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Jessica Edenfield

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF MERIT PAY IN GEORGIA

by

JESSICA GLISSON EDENFIELD

(Under the Direction of Teri Denlea Melton)

ABSTRACT

This study explored the perceptions of implementing a merit pay plan as reported by elementary teachers in three rural Georgia school districts, one of which was participating in the Race to the Top (RT3) initiative. The study examined the perceptions of 109 elementary teachers in regard to merit pay implementation, models of merit pay, factors worthy of reward, and the impact that perceptions of school culture has on attitudes towards merit pay. The study employed a descriptive survey approach to address the research questions. An amended version of the Teacher Survey on Performance Pay was employed to explore the perceptions of participants. The majority of responding teachers worked in the RT3 district. Respondents were not in favor of the implementation of a merit pay plan and preferred raising the base salary of teachers. The majority of respondents did not favor the presented models of merit pay, although a school-based plan received a higher response of agreement than the others. Respondents indicated that a variety of factors beyond student achievement and teacher evaluations needed to be considered when awarding merit pay and reported unfavorable feelings toward Georgia's proposed formula. Concerns regarding factors impacting student achievement were expressed, along with frequent concerns for teachers of EIP and inclusion classes and how emphasis on student achievement may impact these areas. Results also indicated that perceptions of school culture have no impact on attitudes towards merit pay. Respondents reported positive views of school culture, yet were not in favor of merit pay implementation. Concerns arose regarding potential negative implications that merit pay may hold for school culture, such as decreased collaboration and increased competitive feelings. Based on comparisons, overall responses from the RT3 district were similar to those of the other two districts who were not RT3 participants. Neither district type was in favor of merit pay. The results of the study indicated an overall negative view of merit pay by teachers, with the destruction of the schools' collaborative cultures being one of the top concerns. Such feelings may be resolved if teachers are active participants when creating a merit pay plan.

INDEX WORDS: Merit Pay, Race to the Top, Student Achievement, Perceptions

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DEDICATION

To my daddy and my mama, Ed and Jackie Glisson, thank you for teaching me the true meaning of unconditional love. Without you both I would never have made it this far. You taught me to follow my dreams and to never give up. You believed in me when I did not believe in myself. I will be forever grateful!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Not a day goes by that the field of teaching does not see a mandate to try something new to improve student achievement. These mandates may range from the implementation of a new curriculum to the restructure of a school system. The selection of Georgia as one of sixteen states participating in President Obama's Race to the Top (RT3) education initiative has brought about many such changes. One change of particular interest to teachers was the abandonment of the Class Keys Evaluation System, which had been in place for several years. Under RT3, the Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES) has been employed. Under TKES, teachers are rated as *Ineffective* (0 points), *Needs Development* (1 point), *Proficient* (2 points), or *Exemplary* (3 points) on ten specific standards that pertain to professional knowledge, collaboration and planning, differentiation, classroom environment, and professionalism. This component of TKES is known as the Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards, or TAPS, and accounts for 50% of the overall evaluation total. This score is compiled through two thirty-minute formative observations and four ten-minute walk-through observations in which teachers are rated on their knowledge of the standards and instructional effectiveness. At the end of the year each standard receives an overall rating and the sum of the ratings may reach a total of thirty points. A TAPS score of 27-30 points is *Exemplary*, 17-26 points is *Proficient*, 7-16 points is *Needs Development*, and 0-6 points is *Ineffective*.

Another major change under RT3 is the use of value-added measures of student growth for teachers of both tested and non-tested subjects. This change has led to new measures, known as *student learning outcomes* (SLOs). SLOs are to be administered to

students in non-tested areas such as physical education or fine arts, and to students who have no previous standardized test scores, such as third grade and below. Much like standardized tests, SLOs set measurable goals and targets, are aligned with state standards, and are state-approved. The data obtained through testing will be monitored each year to show the growth, decline, or “plateauing” of each individual student. Since the standardized measures are value-added, scores will be compared to those of students in other areas of the state with similar achievement history. The state approved SLOs will make comparisons among district identified achievement growth measures. The comparisons will identify areas of great impact or great weakness on various groups of students. Teachers will be labeled effective only if their students collectively show growth each year. This data accrued from overall students’ performance makes up the other 50% of the teacher evaluation.

A third new practice brought about through the employment of the Teacher Keys Evaluation System is the use of student surveys of instructional practice. The idea of these surveys comes from the Gates Foundation’s “Measures of Effective Teaching” project (Raudonis, 2012). The RT3 initiative requires that teacher evaluations include some form of student input, so in the original plan submitted by Georgia, student surveys included all students from kindergarten up and would account for 10% of a teacher’s evaluation (Raudonis, 2012). However, Raudonis (2012) explained that after State School Superintendent Dr. John Barge took office, Barge amended the plan so that input from students in kindergarten through second grade would be used as information only, while the remaining grade levels’ input would be used as documentation to support the performance ratings that teachers are given. These surveys are anonymously completed

by students in an effort to gain insight into the perceptions that the students have regarding the performance of their teachers, yielding information that may be missed in the classroom observations. The surveys have a readability level suited to the population being surveyed and are not administered by the classroom teacher.

The overall rating, or Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM) score, is based on a compilation of the aforementioned TKES components, along with a preponderance of evidence provided by the teacher such as videos, lesson plans, or other documentation that may influence teacher ratings on performance standards and student growth data. Once a TEM score is calculated, an overall rating of *Ineffective*, *Needs Development*, *Proficient*, or *Exemplary* is assigned to each teacher.

Prior to the implementation of Teacher Keys, a teacher's annual evaluation was based upon a collection of classroom observations by administrators who were looking for employment of the latest research-based instructional practices. They also took into consideration classroom management and completion of assigned duties within the school. Student test scores were not a part of the overall teacher evaluation. However, according to Sheppard (2013), there has been a push for teacher evaluations that are more closely aligned to professional standards and that focus on student outcomes and achievement or, in other words, are closely tied to teacher accountability.

Currently, classrooms are becoming more and more data-driven. Collaboration among teachers is promoted more than ever. The roll-out of the Common Core curriculum standards place even more importance on the area of professional knowledge. The RT3 federal grant has brought about significant changes to all participating districts. However, one change was initially set to roll-out in the 2013-2014 school year, and

although postponed until September, 2015, may be the change that prompts the most debate: merit pay.

In his July 2011 speech to the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan was quoted as saying:

If teachers are to be treated and compensated as the true professionals they are, the profession will need to shift away from an industrial era blue-collar model of compensation to rewarding effectiveness and performance. Money is never the reason why people enter teaching, but it is the reason why some people do not enter teaching, or leave as they start to think about beginning a family and buying a home. (Does Merit Pay, n.d.)

Although various attempts at merit pay systems have been employed in the past, currently 96% of America's schools pay teachers according to a single-salary schedule (Ellerson, 2009). Brodsky, DeCesare, and Kramer-Wine (2010) identified a problem with the current system is that it does not differentiate between desirable or undesirable teaching practices within the classroom, nor does it offer motivation or rewards for teachers who are reporting high student growth and success rates. These concerns have been taken into consideration under the Race to the Top grant. For RT3 in Georgia, merit pay compensation will be calculated based on the following formula for teachers of tested subjects: 50% based on student growth and 50% based upon administrators' rubric-based evaluations of teacher performance when teaching the Common Core and Georgia Performance Standards, professional knowledge, student surveys, and other factors obtained through classroom observations, walk-throughs, and the Georgia Teachers Duties and Responsibilities Inventory (GTDRI) (GA DOE, n.d.). For teachers of non-

tested subjects, merit pay will be calculated according to a different formula in which 40% is based upon student growth and 60% is based upon the administrators' evaluations and student surveys.

Brodsky, DeCesare, and Kramer-Wine (2010) reviewed six merit pay programs in various states in the U.S. and reported findings of both success and failure. In association with the successful merit pay programs, Brodsky, DeCesare, and Kramer-Wine (2010) cited two factors that proved important in the successful implementation of a merit pay program: the amount of involvement of teachers in the early development of the programs, and a formula for configuring merit pay that includes all components (beyond test scores). Teacher involvement in the creation of a merit pay program allows for the teachers' perceptions, input, and fears to be voiced.

Drevitch (2006) reported that supporters of merit pay believe that the basis for determining teacher pay and the amount that teachers are paid must change in an effort to attract a new generation of teachers. He interviewed a young teacher who explained that although teachers who are in their first and second year of the profession are at the bottom of the pay schedule, they often bring to the classroom new and brilliant ideas that go unnoticed. She compared these beginning, "underpaid" teachers to veteran teachers who have not changed their classroom strategies and practices in years to meet the needs of diverse learners, but yet they make more money due to their years of experience (Drevitch, 2006). Supporters of merit pay also claim that bonuses may increase motivation and attract more desirable teacher-hopefuls to the field. The cross country data reported by Woessman (2011) linked merit pay to increased student achievement in the areas of science, math, and reading. Hess (2011) reported that his studies revealed

that merit pay made teachers feel valued and “established a firmer, more quality-conscious basis for dramatic improvement” (Hess, 2011, *The Point of Merit Pay*, para. 5).

According to Barnett and Ritter (2008), merit pay systems can be used as a means for recruiting and retaining effective teachers. These authors suggest that implementing merit pay would motivate existing teachers, attract a more talented group of applicants to the field, and that monetary incentives would reward effective teachers with large bonuses, prompting consistently ineffective teachers to leave the profession. Upon their evaluation of a merit pay plan in the Little Rock school system, Barnett and Ritter (2008) found that following a merit pay two-year implementation period, student achievement showed gains in reading and math. They saw that teachers reported increased levels of satisfaction regarding their salaries, did not feel that they had to compete with each other to earn the reward, and expressed no feelings of negativity within their school environment. Barnett and Ritter (2008) also found that teachers did not report negative feelings or feelings of burden regarding low-achieving students; instead, they reported that these students offered an opportunity to demonstrate their teaching ability and skills. Although these studies were not on one accord, a commonality did exist: merit pay may have a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of highly effective, skilled teachers. Others claim that this is yet another push from corporate America that will result in unethical actions among employees, such as cheating scandals, as well as financial ruin of participating school districts (Lavy, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Implementing merit pay into an educational setting is not a new idea. Although adopted and adapted from the practices of corporate America, merit pay has received

mixed reviews in the educational setting. Supporters believe that it helps to reward and retain deserving teachers. Oppositionists believe that it does not work because teachers are not extrinsically motivated, and in the long run it may lead to an increase in cheating scandals if based on achievement test results. Under President Obama's Race to the Top (RT3) initiative, merit pay is a practice that will be employed in twenty-six of Georgia's school districts during the 2015-2016 school year in an effort to not only increase student achievement, but moreover to recruit and retain highly-skilled teachers that are able to show increased student growth and eliminate those teachers who consistently do not show student growth. Although RT3 districts were allowed to create their own local plans for a merit pay system, input regarding the design and implementation of the system is needed from all stakeholders, especially teachers.

The Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS), under the Teacher Keys Evaluation System, that comprises half of the overall evaluation score is relatively cut and dried. Teachers were given handbooks listing each of the ten standards and the performance indicators associated with each one. The other half of the evaluation will be based student growth data, which may be the basis for controversy and discontentment with Georgia's merit pay plan. In order to effectively implement a merit pay plan, several factors must be defined within a district and understood by participants. The district must devise a suitable assessment to measure student growth and there must be a clear definition as to what the expected achievement is; there should also be a clear understanding of what is an effective or ineffective teacher. The inclusion of teachers, or at the very least teacher perceptions and opinions, in the creation of a merit pay plan would be beneficial in order to have buy-in and adequate familiarity with the

expectations of merit pay within a district. However, little research is available regarding teachers' perceptions of merit pay. The majority of merit pay research investigates the impact of merit pay on student achievement and, in some cases, teacher attrition. Merit pay is an upcoming practice under participating Race to the Top districts, which may lead to future national merit pay endeavors; however, little if any research has explored teachers' perceptions of merit pay in Georgia's RT3 districts.

Research Questions

As the researcher's interest lies in describing teachers' perceptions of merit pay in three counties in southeastern Georgia, the research is guided by the following question: What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative?

In addition, the following sub-questions serve to drill down to those perceptions:

1. Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance?
2. What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay (e.g., performance evaluations, student achievement, etc.)?
3. What is the relationship between feelings of support teachers receive from their principals and attitudes toward the idea of merit pay?
4. Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes toward merit pay?

