NOVEMBER 2023

SHIFTING THE RHETORIC:
MAXIMIZING THE TEACHER INCENTIVE ALLOTMENT TO IMPROVE SCHOOLS

LONESTA**RP3**

Education research practice policy **partnership**

"District leaders should work collaboratively with their principals to provide teachers with accessible tools that help demystify the designation process in their district. This could include clear guidelines, accessible documentation, scheduled training, digital tools and meetings with teachers in specific assignments to review TIA components such as student growth and teacher evaluation. Above all, developing a shared governance framework with district stakeholders to guide TIA continuous improvement better facilitates those stakeholders' interests, general knowledge of and trust in their local designation system."
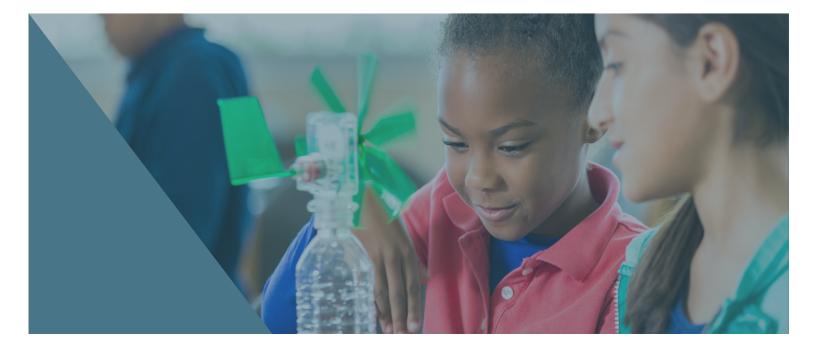
— **Misty Rieber,** Chief Academic Officer, Lubbock Independent School District

➤ Background

The Texas Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) emerged from House Bill 3 (HB3) to improve teacher recruitment, retention and student outcomes. Using student performance and classroom observations, teachers are categorized into designations (exemplary, recognized or master) to determine additional funding for districts to reward and retain their most effective teachers, prioritizing high-economically disadvantaged and rural campuses to direct funds where they are most needed. In the 2022-23 school year alone, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) allocated nearly $150 million toward additional compensation for 13,774 teachers across 346 districts, highlighting that the reach of TIA and its funding extends across the state, even if not all school districts have fully embraced the policy. https://tiatexas.org/

The Goal: **Evolve TIA into a policy that not only rewards teachers but enhances the lives of Texas students by improving their schools.**

Insights were shared from Texas Education Research-Practice-Policy Partnership (RP3) Network members from across the state on the early implementation of TIA. Our network members acknowledge the benefits of TIA as it relates to increasing the salaries of teachers across the state. However, the time has come to refocus the conversation. TIA can more effectively incentivize great teachers in high-leverage situations to propel student growth, particularly among students who have been historically disadvantaged. The legislation authorizing TIA has only been in place since 2019, providing an opportunity for policymakers and district leaders across the state to redirect the conversation about TIA while the program is still new, shifting the broader policy conversation surrounding teaching from a focused pursuit of a six-figure salary to more intentional discussion regarding the overarching goal of effective education policy.

➤ Potential Challenges Across the Sate

As TIA continues to evolve, we must address common misconceptions and potential shortcomings that can impact school improvement efforts across the state.

01) Some believe that the allotment goes solely towards teacher compensation. While TIA dedicates 90% of the funds to teacher compensation, the allotment can also be used to enhance overall school improvement more strategically, in addition to increasing compensation for teachers across the state.

02) TIA's unrestricted portability of designations may inadvertently encourage teacher turnover where we need them most; however, designations can be used to incentivize teachers to serve in high-needs and rural districts.

03) Teachers may find it challenging to grasp the intricacies of the formulas used to award designations in their districts, which can vary significantly from district to district and even within districts based on subject areas (Lee et al., 2021).

➤ Key Considerations

The following recommendations are provided to maximize the use of TIA funding for improving teacher retention across Texas districts.

01) District leaders and policymakers could emphasize the importance of using TIA funds more strategically at the school level.

02) District leaders and policymakers could explore ways to incentivize teachers to stay in or move to high needs campuses.

03) TEA, district leaders and policymakers could provide educators with more accessible resources and training for measuring the effectiveness of TIA, demystify the designation process and create collaborative learning opportunities across districts.

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING SCHOOLS THROUGH TIA

RP3 Network members from across the state shared key insights for maximizing the Teacher Incentive Allotment to improve schools. Below are clarifications and potential strategies for addressing each consideration.

CONSIDERATION 1
Emphasize the Importance of Using TIA Funds Strategically at the School Level

Why This Matters

While teachers may receive increased compensation, the focus should remain on enhancing the quality of education for students statewide. TIA policy requires that 90% of the allotment must be directed toward teacher compensation at the school where the designation was earned. Understanding this distinction encourages district and school leadership to explore how compensation can be strategically used to enhance the overall school context, extending beyond the efforts of a single teacher. This aligns with the broader goal of education policy to foster a holistic approach to school improvement and promote educational excellence for students.

Potential Strategies

• District leaders and policymakers can facilitate discussions and provide guidance to ensure that compensation benefits the entire school community.

• District leaders and policymakers can redirect the emphasis away from individual teacher earnings and toward the goal of school improvement to nurture student success (Kozlowski &Lauen, 2019).

• District leaders can encourage educators to work together to maximize the impact of TIA on both teacher recognition and student success (Mintrop et al., 2018).

"

The Commit Partnership has been instrumental in supporting districts across Dallas County in TIA implementation, illuminating several promising approaches to strategic compensation. For instance, DISD's multi-year approach to strategic compensation has yielded impressive results, with the district retaining over 93% of its most effective teachers, surpassing the statewide retention rate of 86%. Furthermore, the program's evaluation indicates an improvement in DISD teachers' professional growth, reflected in higher scores within the district's designation system.

