences mentioned was the stress the program placed on teachers. For three districts, teachers and administrators left the district or education altogether because of the intense pressure they believed the pay for performance system placed on them or because of their unwillingness to fully participate in the requirements of the program. Another unintended consequence occurred in one district because of the need to adjust program details throughout implementation. Every time an adjustment was made, another group of stakeholders argued the changes were unfair. This dissonance among teachers was one of the factors that eventually led to the district's decision to end the program when grant funding ended. Another superintendent reported that because her campus master teachers were making so much money, they

were uninterested in becoming campus administrators because the salary increase was nominal.

### **Changes in Superintendent Perceptions About Pay for Performance**

Because the data for this research question were so specific to each superintendent's unique experiences, the findings are summarized using data from the individual superintendents. Dr. Smith approached the pay for performance program initially with the thought that the money was available through a state grant to enable her to "get it into the teachers' pockets." She soon realized that the discord the program created among the teachers and schools was not worth the significant investment required.

Dr. Jones approached the idea of pay for performance with hopeful skepticism, but in the end, he realized that the pressure ended up being too much of a strain on teachers. Dr. Rodriguez initially wanted a pay for performance system in her district that would be fair and would reward good teachers. Her system is still in operation today, and she concluded it was better for teachers than the typical salary system, but it does not come easily. Dr. Davis saw the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) system of pay for performance as a tool to reward the best teachers and noted having no change in perceptions even though observing that the state was moving toward implementing similar rubrics to evaluate teacher performance. Finally, Dr. Martinez stated that her motivation had not changed throughout the implementation process. She still wanted to find ways to increase opportunities to supplement teacher pay but also acknowledged that money was only one way to retain teachers. Therefore, Dr. Martinez focused on applying

creative ideas, including providing better benefits and offering innovative programs, to retain good teachers.

### **Determining the Success of Pay for Performance Programs**

The five superintendents used a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate the success of their pay for performance programs. Each of them used the state's standardized assessment results in some way during program evaluation. One district's superintendent used the number of schools who had previously been low performing and had become acceptably performing as a measure of success. Other methods for performance evaluation led to collecting data about school culture and climate through surveys of teachers and students, analysis of teacher and student attendance, and teacher retention rates. For the two districts using the TAP model for pay for performance, data provided by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) served as one measure of program success. The variety of data used in determining program success among superintendents were as varied as the individual programs themselves.

Of the five superintendents interviewed, four believed that their pay for performance programs were at least somewhat successful. However, none of these participants thought money made the primary difference in their programs' successes. The entire structure of the pay for performance programs, along with the associated supports and feedback to teachers, were believed by the participants to be the primary drivers of perceived success.

## **Values vs. Market Driven**

Each of the superintendents understood their role as policy intermediaries related to their respective pay for performance programs. They saw the struggles associated with the program implementation as occurring within the expectations of a superintendent. They were comfortable navigating the role of policy communicator and intermediary between stakeholders who sometimes had conflicting interests in their experiences as superintendents.

When asked specifically about how they made sense of pay for performance programs, the superintendents responded in a variety of ways. Dr. Smith wanted the program to be successful but did not believe that a for-profit model could work in a non-profit environment. Dr. Jones was not convinced that pay for performance would be effective but was invigorated by using it to try an innovative approach to improving student outcomes.

Similarly, Dr. Rodriguez did not fully believe the pay for performance program would be totally successful but had to accept that her school board was fully supportive of the program plan developed by her predecessor. She realized that part of her job is to implement board priorities and accepted responsibility for guiding implementation. However, she demonstrated a positive outlook about the effects of the program.

Dr. Davis strongly believed in the program his district had implemented and the opportunities it would provide to the teachers. Unlike Dr. Smith, Dr. Davis thought the market-based strategy was effective for his district. Dr. Martinez, like Dr. Smith, did not believe that market-based strategies (i.e., business model oriented) were appropriate for

non-profit environments, but Dr. Martinez reported a desire to continue to find meaningful ways to differentiate teacher pay.

The superintendents in this study struggled to reconcile their desire to pay teachers in a more meaningful way than the standard pay scale based on years of experience and degrees held and the turmoil that market-based pay for performance programs brought to their school communities. The values of democratic education such as community and collaboration in the best interest of students, were in direct contrast to the competitive nature of pay for performance programs, even in districts where payouts were given to groups of teachers instead of individuals. Interestingly, two of the superintendents with pay for performance programs still in operation at the time of the study interviews had very strong views against pay for performance programs. For both superintendents, they seemed resolved to continue the programs because they were better than doing nothing to differentiate teacher pay. There was one negative case in the Values vs. Market-Based theme. Dr. Davis strongly asserted that the pay for performance program in his district allowed him to better recruit and retain teachers. He believed that the financial incentives motivated teachers to participate in professional development and strive for better outcomes for students.