Significance of the Study

Merit pay is a future practice in twenty-six of Georgia's public school districts. However, in order to implement a successful merit pay program that will achieve the

results merit pay is intended to produce, districts would benefit from teachers, or at the very least teacher input, playing an active role in the process of the creation and implementation of the program. The information gained through this quantitative study offers insight from the perspective of teachers regarding the implementation of a merit pay program. The results of the study may prove beneficial to both local and state officials by yielding information regarding what teachers in Georgia, those involved in Race to the Top, think of merit pay systems and what factors affect teachers' perceptions of merit pay. The results of the study may also prove beneficial by allowing local and state officials to gain insight into teacher motivation and possible teacher retention issues related to merit pay. The study attempted to investigate the perceptions of Georgia teachers toward the employment of a merit pay system and the aspects of a merit pay system that Georgia teachers find the most and least appealing.

Procedures

This comparative descriptive study attempted to investigate the perceptions of a group of rural Georgia elementary teachers regarding merit pay. Data were collected through the use of a survey based on an amended version of the Teacher Survey on Performance Pay (TSPP), which was administered to voluntary participants via *SurveyMonkey*©. Six open-ended questions were added to gain insight into teachers' feelings towards a merit pay system, opinions of Georgia's formula for merit pay, and to offer participants the opportunity to share any further ideas or feelings. Data were exported into Minitab for analysis and are reported as frequencies and percentages for both the RT3 district and the non-RT3 districts. Differences in perceptions between the two types of districts were compared.

Limitations and Assumptions

As with all studies, there are several limitations and assumptions associated with the study. The researcher asked elementary teachers in schools in Counties A, B, and C to voluntarily participate in the anonymous study and complete the survey. Only a portion of the teachers volunteered to participate due to the nature of the study, even though it was anonymous and the researcher communicated how the data from the study will be used to gain an understanding of teacher perceptions of merit pay. An additional limitation of the survey is that the researcher can only assume that responses given by the participants are indicative of their actual perceptions. Another limitation to the study is that the sample was restricted to only elementary schools in one Race to the Top school district in rural Georgia and two districts not participating in RT3, which made it difficult to make a generalization regarding overall teacher perceptions of merit pay throughout Georgia. The lack of information regarding the psychometrics of the Teacher Survey on Performance Pay is another limitation to the study. Another limitation related to the study is that many participants in the study may not have been knowledgeable about merit pay structures and how they work. The term “merit pay” may have been explained differently by the district, which might have impacted results. The researcher was unable to find a validation study for the TSPP. Therefore preliminary administrations were conducted to ascertain validity because the authors of the original survey were unable to respond with any validation (see Appendix C).

There are several assumptions that underlie this study. First and foremost, is the assumption that participants were open and honest in their responses. Another assumption is that participants who have strong feelings regarding merit pay were the

ones most likely to participate in the survey, which could have affected the results. A final assumption is that the survey questions were valid and measured what they were intended to measure.

Key Definitions

The following key terms are used throughout this study and are defined based upon the purpose of this study.

Achievement gap: For the purpose of this study, an achievement gap is defined as the difference in performance between a focal group and a reference group.

According to the Georgia Department of Education, the focal group makes up the high-need students who score within the bottom 25% of the score distribution.

The reference group represents the state's mean performance on the given test (GA DOE, n.d.).

Classroom observation: A classroom observation is one of several methods used to collect data about a teacher's performance that includes recording of evidence or notes while watching a teacher engage in instructional practices in the classroom (Covey, 2009).

Group performance: For the purpose of this study, group performance is the overall performance of teachers of similar subjects or teachers in departmentalized settings as measured on standardized tests and compared to the statewide norm, as well as the previous years' scores (Goodman & Turner, 2011).

Perceptions: For the purpose of this study, perceptions are defined as beliefs or opinions held by a group of people (Perceptions, n.d.).

Performance Evaluations: For the purpose of this study, performance evaluations are the rating of a teacher's performance as defined by the ten standards and their accompanying indicators on the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) (GA DOE, n.d.).

Performance Pay: For the purpose of this study, performance pay is defined as a pay plan that compensates teachers based on performance evaluations and value-added measures or student achievement data. This term may be used interchangeably with merit pay (GA DOE, n.d.).

Race to the Top (RT3) initiative: The Race to the Top (RT3) initiative is President Obama's \$4.35 billion dollar education initiative funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which opened a contest in which districts could gain points by satisfying certain educational policies, such as employing performance-based standards (GA DOE, n.d.).

School Performance: For the purpose of this study, school performance is defined as the overall performance of a school on standardized tests in comparison to the statewide norm, as well as past years' performance on the given tests (GA DOE, n.d.).

Single-salary Schedule: For the purpose of this study, a single-salary schedule is defined as the current pay schedule for 96% of school districts in the United States and is based upon a teacher's number of years' experience and number and type of college or university degrees (Ellerson, 2009; Podgursky, 2008).

Student Achievement: For the purpose of this study, student achievement is defined as a student's score on a standardized test, the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) or on a Student Learning Outcome or SLO test (GA DOE, n.d.).

Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES): The Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES) is the teacher evaluation system employed by districts under the Race to the Top initiative, which is based on classroom observations, student achievement, and assessment of performance of teachers' duties and responsibilities (GA DOE, n.d.).

Value-added Measures: For the purpose of this study, value-added measures are defined as measures that seek to quantify the value of gains in educational attainment, usually by comparing student test results in one year with those in a subsequent year or years (GA DOE, n.d.).

Chapter Summary

Although applying the long existent corporate America practice of merit pay into current educational practice is not a new idea, little literature exists regarding the perceptions of teachers in doing so. In Georgia's current twenty-six Race to the Top school districts, the impending implementation of a merit pay system will occur in the 2015-2016 school year. Although the literature includes results from various attempts at merit pay, there is a gap in the literature regarding the factors that affect teachers' perceptions of merit pay. There is also no empirical data regarding teachers' perceptions of merit pay in the state of Georgia under the Race to the Top initiative. Therefore, this study sought to investigate teachers' perceptions of a merit pay system by determining

factors that impact those perceptions concerning the implementation of a merit pay system.

Participation required that the selected elementary school teachers completed an anonymous survey composed of questions created by the researcher that yielded demographic data, as well as, questions from the Teacher Survey on Performance Pay (TSPP). The participants completed the survey through a link on *SurveyMonkey*©. Data were exported into Minitab for analysis and is reported as frequencies and percentages for both the RT3 district and the non-RT3 district. Differences in perceptions between the two types of districts were compared.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Presently, the system of teacher pay involves a single-salary schedule that depends upon two main factors: the teacher's number of years of experience; and, the teacher's level of education and certification (Ellerson, 2009). This single-salary schedule has been employed in the American educational system since the mid-20th century in an effort to reduce pay discrimination against two main groups: women and elementary level teachers (Ellerson, 2009). This system is currently used by 96% of school districts in the United States (Podgursky, 2008).

However, change may be on the horizon in several states. President Obama's Race to the Top (RT3) educational initiative led to a push for schools involved to utilize merit pay. Georgia is one of the sixteen states involved in the five year RT3 initiative that have committed to imposing a merit pay plan of their choice (Smarick, 2011). According to the Georgia Department of Education (n.d.), the state was awarded \$400 million in RT3 grant money to disburse among the twenty-six participating districts who account for 68% of Georgia's lowest-achieving schools. Of the \$400 million, \$9.9 million is allotted for merit pay compensation (Downey, 2013). According to Smarick (2011), merit pay will play an extremely small role in the RT3 plan, stating that merit pay is "a sub-sub-sub-subsection" in the Race to the Top written plan. However, according to the Georgia Department of Education (n.d.), merit pay will be based largely upon student growth, but will also include teacher evaluations by administrators.

According to Perry, Engbers, and Jun (2009), performance pay attempts in the public sector have continuously failed. Gratz (2009) reported that some of the earliest

attempts at a performance pay system were practiced in the educational field in mid-1800s Britain where it was common for over thirty years and then declared a failure due to cheating and cramming. Gratz (2009) reported other attempts at merit pay that ended in problems such as teaching to the test without ample time for students to learn the material. Other accounts of failed merit pay attempts recounted by Gratz (2009) ended in cheating scandals and overall negative results. According to Levin (2011), merit pay systems that are based on student achievement are doomed from the beginning. In his research, Levin (2011) discussed the low number of professions outside of sales that offer salaries based on measurable outcomes, which in the case of merit pay would be student achievement. He went further to expose the notion that there is no uniform measure of what student achievement should be and that goals related to education that do not pertain to student achievement would not receive adequate attention (Levin, 2011).

According to Baedar (2011), the amount of money in the United States being spent on merit pay programs in education has quadrupled in the past five years, although mixed results regarding success have been reported. With the implementation of the Race to the Top (RT3) initiative by President Obama and its inclusion of state-determined merit pay systems, there remains a possibility that merit pay will become a common practice in education in the near future. Unfortunately, a void exists in the available research regarding teachers' perceptions of merit pay systems, not only in Georgia, but across America. Educators need to be knowledgeable about their pay scale.

The rationale for the employment of merit pay under the RT3 grant can be whittled down to one main goal: recruit and retain highly qualified and skilled teachers who show success in student achievement and remove teachers who have been given

ample opportunities but do not show success in student achievement. The overall hope of the initiative is to attract favorable applicants and to retain highly-skilled teachers who may benefit from a merit pay plan. Since the recruitment, retention, and removal of teachers is the driving force behind implementing merit pay programs, it is important to note how merit pay is intertwined with teacher motivation, student achievement, and teacher morale and school climate. Considering that the proposed RT3 merit pay plan in Georgia is based on student growth and evaluations over the performance standards, it would appeal to both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation of teachers. In order to obtain the extrinsic reward, teachers would be encouraged to change their methods in an effort to increase student achievement, which is the driving intrinsic motivator in dedicated teachers. By changing teaching practices, higher levels of student learning may be obtained, which leads to increased student achievement. Increased student achievement will naturally lead to increased teacher morale, which could in turn lead to more positive collaboration within participating schools. The following presents a review of the current literature on the ideas behind Race to the Top and its merit pay component, the business model, theoretical frameworks of Vroom and Herzberg, and the links between merit pay and student achievement, teacher motivation, morale, and retention, and merit pay detractors.

Brief History of Merit Pay

According to Gatz (2009), merit pay practices can be traced back to the 1700s, although England is labeled as its place of origin around 1860, where it was employed until 1900 and brought to an end due to cheating scandals and an overall perversion of the educational system of the time. The first attempt at merit pay in the United States

occurred in 1908 in Newton, Massachusetts, but the rest of America's school systems did not buy in to the idea (Gatz, 2009).

Although attempts at merit pay have been tried throughout the years, they seem to fizzle out or never really catch on at all. However, this changed in 1983 when *A Nation at Risk* was published and the economic downfall was blamed on poor schooling (Murnane & Cohen, 1986). The publication offered merit pay and increasing teachers' base salaries as potential solutions to the education problem. Although many districts made an attempt to employ merit pay, research revealed that most systems were only able to continue the practice for approximately six years and reported problems associated with administering the program, bargaining with the teachers, and a general lack of funding (Murnane & Cohen, 1986).

Race to the Top

In 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) into effect (Boser, 2012). Under the ARRA several new educational initiatives were proposed; one being Race to the Top (RT3). One of the biggest reasons behind RT3 is that the government will offer schools the support they need to break away from age-old practices of the past and implement new innovations and reform (Boser, 2012). Any states that wished to participate had to apply for the funds and also had to develop their own approaches to reform. The application process was competitive, with points being awarded for successful completion of various components. The initiative identified the following four key areas for reform: implementation of rigorous standards, support and retention of effective educators, data-driven decision-making, and improvement of low-performing schools through innovative, effective approaches (Boser, 2012). Of the forty

states and the District of Columbia that applied, only twelve states were chosen as RT3 winners. Among the winners was the state of Georgia, which was awarded a \$400 million grant with almost ten million of the grant dollars designated to the implementation of merit pay (Downey, 2013).

The call for the implementation of merit pay under the Race to the Top initiative is Georgia's third attempt at implementing a pay-for-performance plan for teachers. The first attempt at such a plan occurred in 1986 under the Quality Basic Education Act (Rickman & Goss, 2012). This plan was based on a career ladder plan, with the highest rung offering teachers an additional \$17,000 in pay. However, given that a recession occurred and it would cost \$250-\$300 million dollars a year to fully implement the plan, the state legislature eliminated the funding for the plan (Rickman & Goss, 2012).