Commit Partnership

"

Explore Ways to Incentivize Teachers to Stay in or Move to High Needs Campuses

Why This Matters

TIA's unrestricted portability of designations allows teachers to maintain designated status even if they move to another campus. To avoid situations where teachers are leaving high needs campuses, one promising consideration is to incentivize teachers who are designated in high-needs and rural districts. Compensation plans can vary significantly, which means that a teacher may not receive an identical bonus when they move to a new district. A teacher can earn recognition in a high-needs school and then decide to teach in a different district or even a more affluent school. This can result in a talent drain from schools that need it most. Affluent districts can recruit designated teachers from high-needs districts by offering higher base salaries and better-resourced school environments.

Potential Strategies

• Policymakers can modify the TIA formula to provide additional financial incentives for teachers who choose to stay in their current districts, especially if those districts face challenges in attracting and retaining educators.

• District leaders could explore ways to structure compensation plans to incentivize teachers staying at their campuses for several years following their designation.

• TEA could provide districts with additional funding opportunities to access technical assistance providers across the state on using TIA evaluations to implement more equitable strategic staffing.

CONSIDERATION 3
Provide Educators with Accessible Resources and Training for Measuring the Effectiveness of TIA

Why This Matters

Teachers often find it challenging to grasp the intricacies of the formulas used to award designations in their districts, which can vary significantly from district to district and even within districts based on subject areas. Policymakers and district leaders need to address challenges in understanding the purpose of value-added measures and their limitations for teachers seeking clarity on how to effectively leverage data to support student growth.

Potential Strategies

• TEA could provide opportunities for districts to apply for additional funding to support teachers through technical assistance, access to resources and training focused on value-added measures and the broader TIA framework.

• District leaders should work collaboratively with school principals to provide teachers with accessible resources and tools that help demystify the designation process in their district, e.g., clear guidelines, explanations, and even training sessions to ensure that teachers understand the criteria (Ahn & Vigdor 2023).

• District leaders should take advantage of TEA's TIA System Renewal and Continuous Improvement Grant program, which would support the collaboration with an approved TIA Technical Assistance Provider.

• Policymakers should recognize the value of creating opportunities for school districts to learn from each other. Organizations like the Texas Impact Network, which currently engages with 96 out of the 675 district sat various stages of implementing the TIA process, provide invaluable platforms for districts to share insights, strategies and best practices.

References

Ahn, T., & Vigdor, J. (2023). Opening the black box: Behavioral responses of teachers and principals to pay-for-performance incentive programs. Journal of Human Capital, 17(3), 315-348.

Kozlowski, K. P., & Lauen, D. L. (2019). Understanding teacher pay for performance: Flawed assumptions and disappointing results. Teachers College Record, 121(2), 1-38.

Lee, J., Strong, M., Hamman, D., & Zeng, Y. (2021).Measuring Teacher Buy-in for the Texas Pay-for-Performance Program. In Frontiers in Education (Vol. 6, p. 729821). Frontiers Media SA.

Mintrop, R., Ordenes, M., Coghlan, E., Pryor, L., & Madero, C. (2018). Teacher evaluation, pay for performance, and learning around instruction: Between dissonant incentives and resonant procedures. Educational Administration Quarterly, 54(1), 3-46.

How to Cite This Work

Kirksey, J. J. & Torres, L.G. (2023). Shifting the Rhetoric: Maximizing the Teacher Incentive Allotment to Improve Schools. Report and recommendations from the Texas Education Research-Practice-Policy Partnership Network.

Emerging Insights offer perspectives and experiences from RP3 Network members and their community partners on urgent and timely problems of practice and policy across Texas to surface opportunities and obstacles, and pose needed research.

Authors

Dr. J. Jacob Kirksey, Texas Tech University
J. Jacob Kirksey is an assistant professor in the College of Education and associate director of the Center for Innovative Research in Change,Leadership, and Education at Texas Tech University. His research is broadly focused on issues at the nexus of education and other areas of public policy, which includes student absenteeism and truancy,inclusion and special education,the ripple effects of immigration enforcement and the workforce.

Dr. Laura Torres, The University of Texas at Austin
Laura Torres serves as director of data analytics, assessment and translational research and is an assistant professor of instruction in the College of Education at the University of Texas at Austin. Her work focuses on improving the accessibility and use of data and research to advance equitable policy and practice in education.

➤ Contributors

Samantha Boiser | Educate Texas
Tonya Clark | Educate Texas
Kate Greer | Commit Partnership
Courtney Kersey | Commit Partnership
Katy Merriweather | E3 Alliance
Tara Kirkland | College of Education, UT Austin

➤ Founding Members

★ **Commit Partnership**
★ **E3 Alliance**
★ **Educate Texas**
★ **Houston Education Research Consortium**
★ **Philanthropy Advocates**
★ **Texas 2036**
★ **Texas Tech, Center for Research In Change, Leadership, and Education**
★ **UT Austin, College of Education**
★ **UT El Paso, Paso del Norte**
★ **UT Rio Grande Valley, College of Education**
★ **UT San Antonio, Urban Education Institute**

WWW.LONESTARP3.ORG

Let's Connect

We aim to include partners who engage in long-term, mutually beneficial collaborations that promote the production and use of research and data to solve educational problems of practice in their regions.

LONESTARP3 is a statewide network that brings multiple perspectives together—inviting the many voices involved in education. Our partners design, generate, and translate research into accessible and actionable solutions. Our collaborative approach produces research with clear and immediate use in both classroom teaching and policymaking.