Throughout this study, superintendents talked about a variety of competing discourses including competition and collaboration, fairness and complexity, and rewards and intense pressure, just to name a few. The data presented from this study is a far cry from an overwhelming endorsement of pay for performance programs. Even in instances where superintendents spoke about successes of pay for performance programs, their

perceptions of program success may not have been due to the pay for performance program. For example, Dr. Rodriguez mentioned that the district lost more bad teachers than good teachers. However, losing more poor quality teachers than high quality teachers might be a normal phenomenon for school districts. It is also possible that superintendents have used pay for performance programs to control the narrative around struggling schools and low student achievement data. Focusing on a program that is intended to raise students academic achievement scores while being able to recruit and retain teachers allows school superintendents to present a counternarrative to the negative attention focused on school district deficits. However, this study has shown that by and large, pay for performance programs are not the answer for long-term success.

### **Limitations**

The qualitative research design of this study reduced the findings' transferability among all superintendents and all teacher pay for performance programs. Readers must determine if the information contained in this study is relevant and transferable to their contexts and school districts (Hays & Singh, 2011). The data were solely collected from the five superintendents as their self-reported perceptions. The data yielded an in-depth understanding of the superintendents' lived experiences within the phenomenon of implementing a teacher pay for performance program. However, the superintendents might have held biased views about programs they did not develop while implementing those programs, which could have affected the findings from this sample. The scope of the research was limited to superintendents and did not include collecting perceptions of pay for performance programs from other stakeholders. Instead, the ultimate goal was to

provide rich descriptions of the perceptions of the five participants, all of whom had experienced leading districts with teacher pay for performance programs.

Finally, the nature of snowball sampling limited the transferability of the findings. The snowball process allows participants identified as meeting study criteria to recommend other participants for inclusion in the study. The researcher found that the superintendents could not name many, if any, superintendents or districts using teacher pay for performance programs. Even the two superintendents who were a part of the TAP program were unable to identify other districts in Texas who were using pay for performance programs. Instead, the researcher relied on colleagues and professors who served as key informants for finding eligible superintendents who could be study participants. The lack of a formal network of superintendents participating in teacher pay for performance programs might play a role in some of the challenges that this group of five superintendents experienced while implementing programs in their respective districts.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

Four of the five participants in this study reported that they considered their district's teacher pay for performance programs were at least somewhat successful. These perceptions aligned with those of Houston Independent School District's officials, who believed their pay for performance program was successful in raising student achievement scores (Sawchuk, 2008). Superintendent Margaret Rodriguez used a model like the Talent Transfer Initiative (reviewed in Chapter 2) which targeted high performing teachers within a district to transfer to low performing schools as a part of a school

turnaround effort (see Glazerman et al., 2013). Although this strategy was not part of the original intent of the district's pay for performance program, the rubric created to evaluate teachers during program development helped identify the district's best teachers. The transfer of these high achieving teachers to the neediest schools resulted in multiple schools increasing their state ratings from Improvement Required to Academically Acceptable. The four superintendents who reported operating successful pay for performance programs perceived comprehensive reform efforts to be greater contributors to program success than any financial incentives and rewards offered to their teachers. Their perceptions were echoed in the research on pay for performance programs in which successes might have derived from non-financial efforts such as mentoring programs, support staff, collaborative school leadership, etc. (Silva, 2008; Slotnik 2010; Sojourner et al., 2013).

Although the largest teacher unions in the nation have been opposed to teacher pay for performance programs, school districts have partnered with states to collaborate on program specifics (Koppich, 2010). One superintendent in this study mentioned the most powerful local teacher association in the district participated in the program's development, and the association's representation on the district committee that addressed concerns and policy adjustments was a factor in the program's success. The two superintendents whose districts used the TAP model for pay for performance were among those reporting their programs as successful. The perceptions of success offered in this study contrasted those by Glazerman et al. (2009) in a study of the implementation of a TAP program in Chicago that had failed to show any evidence that either student

achievement or teacher retention was positively impacted. The difference in the TAP superintendent perceptions of success in this study and the Chicago study could be attributed to the time in which the study participants' programs were operational. The programs represented in this study were among the more established programs and were continuing in these districts at the time of this report.

All five of the participating superintendents reported some negative aspects of the pay for performance programs in their districts. However, none of them disclosed finding any unethical practices by teachers or administrators as reported by Tienken (2011). Tienken had found teachers holding students back from grade levels with high-stakes testing, encouraging students to drop out of school prior to testing, or only focusing on students who were close to achieving the passing standard.