The second time Georgia attempted to implement merit pay was in 1991 under the direction of then-governor Zell Miller (Rickman & Goss, 2012). This particular plan was created in an effort to reward highly-effective teachers. This plan proposed that merit pay was school-based instead of individualized, which was not acceptable to administrators across the state who wanted to reward successful teachers. Therefore, the state settled on a two-prong approach in which schools received awards for achieving their own performance goals and individual teachers within awarded schools would determine how the rewards were distributed (Rickman & Goss, 2012). Downfalls of this merit pay plan were that it only offered a one-time bonus and highly-effective teachers could only receive the bonus if the school was awarded the bonus (Rickman & Goss, 2012). This plan ended in 2003, and at its end only 10% of Georgia's schools had been approved to participate, with only 6% having earned an award (Rickman & Goss, 2012).

Georgia is set to begin a third attempt at merit pay for teachers in the 2015-2016 school year. The pay-for-performance plan under the RT3 initiative was developed in an effort to retain effective teachers, but also to increase achievement in tested subjects, reduce the achievement gap associated with student subgroups, and to attract effective teachers to high-poverty and/or high-minority schools (U.S. DOE, 2010). The plan is to allow a step increase to teachers who have both satisfactory ratings on the Teacher Keys Evaluations and increased student growth (U.S. DOE, 2010). Georgia also plans to provide additional annual bonuses to individual teachers who fall within established tiers of performance and also to high-school teachers who reduce the achievement gap within an established subgroup (U.S. DOE, 2010). Veteran teachers will be offered an option of whether to participate in merit pay or be grandfathered into the current salary plan; new teachers will be required to participate in merit pay (U.S. DOE, 2010). The differences in the current pay scale and the merit pay system scale can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Example of Teacher Compensation under Georgia's Current State Salary Schedule (U.S. DOE, 2010)

Teacher Salary Scale	Expected Income	Additional Steps
Starting Salary (Bachelor's)	\$33,424	
Value of steps by year 5	\$3,100	<i>3 steps</i>
Salary at Year 5	\$36,524	
Move to Master's at Year 5	\$5,478	
Additional Steps by year 10	\$6,426	<i>4 additional steps</i>
Salary at year 10 (Master's)	\$48,428	

Additional Steps by Year 20	\$7,713	<i>5 additional steps</i>
Salary at Year 20	\$56,141	<i>12 total steps</i>

Table 2

Example of Possible Teacher Compensation within Georgia's RT3 Performance-Based System (U.S. DOE, 2010)

	Ineffective	Effective- chooses to remain at Career Teacher Level	Effective- chooses to advance to Master Teacher Level	Highly Effective- chooses to remain at Career Teacher Level	Highly Effective- chooses to advance to Master Teacher Level
BA Starting Salary	\$33,424	\$33,424	\$33,424	\$33,424	\$33,424
Individual Performance Bonus		\$8,000	\$8,000	\$12,000	\$12,000
Student Achievement Gap Reduction Bonus		\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Value of Steps by Year 5		\$3,100	\$3,100	\$3,100	\$3,100
Potential Salary at Year 5	N/A	\$49,524	\$49,524	\$53,524	\$53,524
Salary Increase with Master Teacher Promotion			\$8,000		\$8,000

Additional Steps by	\$4,584	\$4,854	\$4,854	\$4,854
Year 10				
Potential Salary at	\$54,108	\$62,108	\$58,108	\$66,108
Year 10				
Additional Steps by	\$6,547	\$6,547	\$6,547	\$6,547
Year 20				
Potential Salary at	\$60,656	\$68,656	\$64,656	\$72,656
Year 20				
Incremental Pay-	\$14,232	\$14,232	\$14,232	\$14,232
Steps				
Incremental Pay-	\$13,000	\$21,000	\$17,000	\$25,000
Bonuses				
Step as % of	52%	40%	46%	36%
Incremental Pay				

As with any proposed initiative, the question of fidelity comes to mind. As of July 2013, the United States Department of Education was threatening to withhold the \$9.9 million dollars of the RT3 federal grant funds allocated to merit pay because of Georgia's delay in implementation (Downey, 2013). This may cause teachers to question whether the plan will actually be implemented. Questions may also arise regarding how funds allocated for merit pay will be replenished once the RT3 initiative is over. One solution is to use educators' cost of living adjustments (COLAs) as a funding source for merit pay compensation, which may be met with opposition from certified educators.

The proposal for implementing merit pay under the Race to the Top initiative may have ties to corporate America. The idea behind a business is to have a workforce that, within a given timeframe, produces a product or offers a service to meet certain

specifications. Therefore, the argument could be made that the field of education is comparable to American business in that teachers are the educational workforce that provides the service and students are produced and expected to perform at grade-level successfully by the end of the school year. However, the problem with this comparison is that corporate America has limited types of customers looking for a specific good or product. Schools, on the other hand, have to meet a variety of expectations from large groups of people that include students, parents, community stakeholders, etc., as well as deal with highly varied student competencies. The push towards merit pay is built around models that corporate America has been using for years. According to Roble (2006), there were over 110 merit pay systems being used in the business arena. Rothstein (2005) reported that corporate America generally does not rely solely upon quantitative data to determine employee success because it would be difficult to attribute success to only one person involved; instead, corporate America also uses qualitative evaluations as a basis to determine merit pay and to compensate individuals responsible for positive outcomes. According to Podgursky (2008), a compensation policy is mandatory in the business arena and should be goal-oriented, since workers and their skills are responsible for any organization's outcome, either positive or negative. According to Greene (2002), firms in corporate America that do not measure and reward productivity of employees lose out to their corporate competitors that do.

However, there could be a misunderstanding regarding the language of merit or performance pay in the private sector. According to Adams, Heywood, and Rothstein (2009), large corporations in the private sector reported through a 2002 survey that 60% of employees were eligible for incentives such as dinners, public recognition, and gifts,

which the companies labeled performance pay. The survey also reported that 56% of employees were eligible for stock sharing, another incentive referred to as performance pay. Adams, Heywood, and Rothstein also coin merit pay as individual rewards and group rewards, one-time bonuses, and pay increases (2009). When comparing the use of merit pay in the public versus the private sector, it appears as though there is a gap in the actual language of the practice.

Theoretical Frameworks

In 1964, Victor Vroom developed expectancy theory, which today can be applied to merit pay systems. According to the theory, performance is a function of motivation, meaning that a worker who is highly motivated will perform effectively (Vroom, 1995). In essence, a person is motivated to perform a task only if the person believes that by exerting a certain amount of effort, a desired level of performance can be reached. The person must then believe that by obtaining the desired level of performance, a certain outcome will occur. The outcome must be considered positive by the person. In relation to merit pay, if a teacher sees the monetary reward as desirable and believes that the set goal (student growth percentages) is attainable, the teacher will be motivated to put forth any efforts needed to obtain the goal. When Vroom's theory is applied, it becomes obvious that teachers participating in merit pay programs must believe that a reward will be obtained if they achieve set goals, believe that the goals set to obtain the reward are attainable, and are motivated by an annual monetary bonus. Vroom (1995) poses that when employees' pay is related to their level of performance, the employees will perform at a more effective level. The application of this theory to the merit pay arena opens the

door for a researcher to distinguish what teachers like and dislike regarding merit pay, which can be applied to tweak programs and promote teacher buy-in.

Herzberg (1987) posited that workers' behaviors can be influenced by rewards that can be classified as either motivators or hygiene factors. According to Herzberg, the motivator factors such as achievement, recognition, and advancement are intrinsic to the job and are linked to feelings of job satisfaction. The hygiene factors, which are extrinsic to the job, include salary, conditions, and policy, and are linked to the feeling of, or avoidance of, job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1987). The application of this theory to the idea of a merit pay program may open the door to questions regarding teacher motivation and whether or not salary, or any extrinsic factors, can be used to motivate workers in the education arena.

Merit Pay and Student Achievement

With impending merit pay programs going into effect, the question arises as to whether or not merit pay has a positive effect on student achievement, which is the root of the American educational system. In 2009, Gratz reported in his research that the most common merit pay model associated with education at that time was based on students' standardized test scores and can be associated with the following three misconceptions that he identified (Gratz, 2009, The Flawed Logic of Most Plans sect.):

1. Teachers lack motivation and will value financial rewards more than they value actual student learning.
2. Schools are failing and U.S. students are academically falling behind their peers in other countries.

3. Measuring academic achievement is all that matters and student learning can accurately be measured by standardized tests.

Buck and Greene (2011) reported on international data regarding merit pay systems in schools. According to their research, twenty-seven countries that employed merit pay systems scored around 0.25 standard deviations higher on an international math test than countries that did not employ merit pay.

Goodman and Turner (2011) investigated further into the arena of the effects of merit pay on student achievement in their 2007 study of New York schools that employed a school-wide merit pay program. Their study included 309 schools that participated in a merit pay plan based on the school's overall performance on achievement test scores. The achievement test scores of those schools were compared to the scores of a control group of 129 schools. The study spanned a two-year time frame and revealed that there was no evidence to indicate that the bonus pay program increased student test scores.

Impact of Merit Pay on Teacher Motivation, Morale, and Retention

Liu (2007) analyzed the results of the 1995 Teacher Follow-up Survey given to beginning, novice, and experienced teachers in an effort to predict factors that may affect teacher attrition. The survey questioned the most effective ways to retain teachers. However, in his analysis, Liu found that of the 862 teachers surveyed 37% stated that providing higher salaries and improving fringe benefits offered would be a way to reduce teacher attrition. This was the highest percentage in any area on the survey. This analysis, along with reports of voluntary merit pay systems being employed, may lead to questioning the possibility that financial gain due to merit pay may be a motivator for teachers. However, this would urge an individual to question whether or not money is a

motivator for teachers. According to Herzberg's two factor approach, work behaviors are influenced by either motivators or hygiene factors and salary is classified as a hygiene factor (Herzberg, 1987). Herzberg's work found that motivators such as recognition and advancement have a longer-lasting effect on the attitudes of employees (See Table 3) (Herzberg, 1987). This suggests that teachers may be more motivated to improve their performance if an emphasis is placed on intrinsic rewards instead of a monetary gain.

Table 3 shows Herzberg's Two Factor Approach



Source: <https://wikispaces.psu.edu/display/PSYCH484/10.+Job+Design>

Barnett, Ritter, Winters, and Greene (2007) conducted a pilot study of five elementary schools employing a merit pay program in the Little Rock School District, known as the Achievement Challenge Pilot Project. Upon completion of the two-year study, Barnett, Ritter, Winters, and Greene (2007) found that the compensation system had a positive impact on the attitudes of the teachers. Furthermore, teachers reported that they had increased feelings of satisfaction with their salary, viewed low-achieving students as opportunities to let their teaching ability shine, and noticed academic gains of their students.

Morey (2008) studied Maryknoll School in Honolulu, a school that phased in merit pay. At first the teachers volunteered to participate in the merit pay program, but currently the school's payroll is based on a merit pay program that is linked to student achievement. This particular school had a history of difficulties with teacher retention within the first five years of employment. However, as Morey (2008) reported, once a rigorous plan of action to meet expectations was put into place, teachers seemed to buy in to the program and assumed responsibility for their learning and actions.

Kobakhidze (2010) researched merit pay in post-Soviet Union Georgia. The study included thirteen public schools and 215 teachers. Kobakhidze (2010) employed both a questionnaire and focus group discussions to yield information regarding merit pay and related topics. The reported results were that 30% of the teachers saw low salary as the biggest problem in the field of teaching and 54% of teachers agree that if teachers attend professional development their salaries should increase (Kobakhidze, 2010).

According to Anderson (2011), merit pay is not the best fit reward system for teachers. Anderson reported that teachers did not enter the field of education in hopes of great wealth, but moreover for the satisfaction of a job well done. Therefore, he challenged merit pay and instead proposed a recognition system for teachers. He proposed that accomplished teachers should be rewarded and recognized, but not with a monetary bonus. Avenues such as being assigned leadership roles and public recognition among peers may appeal to teachers more so than bonuses. Anderson (2011) believed that this would increase teacher satisfaction, bring more professionals to the teaching field, and cut down on the high number of teachers who leave education annually.

Laine, Potemski, and Rowland (2010) reported that although income is not the most important factor in whether or not teachers enter or leave the field of education, it definitely plays a role in the decision-making process. They reported findings in North Carolina in which schools that employed a merit pay system reported higher rates of teacher retention. Laine, Potemski, and Rowland (2010) stated that merit pay programs that use multiple means for measuring teacher performance open doors to better teacher evaluation methods, and foster professional learning communities and support systems among teachers which lead to increased teacher retention.

Merit Pay Detractors

The results of a 2007 national survey of teachers given by the Public Agenda and the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality yielded that 81% of elementary school teachers along with 76% of secondary school teachers would rather work in a setting where they believed they were supported by administrators than in a setting in which they received high amounts of pay as a reward (Toch, 2009). Hess (2011) concluded that merit pay can be an avenue to employees feeling valued and may be a way to refine the practices of teaching. Hess (2011) also believed that merit pay programs will breed a culture of competition, and will decrease cooperation and sharing among teachers.

Goldhaber, Dearmond, and Deburgomaster (2011) analyzed perceptions of teachers regarding merit pay in Washington based on the Washington State Teacher Compensation Survey, in which results were received from 3,121 classroom teachers. The results revealed that elementary school teachers are less likely to support merit pay models than high school teachers (Goldhaber, Dearmond, & Deburgomaster, 2011).

Several of the included measures on the survey were related to the issue of trust. According to results, teachers who reported higher trust in and respect for their co-workers were less supportive of merit pay; those teachers who reported higher levels of respect and trust in their principals supported merit pay. The researchers speculated that when teachers feel connected to their co-workers, they do not need a support system that may lead to competition and may negatively impact the culture of the school.

According to Ramirez (2011), there are multiple factors associated with merit pay that may affect the morale of teachers. He reported that merit pay may introduce unneeded competition among teachers, which may cause a lack of cohesion and community within the schools. Ramirez (2011) recognized the sense of belonging as one of the naturally occurring incentives within a school and he stated that if the climate of a school is impacted negatively, success is decreased.

Chapter Summary

Studies have shown that merit pay is an accepted practice associated mainly with corporate America. However, in an effort to improve America's educational system, various types of merit pay have been used and are resurfacing again under the Race to the Top initiative. As with any educational change, the questions regarding impact on student achievement and overall employee welfare appears to be at the forefront of any debate. The research regarding the impact of merit pay on student achievement reveals that there seems to be little evidence to support a significant increase or decline in student achievement. The apprehension associated with the impact on student achievement is largely due to the opinion that only items found on standardized tests will be the focus of

participating classrooms. Other research indicates that there is a belief that under merit pay teachers will revamp their instruction and seek ways to effectively teach the content.

In regard to teacher morale and retention, again there seems to be mixed results in the literature. This leads to the consideration of two theoretical constructs that can be associated with merit pay: Vroom's expectancy theory and Herzberg's two-factor theory. When applying Vroom's theory, if a teacher were to see goals as attainable and the "reward" as desirable, there may be an increase in morale and retention. Herzberg's theory requires a more in-depth look at what exactly motivates teachers, which has not generally been associated with money. Therefore, with money not being a motivator for teachers, merit pay may be a doomed practice. Understanding could be found through research that attempts to identify motivators for teachers. Further research needs to be conducted to gain insight into the perceptions of teachers regarding merit pay, as well as what may motivate the teacher population.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHOD

A review of the literature reveals that the employment of a merit pay system is not a new practice in the educational arena. Although an apparent “tried and true” practice in the business arena, merit pay is accompanied by mixed emotions regarding its worth in education. Research reveals that the use of merit pay has no significant impact on schools or student achievement. Although there has been limited research regarding merit pay and its impact on student achievement, teacher morale, and teacher retention, there is a noted absence of research regarding teachers’ perceptions of merit pay. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of teachers in three rural Georgia school districts regarding merit pay.

Research Questions

As the researcher’s interest lies in exploring the teachers’ perceptions of merit pay in three counties in southeastern Georgia, the research will be guided by the following question: What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia’s Race to the Top initiative?

In addition, the following sub-questions will serve to drill down to those perceptions:

1. Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance?
2. What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)?

3. What is the relationship between feelings of support teachers receive from their principals and attitudes toward the idea of merit pay?
4. Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes toward merit pay?

Research Design and Methodology

To answer the research questions posed by this study, the researcher proposed that a comparative descriptive study be conducted. This study attempts to investigate the perceptions of a group of rural Georgia elementary teachers regarding merit pay. A quantitative research design is appropriate due to the size of the sample being studied and the researcher's goal of investigating differences in perceptions associated with RT3 districts. The participants are elementary teachers from one Race to the Top district and two districts not participating in Race to the Top. These districts were chosen because the researcher has access to them, which made them convenient to the researcher. The participants were asked to anonymously complete the Teacher Survey on Performance Pay. The researcher used the data collected to describe characteristics of the perceptions, as well as differences in these perceptions, of merit pay and the frequency in which answers between the RT3 and non-RT3 districts occur.

Population and Study Sample

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of merit pay in three rural southeast Georgia public school districts; one of which is participating in President Obama's RT3 initiative. The districts were chosen out of convenience to the researcher who has access to them. The sample itself was a self-selected voluntary response and consisted of teachers in Counties A, B, and C counties in Georgia, and included regular education

teachers, special education teachers, and teachers of non-academic subjects in elementary schools that house pre-kindergarten through fifth grades. The educators within the sample had to possess Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade certification on their Georgia teaching certificate in order to be included in the sample. County A, which is the county with the highest population and also the district currently implementing RT3, hosts three elementary schools that employ 166 teachers who were invited to participate in the survey. County B and County C, the two districts not currently implementing RT3, each host one elementary school that employ a combined total of 80 teachers who were invited to participate in the survey. The data represent only those who chose to complete the instrument.

The researcher was granted permission by the superintendents to conduct the survey in all three selected counties (See Appendix D). The Georgia Southern University IRB reviewed and approved the study (See Appendix G). The survey was anonymous; participants were asked non-identifiable demographic questions, as well as whether or not they work in an RT3 school. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and participants could stop at any time without penalty. All responses saved into *SurveyMonkey*®, including responses from partially completed surveys, were exported into Minitab for analysis.

Instrumentation

In 2007, Jacob and Springer developed the Teacher Survey on Performance Pay (TSPP) in an effort to gather information regarding teachers' perceptions of merit, or performance pay in the Hillsborough County School District in Florida. Jacob and Springer worked on behalf of the Hillsborough County School District and The National

Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University to gain insight into teachers' opinions of Florida's Merit Awards Program, which was actively used at the time. Jacob and Springer invited teachers from 199 public and magnet schools in the district to participate. The findings revealed that overall the teachers moderately supported the program, favored the idea of individual rewards, and were apprehensive of negative repercussions to the school environment due to merit pay (Jacob & Springer, 2007).

The survey used in this study was a modified version of the TSPP. Since the previous research was based on a state-specific study, parts of the survey pertaining specifically to their chosen state were omitted, leaving three usable sections. The three sections used are entitled "Incentive Pay," "What should be rewarded with merit pay?," and "School Environment" (see Appendix E).

The survey employed a 4- or 5- point Likert scale response for each question and participants indicated their level of agreement or disagreement or rated the level of importance for each question. The first section of the survey assessed teacher perceptions regarding the various types of merit pay and whether or not the implementation of a merit pay system would be a positive change to current teacher salary scales. The second section of the survey assessed teacher perceptions regarding a variety of methods that could be used to reward teachers with merit pay. Within this section, teachers were given seventeen factors that may be used in developing a merit pay program. The third section of the survey assessed teacher perceptions of the overall school environment, focusing specifically on perceptions related to the building principal and fellow teachers. The survey included six open-ended questions at the end, designed to allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions, as well as to allow participants the

opportunity to volunteer any information that they deemed important that was not included in the survey itself. These questions were designed to drill down to the individual's opinions and suggestions in regard to merit pay implementation, the formula associated with rewarding it, and aspects that are not favored by teachers in general.

The questions from the TSPP, as well as the six open-ended questions created by the researcher were entered into *SurveyMonkey*©. Prior to the Likert-scale survey questions, demographic data were obtained via drop-down menu questions to indicate the participants' race, sex, number of years teaching experience in Pre-K-fifth grade, marital status (due to single or combined income), educational background, and sources that have informed them about merit pay.

There were no published reports of validity studies for the Teacher Survey on Performance Pay; therefore, there were no psychometrics available to the researcher. Communication with a creator of the survey resulted in a response but no information regarding psychometrics was revealed. In an effort to establish construct validity, a pilot study of a group of six teachers who possessed Georgia certificates in Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade was conducted. A pilot study was conducted to ascertain validity, due to the inability of the original writers to offer any psychometrics. Results from the pilot study revealed the need to provide examples of teacher performance and supports by the principal within questions pertaining to those areas. Results from research by Jacob and Springer in Florida in 2007 and by Covey in Arkansas in 2009, along with the pilot study results, revealed that the TSPP does serve to answer the over-arching research question: What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative?

Data Collection

Permission from superintendents of the three chosen districts was obtained by the researcher (see Appendix D). Prior to data collection, the researcher submitted the research proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University. Data collection did not begin until IRB approval was received.

Following approval from the Georgia Southern University IRB, the teachers at the participating elementary schools received an email invitation from the building principal requesting that they participate in the study and complete the survey instrument. The email included a brief explanation of the purpose of the survey, how the data will be used, and how the results of the survey could improve future endeavors for implementing merit pay. Teachers were informed that participation in the survey was completely voluntary, responses were completely anonymous, and they could stop participation in the study at any time or on any question. In an effort to gain maximum participation, the survey was delivered during times that were less busy according to the district calendars. The participants were given three and a half weeks to complete the survey. Within one week after the first notification for participation was sent, a follow-up email was sent as a reminder for participants who may not have completed the TSPP (see Appendix F).

The email contained a link to *SurveyMonkey*®, as well as a cover letter, letter of implied consent, the researcher's contact information, and information and instructions regarding accessing the survey on *SurveyMonkey*®. The survey was designed so that participants may begin the survey, save their results, exit, and return to complete it at a later time. The survey took no longer than 45 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

The self-reported TSPP survey data was collected using the *SurveyMonkey*© website and exported into Minitab for analysis. The descriptive statistics are reported as frequencies and percentages and were computed for all items. Comparisons were made between survey question results for the RT3 district versus the districts not participating in RT3 regarding perceptions of merit pay. The researcher looked to describe the proportions of those who agree or disagree with merit pay practices, practices that are considered desirable regarding merit pay systems, and the influence of teacher relationships and administration on perceptions of merit pay. Data is presented as frequencies and percentages.

Data received from the six open-ended questions were analyzed as qualitative data and a constant-comparative method was used to develop themes reflective of participants' intent. These data were compared to the survey data to determine where discrepancies and alignments exist. Demographic data were used to give an overall description of the population of participants.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this survey study was to gain insight into the perceptions of merit pay of teachers in three southeast Georgia counties, counties A, B, and C, with county A being an RT3 district. To answer the research questions, the researcher proposed a study to investigate teacher perceptions of merit pay, offer opportunities for teacher input regarding adequate rewards and reward systems, and the influence of teacher relationships and administration on perceptions. The researcher employed an adapted version of the Teacher Survey of Performance Pay that includes six open-ended questions,

as well as questions to gather demographic information. Data analysis consisted of reporting frequencies and percentages related to each multiple choice question.

Comparisons were made between survey question results for the RT3 district versus the districts not participating in RT3 regarding perceptions of merit pay.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this descriptive study was to offer insight into the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay systems in schools as proposed under the Race to the Top (RT3) initiative. This study explored several facets of merit pay such as how rewards should be determined, what factors should be rewarded, how the level of administrative support received impacts teachers' perceptions of merit pay, and how teachers' attitudes towards their school culture impact their perceptions of merit pay. A sample of 109 self-selected teachers, certified in Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, responded to an online survey. The survey instrument used was an amended version of the Teacher Survey of Performance Pay created by Jacob and Springer (2008). The survey was piloted with Georgia teachers who possessed a Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade certification (N=6) in several school districts across Georgia.

Research Questions

The following research question was addressed throughout this study: What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative? In addition, the following sub-questions serve to clarify the perceptions:

1. Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance?
2. What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)?

3. What is the relationship between feelings of support teachers receive from their principals and attitudes towards the idea of merit pay?
4. Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay?

Research Design

A quantitative design was chosen for this descriptive study due to the size of the sample being studied and to allow investigation into the perceptions of teachers in both Race to the Top (RT3) and non-RT3 districts. Data were collected through the use of an online survey. The data collected from the survey were used to describe characteristics of the perceptions, as well as differences in these perceptions, of merit pay and the frequency in which answers between the RT3 and non-RT3 districts occur. The data were reported as frequencies and percentages and computed for all Likert-scale items on the survey. The six open-ended questions were analyzed as qualitative data and a constant-comparative method was used to develop themes reflective of participants' intent and was compared to the survey data. Demographic data were collected in order to describe the overall population of participants.