One negative consequence reported by two superintendents in this study involved teachers having a sense of competition between each other instead of teachers experiencing a collaborative atmosphere attributed to the pay for performance programs. In a 2011 report, Elbus warned of the possibility of competition among staff and other negative consequences such as cheating to improve test scores. Brewer et al. (2015) echoed the sentiment of pay for performance negatively impacting teacher collaboration. It is important to note that the specific pay for performance programs that reported competitive teacher cultures involved structures with teacher payouts based solely on individual performance rather than team and/or campus payouts.

Although there were similarities in some responses by the study participants, the variety in perceptions of pay for performance programs in this study were as unique as

the pay for performance programs themselves. The highly contextualized nature of school districts, pay for performance programs, and the measures of success developed creates difficulty for districts considering implementing a teacher pay for performance program to determine the best avenue to follow. What was perceived to have worked well in some districts, did not work well in others. For this reason, it is important for superintendents wanting to develop pay for performance programs in their districts to consider the similarities and differences of the districts represented in this study carefully while seeking to create the pay for performance program best designed to meet the unique needs of their districts.

This study adds depth to the current literature regarding teacher pay for performance literature by highlighting the voices of superintendents whose insights have been virtually absent from the discourse. This qualitative study provides rich descriptions of the perceptions of superintendents before and during pay for performance program implementation. The research findings also indicate that the questions that need to be asked when evaluating teacher pay for performance programs should include the following:

1. Does pay for performance increase student achievement, improve teacher recruitment, and benefit teacher retention?
2. What other areas of the schools and in the district to teacher pay for performance programs positively or negatively impact?
3. Do teacher pay for performance programs align with the values school district espouses?

4. Would there be similar results to pay for performance with intensive supports that do not involve direct teacher payouts?

### **Recommendations**

There are two types of recommendations that follow from the findings. First, the implications for practice are presented in this section. Second, the recommendations for future research are presented.

#### **Implications for Practice**

This study provided insight about superintendents' perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs. The findings offer readers considerations for development and implementation of similar programs in their districts. There are six implications for practice that could be used by district leaders when considering implementing a teacher pay for performance program provided in this section.

First, superintendents should carefully consider if the possibility of discord in their schools and district is worth the trouble of implementing a teacher pay for performance program at all. The superintendents in this study reported multiple stumbling blocks during implementation of their district's programs. They also found that the conflict between the values of our current educational system were in direct conflict with the nature of market-based practices such as pay for performance. Additionally, superintendents expressed that they didn't believe that the financial incentives were the primary reason for program success. After careful consideration of these issues, if superintendents desire to implement a teacher pay for performance program, they should heed the recommendations that follow.

Second, superintendents should have systems in place prior to pay for performance program implementation to handle issues when they arise which will allow their districts to respond quickly and adjust program specifics. Superintendents need to include a variety of stakeholders in committees during pay for performance program development. Also creating collaborative teams to address issues that arise may enable all stakeholder perspectives to be considered and prevent discord among these varied groups from complicating program implementation and ongoing functioning.

Third, one of the draws for superintendents to implement pay for performance programs in their districts is the availability of federal and state grant money to fund program planning and implementation. When using such temporary funding to support a pay for performance program, superintendents must consider and plan for program sustainability beyond the funding cycle so a successful program can continue without being scaled back due to lack of funding. Only one of the four pay for performance programs that were initially grant funded was still operating at the same scale as initial implementation at the time of data collection.

Detailed plans for clearly communicating the teacher pay for performance program to all stakeholders are recommended for reducing confusion among teachers as well as community members. Having a comprehensive communication strategy that includes those stakeholders most impacted by the program's specifics and adjustments can be used to increase buy-in and understanding among members of these groups. The overall perception of success of a pay for performance program can be impacted by the quality and amount of stakeholder communication.

Next, superintendents should look for multiple avenues, other than direct financial compensation, to improve teacher performance and retention, especially if working with limited funding. The literature and perceptions gleaned from this study suggest a variety of school reform efforts may need to be used for increasing teacher quality and retention. Some suggestions from the superintendents in this study included implementing programs to support collaboration among peers, provide master teachers who coach and offer professional development to teachers, and apply high quality evaluation rubrics to measure teacher quality and deliver feedback to teachers.