In an attempt to establish construct validity, a pilot study utilizing six Georgia teachers certified in Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade was conducted. The researcher asked for any recommendations of adjustments that needed to be made to the survey. Participants indicated a need for examples of teacher performance and supports by the principal to be provided within questions pertaining to those areas. The suggested changes were made to the survey.

Findings

The purpose of the research was to explore teachers' overall perceptions of merit pay in Georgia, as well as to delve into teachers' thoughts regarding awarding merit pay, factors that should determine merit pay, and the impact that opinions of administrative support and school culture have on attitudes towards merit pay. The results of the research are presented through frequencies, percentages, and descriptive summaries.

Respondents

Of the three rural Georgia counties, with a combined total of five elementary schools, 129 individuals self-selected to participate in the online survey, which resulted in an initial response rate of 51%. Careful analysis of the responses resulted in the disqualification of twenty respondents due to the following reasons: stating that they were not certified Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade in Georgia (n=10) and failure to answer questions beyond the first three demographic questions (n=10). Therefore a response rate of 43% (n=109) was achieved.

Of the total respondents, 93.6% were female and 6.4% were male. In regard to race, 83.6% of respondents were Caucasian, 12.8% African American, 0.9% Asian, and 0.9% other, with two participants not indicating their race. Participants' marital status was predominantly married (71.6%), with remaining participants being single (18.3%), divorced (9.2%) or widowed (.9%). The highest level of education of respondents most commonly reported was a master's degree (48.6%), 25.7% holding a bachelor's degree, 23.9% holding an Educational Specialist, and .9% holding a doctorate, with one participant that did not respond. These data are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Demographics of Participants

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	102	93.6
Male	7	6.4
No response	0	0
Total	109	100.0
Race		
Caucasian	91	83.6
African American	14	12.8
Asian	1	.9
Other	1	.9
No response	2	1.8
Total	109	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	78	71.6
Single	20	18.3
Divorced	10	9.2
Widowed	1	.9
No response	0	0
Total	109	100.0
Level of Education		
Bachelor's	28	25.7
Master's	53	48.6
Specialist	26	23.9
Doctorate	1	.9
No response	1	.9
Total	109	100

The respondents were all employed in an elementary setting. Of the respondents, 77.1% worked in a Race to the Top participating district. A number of respondents reported having less than ten years' experience as a teacher (40.4%), while the remaining respondents indicated having 10-19 years (22.9%), 20-29 years (18.4%), and thirty or more years (3.7%). Of the respondents, sixteen did not report their number of years in education. These data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

RT3 Participants and Years' Experience of Participants

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percent
RT3 District		
Yes	84	77.1
No	25	22.9
No response	0	0
Total	109	100.0
Number of Years' Experience		
Less Than 10 years	44	40.4
10-19 years	25	22.9
20-29 years	20	18.3
30 or more years	4	3.7
No response	16	14.7
Total	109	100.0

The participants reported positions working as teachers in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth, fifth grade. The subjects taught by respondents included reading, math, language arts, writing, science, social studies, physical education, art, music, guidance, media, or special education. The respondents either worked in self-contained settings and taught all academic subjects, or were departmentalized and taught assigned academic subjects, or taught a variety of grade levels and subjects. The majority of the respondents (75.2%) reported teaching only one grade level while 21.1% reported teaching multiple grades. Four participants did not respond to the question. In regard to subjects taught, the majority of respondents reported teaching all academic subjects (46.8%), 13.8% taught only one academic subject, 0.9% taught self-contained special education, 1.8% taught special education reading and math, 0.9% taught art, 1.8% taught music, 3.7% taught physical education, 0.9% worked in guidance, 3.7% worked in media, and 22.9% taught multiple subjects. Five participants did not respond to the question. These data are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1

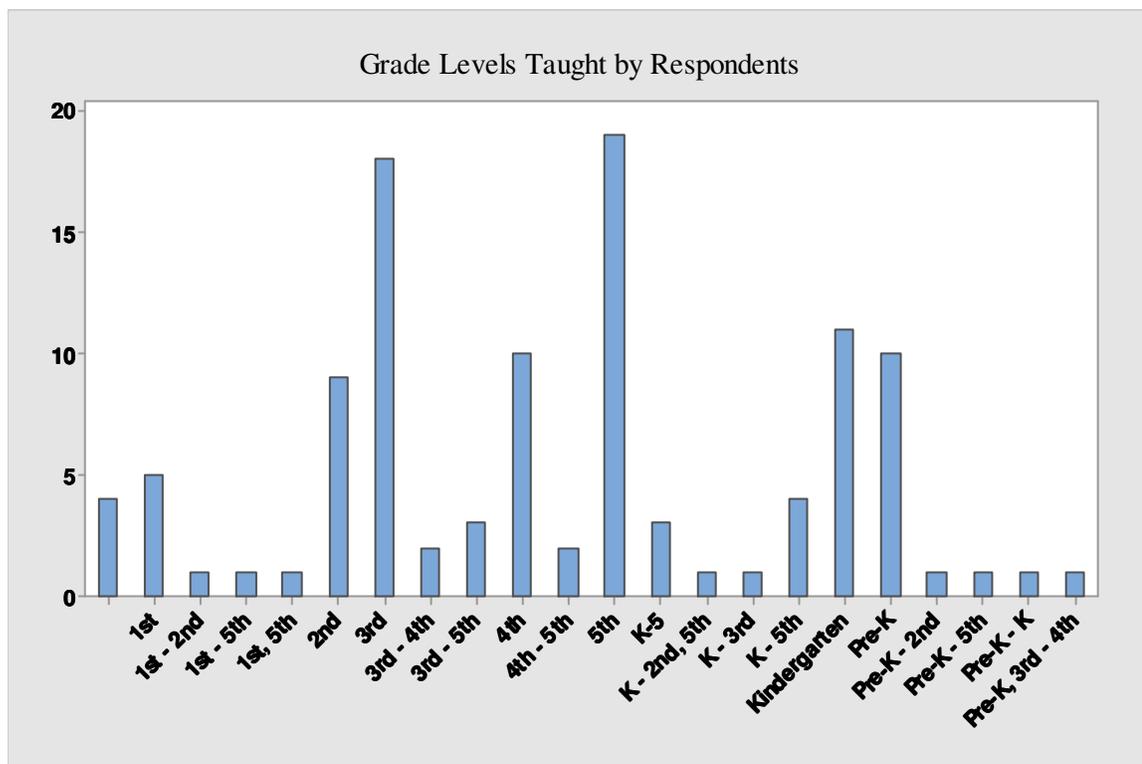
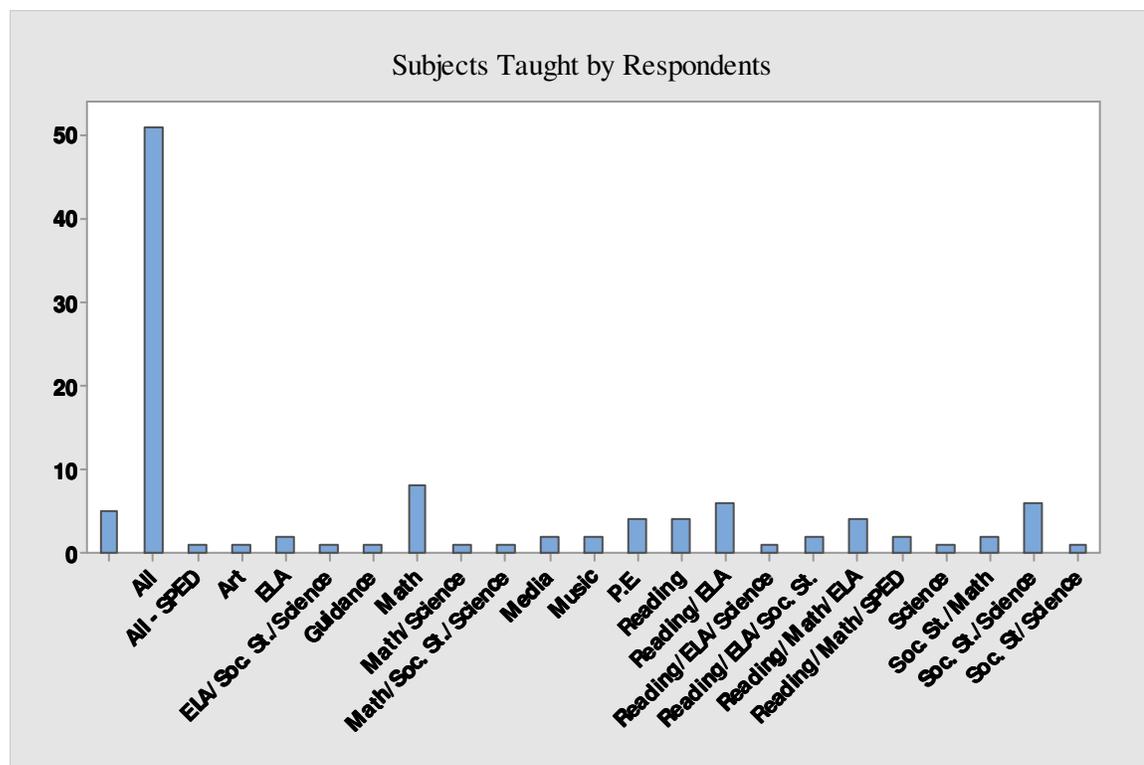
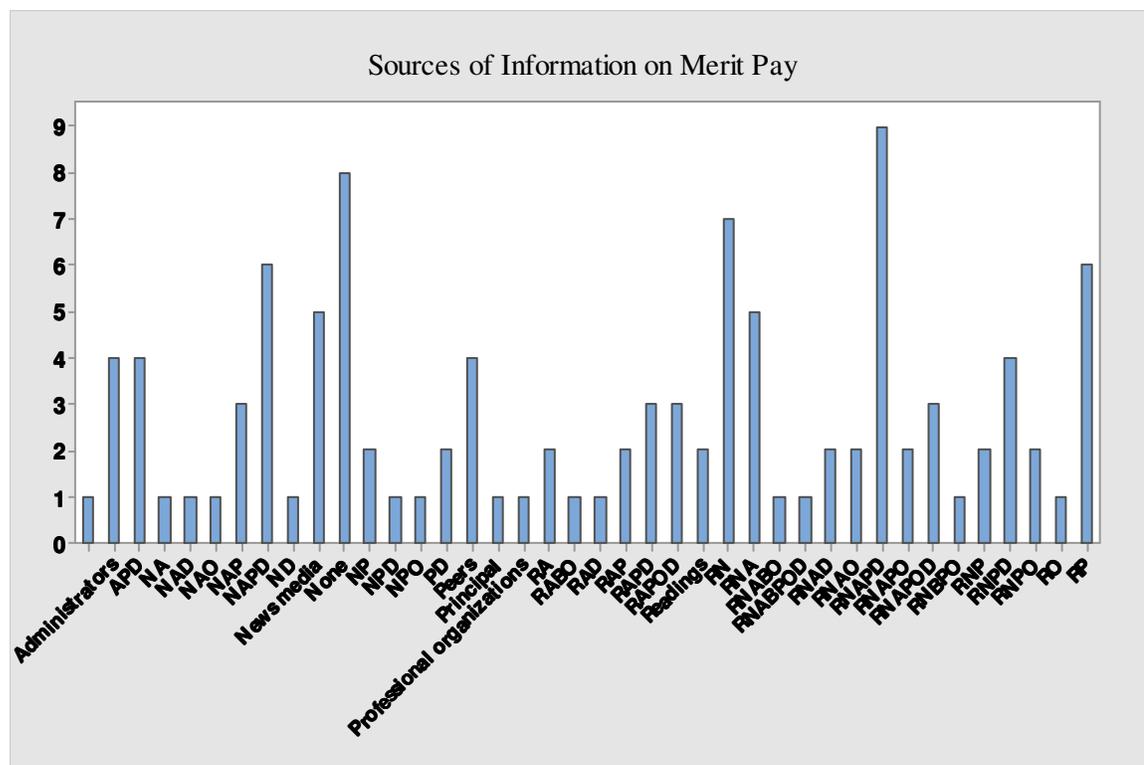
Grade Levels Taught by Respondents

Figure 2

Subjects Taught by Respondents

The final demographic item requested that respondents identify the sources that have provided them with information about merit pay. The sources available for selection included professional readings(R), news media (N), administrators (A), board of education (B), peers(P), professional organizations(O), and classes or professional development (D). Respondents were allowed to select multiple sources. The most common source selected by participants was the news media (57.8%), followed by professional readings (56.9%), peers (55.9%), administration (50.5%), classes and professional development (37.6%), professional organizations (18.4%), and their local board of education (3.7%). Of the respondents 7.3% indicated that they had not received any information on merit pay and one respondent chose not to answer this question. These data are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Sources of Information on Merit Pay**Considerations Related to Merit Pay Implementation**

The initial step to successful implementation of a merit pay program is to choose the merit pay model that works best for the given school system. One major section of the survey focused on the overall perceptions of teachers regarding various models associated with the implementation of a merit pay program and the possible impact of practicing merit pay in schools. Participants were asked to rate their feelings regarding the models presented and outcomes posed based on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

Of those who responded, the overwhelming majority were not in favor of the three main models of merit pay presented (school-based, group-based, or individualized), with over half of the respondents having selected *Disagree* or *Strongly Disagree* for each.

Of the respondents, 32.4% selected *Strongly Agree* or *Agree* in regard to basing merit pay on overall school performance; indicating that this model is more popular amongst respondents than a model that bases merit pay on a select group (i.e., departments, grade-levels, interdisciplinary teams) or an individualized compensation plan. No respondents chose *Strongly Agree* when considering group based performance pay. The majority of the respondents (73.8%) *strongly agree/agree* that merit pay would destroy the collaborative culture of their schools. The majority of the respondents selected *Disagree/Strongly Disagree* when considering increased teacher work ethic and increased cooperation among teachers. Over eighty percent of the respondents felt that state and district officials should raise teachers' base salary instead of implementing a merit pay system. These results are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

Perceptions of Models and Outcomes

Merit Pay Model or Outcome	Strongly Agree/ Agree Percent	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree Percent	Don't Know Percent
School-based performance rewards	32.4	65.7	1.9
Group-based performance rewards	18.5	78.6	2.9
Individual-based performance rewards	19.4	78.6	2
Destroys collaborative culture of teaching	73.8	17.5	8.7
Causes teachers to work harder	35.3	57.8	6.9
Increase in teacher cooperation	25.5	60.8	13.7
Officials should increase base pay as opposed to implementing merit pay	81.4	12.7	5.9

With the upcoming roll-out of merit pay programs in participating Race to the Top (RT3) districts, it is interesting to note the breakdown of responses received from Race to the Top participants and non-RT3 participants. In regard to the models of merit

pay presented, responses of non-RT3 district participants were compared to those of RT3 districts, with the majority of each having selected *Strongly Disagree* or *Disagree*.

Results also reveal that non-RT3 respondents were less likely to select the rating *Strongly Agree* in this opening section of the survey, indicating a possible lack of confidence in knowledge of the topic or uncertainty in strong support of the items. Of the two types of districts, respondents from both had a higher percentage of *Strongly Agree* or *Agree* in regard to overall school based compensation, when compared to group or individualized pay plans (See Appendix F).

In regard to outcomes associated with merit pay, the data indicated that the majority of responders in both types of districts *Strongly Agree* or *Agree* that merit pay will destroy the collaborative culture within schools. The majority of responders in both RT3 and non-RT3 districts reported a response of *Strongly Disagree* or *Disagree* in regard to both merit pay causing increased teacher work ethic and increased teacher cooperation. The rating *Agree* in regard to merit pay increasing teacher cooperation occurred more frequently among respondents from RT3 districts for a total of 25% compared to 8% of the non-RT3 population. The majority of both RT3 (78.5%) and non-RT3 (91.3%) respondents would rather see state and district officials increase base salaries for teachers rather than implement merit pay (See Appendix H).

Rewarding with Merit Pay

One important aspect of implementing a successful merit pay plan is determining the indicators that will be rewarded with merit pay. The formula for determining individual bonuses in Georgia's proposed merit pay plan includes student growth data and Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS) which includes evaluations

and walk-throughs by administrators and student survey input. The second section of the survey allowed participants to use a 4 point Likert scale ranging from *Not Important* to *High Importance* to rate criterion that could potentially be rewarded with merit pay.

Of those presented, “efforts to involve parents in students’ education” was the only criteria in which *High Importance* was the most frequently selected response with 37.6% of respondents choosing this rating. Criteria rated as *Moderate Importance* in rewarding merit pay include “earning an advanced degree,” “time spent in professional development,” “high test scores by students on a standardized test,” “student gains (improvement/ growth) on the appropriate mandated test (SLO or CRCT),” “student gains (improvement/ growth) on a test other than the SLO or CRCT,” “performance evaluations by supervisors (administrators),” “independent evaluations of portfolios (e.g., student and/ or teacher’s work),” “collaboration with other faculty and staff,” “working with students outside of class time,” “serving as a master or mentor teacher,” “teaching in hard-to-staff fields,” and “teaching in hard-to-staff schools”. Notably, *Moderate Importance* was the most commonly selected rating by those who chose to respond.

Other possible criteria for merit pay were seen as less important by respondents. Those with the overall rating of *Low Importance* included “performance evaluations by peers”, and “student evaluations of teaching performance”. The only criteria rated by the majority of respondents as *Not Important* was “National Board Certification”. This data is seen in Table 7.

Table 7

Indicators for Rewarding Merit Pay

Criteria	High Importance	Moderate Importance	Low Importance	Not Important
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	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Earning an advanced degree	36.3	52	9.8	1.9
Time spent in professional development	28.7	52.5	15.8	3
High test scores/ standardized test	9.7	40.8	38.8	10.7
Student gains on a mandated test (SLO or CRCT)	21	48	25	6
Student gains on a test other than SLO or CRCT	21.8	49.5	19.8	8.9
Performance evaluations by supervisors (administrators)	24.5	59.8	11.8	3.9
Performance evaluations by peers	9.9	31.7	39.6	18.8
Independent evaluations of portfolios	16.7	49	24.5	9.8
Student evaluations of teaching performance	2.9	22.6	44.1	30.4
Collaboration with other faculty and staff	34.7	42.6	15.8	6.9
Working with students outside of class time	6.9	43.1	27.4	22.6
Efforts to involve parents in students' education	37.6	26.7	27.7	8
Serving as a master or mentor teacher	9.8	45.1	31.4	13.7
National Board Certification	19.6	20.6	29.4	30.4
Parent satisfaction with teacher	13.6	36.9	34.9	14.6
Teaching in hard-to-staff fields	20.6	40.2	28.4	10.8
Teaching in hard-to-staff schools	20.8	45.5	25.7	8

The overall responses between RT3 respondents and non-RT3 respondents were similar for most criteria and fell within ten percent of each other. It is interesting to note that the RT3 district had a higher percentage of respondents to rate the items related to student gains on mandated tests such as SLOs or the CRCT (71.4%) and gains on other tests besides the SLOs or CRCT (73.1%) as *Moderate to High Importance*. Another slight discrepancy between the subgroups is no one in a non-RT3 district rated “performance evaluations by supervisors (administrators)” as *Not Important*, whereas a small number (5.1%) of the RT3 responders selected that rating.

The School Environment

Administrative Support. Of the 101 respondents who chose to participate, the vast majority (81.7%) of the overall responses regarding perceptions of the building principals were positive in nature. The most frequently selected response to the statement “The principal at my school works to create a sense of community in this school” was *Agree* (47.5%), with *Strongly Agree* (28.7%) being the rating with the next highest occurrence. In regard to the building principal setting high standards for teaching, 90.1% of respondents selected *Strongly Agree* or *Agree*. The majority (77.2%) of respondents indicated that their principal ensured sufficient time for professional development by selecting *Strongly Agree* or *Agree*. The most frequently selected response to the statement “The principal at my school provides support to improve instruction in the school” was *Agree* (59.4%), followed by *Strongly Agree* which was selected by 23.8% of the respondents. Less than 12% of the respondents selected *Strongly Disagree* or *Disagree* on questions pertaining to perceptions of the building principal. The data are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8

Administrative Support

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
The principal at my school works to create a sense of community in this school.	28.7	47.5	11.9	7.9	4
The principal at my school sets high standards for teaching.	34.7	55.4	6.9	2	1
The principal at my school ensures that teachers have sufficient time for professional development.	19.8	57.4	17.8	2	3
The principal at my school provides support to improve instruction in the school.	23.8	59.4	10.8	4	2

Perceptions of principals are similar for both RT3 and non-RT3 respondents, which resulted in *Agree* being the most frequently selected response pertaining to principals creating a sense of community, setting high standards for teaching, ensuring sufficient professional development time, and providing supports for improving instruction. It is also interesting to note that non-RT3 districts had 4% or fewer respondents that chose *Strongly Disagree* or *Disagree* when replying to statements about their principal. On the other hand, RT3 respondents had a higher response of *Neutral* when replying to statements on how they perceived their principal (See Appendix F).

Perceptions of Colleagues. Besides teachers' perceptions of administrators, another key component of the overall environment, climate, and culture are teachers'

perceptions of fellow teachers in their building. It is interesting to note that there were less than 100 responses to each of the questions pertaining to perceptions of teachers. Of the respondents, 60.6% disagreed that teachers were more competitive than cooperative in their schools. In response to the statement, “Teachers in my school do not really trust each other” the most frequently selected rating was *Disagree* (50.1%). Over half of the respondents (54.6%) agreed that teachers in their schools felt responsible to help others do their best. In response to the statement, “Teachers in my school expect students to complete every assignment” the most frequently selected rating was *Agree* (60.6%). When responding to the statement “Teachers in my school encourage students to keep trying even when the work is challenging”, none of the respondents selected *Strongly Disagree* or *Disagree* whereas 66% of the respondents selected *Agree*. Of the respondents, the vast majority (85.6%) responded *Strongly Agree* or *Agree* to the statement “Teachers in my school feel that it is important that all of their students do well”. Multiple respondents (49.5%) agreed that their fellow teachers could be counted on to help out at any time or any place, although it may not be part of their actual duties. These data can be seen in Table 9.

Table 9

Perceptions of Colleagues

Perception	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Neutral
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Teachers in my school seem more competitive than cooperative.	11.1	70.7	18.2
Teachers in my school do not really trust each other.	17.2	72.3	20.2
Teachers in my school feel responsible to help each other do their best.	62.6	16.2	21.2

Teachers in my school expect students to complete every assignment.	71.7	8.1	20.2
Teachers in my school encourage students to keep trying even when the work is challenging.	93.8	0	6.2
Teachers in my school think it is important that all of their students do well.	85.6	2	12.4
Teachers in my school can be counted on to help out anywhere, or anytime, even though it may not be part of their official assignment.	68.7	16.1	15.2

Responses from the RT3 and non-RT3 districts were similar when compared, and it was interesting to note that respondents from the RT3 district had a higher percentage to select *Strongly Agree* or *Agree* in regard to teachers in their district being more competitive than cooperative and untrusting towards other teachers. Another interesting pattern seen in their responses was that the RT3 participants had a higher occurrence of *Neutral* ratings in regard to more positive teacher characteristics such as helping others, encouraging students, and being dependable when helping with additional duties.

Teacher Input

One of the amendments to the TSPP was the addition of six open-ended questions to the survey in an effort to gain a more in-depth view of teachers' perceptions of merit pay. This section also offered teachers an opportunity to share ideas, suggestions, or opinions that may not have been mentioned or questioned throughout the survey.