Finally, using a national model, such as TAP, which includes supports for districts and a structure for teacher pay for performance programs, may provide greater opportunities for pay for performance program stability and sustainability. As mentioned previously, the two superintendents with experience with the TAP model in their districts produced programs that persisted even during dire financial circumstances. Finally, superintendents considering pay for performance programs should consider these implications to avoid the pitfalls experienced in the districts represented in this study and to gain additional opportunities for program success and sustainability.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This qualitative study investigated superintendents' perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs due to a lack of current literature regarding teacher pay for performance and superintendents. As a result, this study determined other possibilities for future research relating to teacher pay for performance programs follow:

1. Because this study was limited to superintendents in Texas, a qualitative study of superintendent perceptions related to pay for performance programs in other states may provide additional insights useful to superintendents considering implementing pay for performance programs in their districts.
2. Two of the superintendents in this study were participants in the nationally known TAP model of pay for performance. Consequently, a qualitative study of the perceptions of the effect of TAP on the success and sustainability of teacher pay for performance programs may generate a comprehensive picture of the strengths of this specific model.
3. Two of the three districts with locally developed models no longer maintained their pay for performance programs. Two of the two districts with a nationally developed program maintained their programs. Therefore, a survey study of districts using pay for performance could reveal the weaknesses of locally developed models and the strengths of the nationally developed model to produce a stronger overall method for successful pay for performance.
4. The superintendents in this study were unable to identify more than one or two other superintendents or districts who had or were currently implementing teacher pay for performance programs. A study of having a support system that enables superintendents and other stakeholders to collaborate and share successes and challenges with pay for performance may enable increased program success and sustainability in multiple contexts. An example of such a qualitative research study could include investigating perceptions of the

impact of the formal and informal networking systems available to superintendents or other district-level administrators involved in leading teacher pay for performance programs.

5. This study only revealed the perceptions of superintendents involved in implementing pay for performance programs. Of the participants in the study, four of five perceived their district's teacher pay for performance programs to be at least somewhat successful. A qualitative research study designed to uncover the pay for performance program perceptions of other district stakeholders, such as teachers and administrators, in districts whose superintendents perceive pay for performance programs to be successful may generate opportunities to compare and contrast the findings in this study with the perceptions of other district stakeholders who are directly impacted by a pay for performance program.
6. Pay for performance is designed to improve students' academic outcomes. However, the superintendents did not discuss parents as stakeholders in pay for performance programs. The absence of parents as explicitly named stakeholders in this study offers an intriguing line of inquiry. Perhaps, pay for performance affects teacher-parent relationships and parents' perceptions of their children's academic achievement. Further study along these lines may benefit districts implementing pay for performance.
7. Two superintendents in this study believed that the pay for performance programs in their district identified the top performing teachers in their

schools. A mixed methods study examining the link between pay for performance programs and identifying high quality teachers would offer further insights into measures of teacher quality.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study was performed to investigate superintendent's perceptions of teacher pay for performance programs in their districts. The five participants included in this study provided a variety of insights into their unique experiences while implementing a teacher pay for performance program. Overall, pay for performance programs are complicated to implement and difficult to fund, according to these five superintendents. Additionally, for four of the five superintendents, they had difficulty reconciling their desire to increase or differentiate teacher pay with the erosion of community by the market-based structure of teacher pay for performance programs. The negative impact of teacher pay for performance programs seem to outweigh their benefits. Furthermore, the superintendents believed many other professional and non-financial support options included in pay for performance could be used without implementing a pay for performance model to benefit teacher morale and support teacher retention as well as increase academic achievement among students. The cost to benefit ratio may be better controlled using non-financial supports rather than a pay for performance program. Superintendents and other district leaders may find these insights and researcher-developed implications for practice helpful in guiding the work of developing and implementing a teacher pay for performance program in their districts should they chose to do so.

## **Appendix A:**

### **Superintendent Interview Protocol**

1. How long have you been a superintendent?
2. How long have you been a superintendent in this district?
3. Describe this school district's pay for performance program.
4. How would you describe your experience implementing a pay for performance program?
  - a. (Follow up: What was that like for you?)
5. What areas of school district operations were affected by the implementation of the pay for performance program?
  - a. In what ways were they affected?
  - b. (Be ready to provide a list of functions if participant seems unaware of the 10 functions.)
6. What were your initial perceptions of pay for performance programs?
7. In what ways have your perceptions of pay for performance changed?
8. How would you describe the level of success of the pay for performance program?
  - a. (Follow up: What measures do you use to determine the success of the pay for performance program?)
9. What feelings have you had about the implementation of this school district's pay for performance program?
10. What does it mean to you to be involved in the work of implementing a teacher pay for performance program?

11. How do you make sense of teacher pay for performance?
12. What else would like me to know about pay for performance in this school district that I might not have asked about?

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doi:10.3102/0162373712462625