When participants were invited to share anything else pertaining to merit pay that may not have been included in the survey, 42.5% of those that responded indicated that they did not have anything additional to add. Concerns related to additional factors that impact student learning such as home environment, parental support, and overall caring and motivation were mentioned by 17.5% of the respondents. Another 17.5% of the respondents indicated concerns with teaching EIP, inclusion, or gifted students which

included decreased desires to teach in these areas, feelings that teachers of gifted students would automatically earn their merit bonuses each year, and the concern over how merit pay would be determined based on GAA (Georgia’s Alternate Assessment) scores for students with severe cognitive impairments. Several of the respondents disagreed in general with the practice of merit pay for teachers, labeling the practice as “an embarrassment to the profession”. The following concerns were also expressed by respondents:

- Future of non-academic subjects such as art and music that are not mandated by the government
- Teacher evaluations being based on the integrity and discrepancy of the administration
- Funding source(s)
- Negative impact on teacher collaboration with an increase in teacher competition
- Increase in dishonesty in teachers

Of all respondents to this item, only one had positive feelings towards merit pay for teachers citing a past attempt in Florida using evaluations based on portfolios that yielded positive results. These data can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10

Additional General Input

Perception	N	Percent
None	17	42.5
Difficulties for EIP or inclusion teachers and concerns for gifted teachers	7	17.5
Factors not considered (parental involvement, motivation, socio-economic status)	7	17.5
General Disagreement	3	7.5

Future of non-academic subjects	1	2.5
Evaluation concerns	1	2.5
Funding concerns	1	2.5
Impact on teacher character	2	5.0
Supportive	1	2.5
Total	40	100.0

The second open-ended item requested that teachers share if they were generally in favor of a merit pay program. The vast majority of respondents were opposed to implementing merit pay practices in schools. Reasons associated with their opposition were:

- Students' performance on standardized testing
- Factors out of the teachers' control such as motivation, socio-economic status, parental involvement, and student readiness for the current grade level
- Evaluations by administrators outside of the classroom
- Ability levels of students with disabilities or early intervention students
- Discourages collaboration
- Encourages nepotism
- Increase in dishonesty and stress
- No fair way to implement the system
- Most professions do not have a merit pay system
- Prefers to increase base pay
- Will not work well in a profession run by the government

Those who were in favor of merit pay implementation cited the following reasons to support their opinion:

- Offers opportunity to increase income

- Serves as a good reward
- Teachers will work harder if given an incentive
- Entices teachers to perform at their best
- Rids schools of lazy teachers

Only two respondents reported a neutral view of merit pay and cited that they did not have adequate information to make a judgment. These data can be seen in Table 11.

Table 11

Teachers in Favor of Merit Pay

In Favor of Merit Pay	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	19.7
No	47	77.1
Neutral	2	3.2
Total	61	100.0

The third open-ended question allowed participants to respond to Georgia's proposed formula associated with merit pay. The formula states that half of the teachers' evaluations rely on student growth measures while the other half relies on evaluations by administrators, which include rubric-based formal evaluations, walk-throughs, and student surveys on teacher performance. Participants were questioned on their opinions of this formula and asked to offer suggestions for improvements. The majority of respondents was opposed to the current proposed formula for Georgia and cited the following reasons and suggestions:

- Teachers of inclusion or lower level classes should be compensated for the extra work involved
- Remove or lessen the percentage based on student achievement

- No formula can measure a good teacher's worth
- Too many other factors need to be considered
- Will be problematic for younger teachers or those new to the profession
- Biased evaluations
- Only one test for student achievement
- Disadvantages of smaller systems with less resources

On the other hand, some respondents did support Georgia's proposed formula.

They offered the following reasons for support:

- Student achievement reflects teacher ability
- Based on student growth instead of test scores
- Allows teachers to feel appreciated
- Student growth based on scores from previous years and not based on comparisons to higher-achieving peers
- Currently implemented in their district

One respondent reported neutral feelings, however stated that this formula may increase competition and possible false results due to dishonesty. These results are seen in Table 12.

Table 12

Support of the Merit Pay Formula

Support of Merit Pay	Frequency	Percent
Yes	11	24.5
No	33	73.3
Neutral	1	2.2
Total	45	100.0

Respondents were asked to suggest a monetary amount for rewarding merit pay on the fourth open-ended question. Of those that responded, 23.6% indicated that there should be no monetary reward associated with merit pay. Another 26.5% of respondents stated that they were unsure of an adequate amount. Various monetary amounts were offered, as well as the following suggestions:

- Base money on the amount of student growth
- Award a bonus equivalent to the teachers' monthly salary
- Have an overall bonus that is divided equally among all teachers that qualify

These data can be seen in Table 13.

Table 13

Monetary Reward

Amount	Frequency	Percent
None	8	23.6
Don't Know	9	26.5
Based on amount of student growth	2	5.9
Total amount divided equally among all that qualify	1	2.9
Additional monthly salary	1	2.9
Less than \$1000	1	2.9
\$1000 increments	2	5.9
\$2000-\$10,000	9	26.5
Greater than \$10,000	1	2.9
Total	34	100.0

When asked to offer motivators for teachers besides monetary rewards, the reward most often mentioned was paid time off (34.2%). The respondents also suggested giving teachers days towards retirement (10.5%) and basic public recognition (13.2%).

Respondents were able to record multiple suggestions. Other suggestions for rewards reported were:

- Technology purchased for classrooms
- One hour of free time during the school day
- Leave early passes
- Increased planning time
- Advanced education classes paid for
- More choice in teaching
- Cost of living raise
- Base salary raise
- On-campus spa or gym
- Off-campus lunch hour
- Additional supply money
- Four day work week
- Better students and parents in classes

Several suggestions did not include tangible items and suggested that student learning and growth should be enough of a reward and one respondent desired a better atmosphere to teach in. The results can be seen in Table 14.

Table 14

Teacher Motivators

Suggested Motivator	Percent
Paid time off	34.2
Days towards retirement	10.5
Public recognition	13.2
Technology in classrooms	5.3

1 hour free time	2.6
Leave early time	7.9
Increased planning time	5.3
Paid classes	2.6
Choice in teaching	2.6
Student learning/ growth	5.3
COLA raise	2.6
Off-campus lunch	7.9
Desirable students/ parents	2.6
On-campus spa/ gym facility	2.6
Additional supply money	2.6
Base salary raise	2.6
Four day work week	2.6
Improved atmosphere	2.6
No response	34.9
<hr/> N = 38	<hr/> 100.0

The next open-ended question was an inquiry into the aspect of merit pay that teachers dislike. Teachers were able to offer multiple responses, however, the vast majority of respondents believed that merit pay's ties to student achievement was the aspect that is the least liked (36.7%). Another aspect of merit pay that was not popular with teachers is that merit pay cannot account for factors such as home environment, student motivation, or student readiness for the current grade level (30.6%). Other identified dislikes of merit pay were:

- Unfair system overall
- Negative implications such as dishonesty, competition, decreased collaboration
- Increased stress
- Fear of failure
- General housekeeping
- Evaluations that are subjective

Although some of the listed aspects of merit pay are implied, they are still reported by teachers. The data can be seen in Table 15.

Table 15

Teacher Dislikes

Teacher Dislikes of Merit Pay	Percent
Other factors not accounted for	30.6
Student achievement piece	36.7
Unfair system	4.1
Negative impact on teaching practices and relationships	10.2
Increased stress	2.0
Fear of failure	4.1
Housekeeping/ extra work for teachers	2.0
Subjective Evaluations	2.0
No response	8.3
N = 49	100.0

The final question allowed participants to select a statement or multiple statements indicative of their understanding of a merit pay plan in a school setting. The majority of respondents (75.3%) understood that merit pay plans are based on a combination of factors such as student achievement, teacher evaluations, etc. It was interesting to note that 38.3% of respondents identified merit pay as an individualized practice. Statements that pertained to funding were the least selected in regard to understanding. However, 27.2% of respondents indicated that merit pay will increase a teacher's annual bonus. Following the responses, it is evident that the participants need more information in order to have a better understanding of merit pay practices. The data can be seen in Table 16.

Table 16

Understandings of Merit Pay

Understanding	Percent
Based solely on student achievement	23.5
Based on a combination of factors (student achievement, evaluations, etc.)	75.3
Individualized	38.3
Divided amongst a group or department	3.7
Increases a teacher's base salary	27.2
Annual bonus	25.9
Can only be earned once	1.2
Money comes from local funds	3.7
Money comes from grants	8.6
Applies only to teachers of tested subjects	9.9
Monetary incentive is the same for all who meet criteria	13.6
Monetary incentive may increase or decrease according to factors such as years teaching, subject, grade, etc.	29.6
No Response	25.7
N = 81	100

Response to Research Questions

The data obtained from the 109 surveys were used to draw conclusions regarding answers to the research questions of the study. The over-arching research question of the study was: What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative?

Following analysis, the data revealed that the overall perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's RT3 initiative were disagreeable with 81.4% of respondents indicating a preference to increasing base salary instead of implementing merit pay. Of the respondents, 73.3% indicated that they were not in favor of implementing a merit pay program in their schools. Additionally,

respondents indicated aspects of merit pay that they disliked, the top three being factors not accounted for that impact achievement (parental support, home environment, motivation, socio-economic status) (30.6%), emphasis on student achievement (36.7%), and the potential negative impact on school culture (increase competitiveness, decreased collaboration, dishonest actions) (10.2%). Given the general dissatisfaction with merit pay implementation, the respondents were asked to offer suggested alternatives for rewards other than money that may make merit pay more appealing. Their top three responses were paid time off (34.2%), public recognition (13.2%), and days offered towards retirement (10.5%).

Research Question 1: Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance? Although the idea of implementing a merit pay program was not welcomed by participants, it is an inevitable happening; therefore teachers needed to voice their preference regarding the models, formulas, and rewards associated with their system's merit pay program. In analyzing teachers' responses to the merit pay plan that they prefer, 32.4% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed with basing merit pay on overall school performance. In regard to individualized merit pay, 17.5% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed with the practice. Although a majority of respondents were not in favor of either model, the conclusion can be drawn that teachers in the participating districts favor school based merit pay over individualized programs.

Research Question 2: What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)? The factors that could be used to determine merit pay that teachers identified as being

moderately to highly important are: earning an advanced degree, spending time in professional development, student test scores, student gains on both mandated and non-mandated tests, teacher performance evaluations by administrators, independent evaluations of portfolios of teacher or student work, collaboration with other faculty and staff, efforts to involve parents in their child's education, serving as a master or mentor teacher, and teaching in either hard-to-staff fields or schools. Of these factors, the single one rated *High Importance* by the largest percentage of teachers in comparison to other factors was "Efforts to involve parents in students' education" (37.6%), implying that the teachers may wish to see this included as a component in a merit pay plan. When asked to respond to Georgia's proposed merit pay formula, 73.3% of respondents were not in favor of the formula. The most common concern centered on student achievement and carried a common thread of concern for teachers who teach early intervention or inclusion classes. Respondents felt that implementing merit pay would lessen the desire to teach those classes and hold teachers accountable for unrealistic student achievement goals (especially for students with significant cognitive impairments).

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between feelings of support teachers receive from their principals and attitudes towards the idea of merit pay? In response to support received from the principal, the majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their principals work to create a sense of community in their school (76.2%), sets high standards for teaching (90.1%), ensures sufficient professional development time (77.2%), and provides supports for improving instruction (83.2%). These ratings indicated that the vast majority of respondents are satisfied with the feelings of support they received from their principal. In turn, the results presented

indicated that the level of support offered by the principal has little impact on the overall attitudes that teachers have towards merit pay, since the majority of respondents (77.1%) indicated that they are not in favor of the implementation of a merit pay program in their schools.

Research Question 4: Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay? Data analysis revealed overall positive perceptions of the school cultures of the participants. The majority of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that teachers in their schools are more competitive than cooperative (70.7%) and do not trust fellow teachers (62.6%). In regard to positive aspects of school culture, the majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that teachers in their school felt responsible to help one another to do their best (62.6%), had high student expectations (71.7%), encouraged students to persist through challenging work (93.8%), felt it is important that all their students need to do well (85.6%), and can be counted on to help others with duties that are not assigned to them (68.7%). As stated previously, the overall attitude towards merit pay is unfavorable, indicating that the perceptions of school culture have little to no impact on teachers' attitudes towards merit pay.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of elementary teachers toward the implementation of a merit pay plan under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative. A total of 109 elementary teachers from three rural Georgia districts chose to participate in the study. Of the three districts, the largest district was an active participant in the Race to the Top (RT3) initiative; the two smaller schools were not. The data revealed that the participants perceived the implementation of merit pay as unfavorable. Of the

respondents, 73.3% did not support merit pay in schools. The data also revealed that of the models of merit pay, 32.4% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with merit pay being based on overall school performance. Analysis of the data indicated that teachers' perceptions of principal support have no impact on attitudes towards merit pay. Overall, the principals received positive ratings from participating teachers. The data also suggest that although teacher respondents had positive perceptions of their fellow teachers, which would result in a positive view of their school culture, this did not impact their attitudes towards merit pay. Data revealed very few differences in the responses of the RT3 district participants and the non-RT3 district participants.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

President Obama's educational initiative known as Race to the Top (RT3) is bringing about numerous changes to the field of education. One of the major changes associated with this initiative is the implementation of merit pay programs in participating school districts. In fact, the twenty-six Georgia districts chosen to participate in RT3 and receive grant funding were required to present a plan for merit pay that included the model of merit pay chosen, factors to be rewarded, as well as the formula for configuring the bonus pay. Participating Georgia districts are expected to roll out the merit pay plans during the 2015-2016 school year. Each district has the liberty to create their own plan in accordance with the state formula and guidelines. Understanding the perceptions of teachers in regard to merit pay is critical to the successful implementation of the plan.

This study utilized an instrument developed and previously used by Brian Jacob and Matthew Springer (2008) to survey teachers' perceptions of merit pay. The researcher used frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations to answer the following research question: What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative? Additionally, the following sub-questions aided in clarifying the results:

1. Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance?
2. What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)?

3. What is the relationship between feelings of support teachers receive from the principal and attitudes towards the idea of merit pay?
4. Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay?

Descriptive statistics were calculated and reported as frequencies and percentages and were computed for all items. The researcher looked to describe the proportions of those who agree or disagree with merit pay practices, practices that are considered desirable regarding merit pay systems, and the influence of school culture on perceptions of merit pay. Additionally, this study also compared reported perceptions of RT3 district participants and non-RT3 district participants in regard to the Likert scale items. A total of 109 elementary teachers from the three rural districts participated in the survey.

Analysis of Research Findings

The data revealed that the overall perception of merit pay by the participants was unfavorable. Furthermore, 81.4% of the respondents were in favor of a raise in the base salary of teachers instead of merit pay. When delving deeper into the aspects of merit pay disliked by the teachers, the data revealed expressed disapproval in factors not accounted for (home environment, previous learning, parental support, socio-economic status, etc.), emphasis on student achievement, the possible negative repercussions of merit pay (decreased collaboration, increased competition, dishonesty amongst teachers, etc.), and the use of subjective evaluations. A clear concern expressed throughout pertained to the emphasis placed on student achievement and how this would impact teachers of EIP students or students with disabilities, as well as teachers of gifted students. Ideas regarding these concerns included that teachers would shy away from

teaching EIP or inclusion classes, teachers of gifted students would be expected to receive the bonus, and teachers of students with significant cognitive impairments would not have a chance at merit pay. However, over half of the respondents believed that high standardized test scores, student growth on mandated test scores, and student growth on tests that are not mandated were of moderate to high importance when considered as possible factors for rewarding merit pay. This leads to the indication that student achievement could possibly be accepted as a component of merit pay, just not a main factor.

In regard to the model of merit pay favored by more respondents, the one based on overall school performance had the greatest percentage selecting *Strongly Agree* or *Agree* (32.4%). Of the suggested factors to be rewarded with merit pay, those with the highest percentage of respondents selecting *Moderate to High Importance* were earning an advanced degree (88.2%), time spent in professional development (81.2%), and collaboration with other staff members (77.2%). The data revealed that the proposed formula for merit pay in Georgia is viewed as unfavorable by the majority of respondents. This can be attributed to the inclusion of student achievement based on one test as half of the formula, lack of consideration for outside factors (motivation, environment, etc.), biased evaluations by administrators, and lack of resources in smaller districts, all suggestions made by respondents.

Findings from the study conclude that the feelings associated with school culture had no impact on the overall attitudes towards merit pay. Respondents indicated overall positive feelings in regard to support from principals. Positive feelings were also reported in regard to perceptions of colleagues. This would equate to an overall positive

view of school culture by respondents and apparently had no impact on the predominantly negative outlook on merit pay.

Several more insights into merit pay were derived from this study. Throughout time teachers have been considered to be intrinsically motivated, allowing the assumption that tangible items would have little influence over them. However, when given the opportunity to suggest non-monetary motivators, the majority of respondents offered tangible or valuable rewards such as paid time off, early retirement, lunch off-campus, increased planning time, and increased amounts of technology in classrooms. When asked to suggest a monetary amount that would be adequate for a merit pay bonus, only 23.6% of responders stated that no monetary amount should be considered, again contradicting the idea that teachers are predominantly intrinsically motivated beings.

Following the comparison of RT3 and non-RT3 districts, the conclusion can be drawn that there is little difference in their responses. Most of the overall ratings fell within ten percent of each other. One difference that stood out was that in regard to rating principal support, the respondents from the RT3 schools had a higher occurrence of *Neutral* ratings than the non-RT3 schools. Also noteworthy, is that a higher percentage of the RT3 respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their colleagues were more competitive than cooperative and less trusting of others than the non-RT3 respondents.

Discussion of Research Findings

The current study strived to determine the perceptions of elementary teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of a merit pay plan under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative. Additionally, perceptions regarding merit pay models, factors to be rewarded, and the impact of feelings towards school culture on attitudes towards merit

pay were researched. The following discussion will compare research findings of this study to research presented in the literature review. These findings had implications for the conclusions of this study.

In regard to the over-arching research question, “*What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia’s Race to the Top initiative?*” the current study revealed that the majority of the respondents did not favor the implementation of a merit pay system and preferred a raise in base pay. The use of student achievement data as part of the merit pay formula was one aspect perceived as unwanted by the majority of respondents to the survey. This concern of teachers is supported by Levin. According to Levin (2011), there is no uniform measure of what student achievement is expected to be and that merit pay systems that are based on student achievement often fail. He reported that placing emphasis on student achievement in turn lessens the importance placed on educational goals not centered on student achievement. This may also impact the effort that teachers put forth in various areas. In regard to work ethic, over half of the respondents did not feel that the incorporation of a merit pay plan make teachers work harder (57.8%). This contradicts the theory set forth by Victor Vroom. Vroom (1995) has posed that when employees’ pay is related to their level of performance, the employees will perform at a more effective level. If Vroom is correct, this may lead to questions regarding Georgia’s proposed formula and the emphasis that teachers may place on an achievement test and performing well during evaluations. Teaching character education, fostering peer relationships, and embarking upon “teachable moments” not connected to the adopted Common Core standards may become forgotten under a merit pay formula.

Another concern recorded by 10.2% of respondents to the current study was the negative impact that merit pay may have on overall school culture such as increased competition, decreased collaboration, and the occurrence of dishonest practices. Gratz (2009) reported that some of the earliest attempts at merit pay in education occurred in Britain in the mid-1800s, lasted for approximately thirty years and was labeled a failure because of high instances of cheating and cramming. He also reported that more recent accounts of merit pay programs in education ended in problems such as teaching to the test, cheating scandals, and overall negative results. Hess (2011) alleged that merit pay programs breed competition, in turn decreasing cooperation and sharing among teachers.

Also, in response to the overall unfavorable view of merit pay by the respondents, is the idea that teachers are intrinsically motivated and increased student learning and achievement or recognition are more valuable than a monetary reward. The idea behind merit pay leads one to assume that teachers are primarily motivated by money.

According to Herzberg (1987), job satisfaction is influenced by motivators, intrinsic factors such as achievement, recognition, and advancement, whereas the avoidance of job dissatisfaction can be linked to extrinsic rewards such as salary, conditions, and policy. Anderson (2011) stated that educators desired satisfaction over wealth and proposed a recognition program over a rewards program. These ideas lead to the implication that teachers are more intrinsically motivated, which would decrease the desire for a monetary bonus, in turn making teachers less supportive of merit pay programs in schools.

Research Question 1: Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance? Respondents to the current study preferred merit pay based on the overall school performance slightly more

than individualized merit pay. Neither model gained favor from the majority of respondents. However, Rickman and Goss (2012) discussed Georgia's second attempt at merit pay implementation in schools, which employed a school-based model instead of an individualized one. The plan intended to award schools that reached their performance goals, and in turn the highly effective teachers within the schools would divvy up the reward (Rickman & Goss, 2012). The pitfalls that Rickman and Goss associated with this model were that the deserving teachers only stood a chance at being rewarded if their given school was rewarded and the schools were only allotted a one-time bonus. When the plan ended, only 6% of Georgia's participating schools had earned the reward (Rickman & Goss, 2012).

Research Question 2: What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)?

The largest majority of respondents (88.2%) felt that earning an advanced degree should be included when rewarding merit pay. It is interesting to note that the level of education and certification of a teacher plays an important role in calculating teachers' salaries on the familiar single-salary scale associated with education since the mid-20th century (Ellerson, 2009). Multiple factors rated as having *Moderate* to *High* Importance implying that respondents would like to see them considered when calculating merit pay were mentioned and included time spent in professional development, high test scores on standardized tests, and student gains on both mandated and non-mandated tests, and evaluations by administrators. According to Laine, Potemski, and Rowland (2010) merit pay programs that use multiple means for measuring teacher performance, offer better teacher evaluation methods, and foster professional learning communities and support

systems among teachers led to increased teacher retention. The aforementioned research may lead one to question whether or not Georgia's proposed formula for merit pay is adequate, given that it only takes student achievement and teacher performance evaluations into consideration. The majority of respondents to the current study did not favor Georgia's formula, citing concerns over outside factors that impact student achievement and evaluator bias as potential problems.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between feelings of support teachers receive from their principals and attitudes towards the idea of merit pay? The current study indicates that there is no relationship between feelings of support teachers receive from the principal and attitudes towards the idea of merit pay. The overall perception of support received from principals was positive, whereas the overall attitude of respondents towards merit pay was negative. The majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their principals work to create a sense of community in their school, set high standards for teaching, ensure sufficient professional development time, and provide supports for improving instruction. These findings contradict those of Goldhaber, Dearmond, and Deburgomaster (2011) who reported that teachers who had higher levels of respect and trust in their principals supported merit pay according to data from the Washington State Teacher Compensation Survey.

Research Question 4: Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay? Following the analysis of data from the current study, there is no indication that teachers' perceptions of school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay. Again, these feelings are at opposite ends of the spectrum with school culture being perceived as positive overall, whereas the overall attitude toward merit pay

is negative. Goldhaber, Dearmond, and Deburgomaster (2011), following their analysis of responses on the Washington State Teacher Compensation Survey, reported that teachers who reported higher trust in and respect for their colleagues were less supportive of merit pay. These findings led them to speculate that teachers who feel connected to their colleagues do not feel the need for a support system that may lead to competition and negatively impact the cultures of the schools. Their findings support the findings of the current study.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn following the analysis of research findings.

The researcher has concluded from the study:

1. The elementary teachers in the three rural Georgia districts, both RT3 and non-RT3, did not want to participate in a merit pay plan.
2. Teachers indicated overall disagreement with the merit pay plan models.
3. Teachers indicated that components in addition to student achievement and teacher evaluations should be rewarded with merit pay.
4. Teachers indicated that merit pay may negatively impact school culture by creating competition, decreasing collaboration, and enticing unethical teaching practices.
5. Teachers may no longer want to teach at-risk students or students with disabilities due to concerns over student achievement.
6. Rewards such as paid time off, days toward retirement, and public recognition may be more favorable to teachers than bonus pay.

7. Feelings of support from the principal do not impact attitudes towards merit pay.
8. Positive views of school culture do not impact attitudes towards merit pay.
9. Teachers within the RT3 district shared similar viewpoints to those of teachers in districts not participating in RT3.

Implications

Although only one of the districts that participated in the study was a Race to the Top district facing merit pay implementation in the 2015-2016 school year, the possibility that merit pay may be a future reality for all districts remains. This admission makes teachers' perceptions and input in relation to aspects of merit pay plans even more pertinent. By allowing teachers to be active participants in structuring a merit pay plan, district officials stand to increase teacher buy-in and acceptance.

Although the majority of the teacher respondents did not favor a merit pay plan based on school performance, this model did receive higher ratings of *Strongly Agree* and *Agree* than the individualized model. Perhaps this can be attributed to the ownership of outcomes by all staff members, which may in turn create a more collaborative approach to teaching. This model may reduce fears of teacher isolation and increased competition, which were teacher concerns expressed in the study.

The teachers also indicated discontent with the proposed merit pay formula, expressing components other than student achievement and teacher performance evaluations may need to be factored in. Teachers expressed concerns towards placing emphasis on student achievement due to factors not controllable by teachers such as home environment and grade-level readiness. The student achievement piece was also

seen as problematic for teachers of early intervention students and students with disabilities, potentially making these teaching positions undesirable.

Teachers also indicated satisfaction with rewards other than money for merit pay. Teachers have been classified as intrinsically motivated beings and it was often thought that monetary or tangible rewards may not motivate them. Teachers suggested paid time off, public recognition, days towards retirement, and other rewards in place of a bonus check. Interestingly, only a small percentage suggested that increased student learning and growth was reward enough.

In response to understandings of merit pay, the majority of teachers reported that merit pay was based on a combination of factors. Responses revealed misunderstandings regarding the funding of merit pay and how the bonuses would be rewarded or divided. The financial aspect of merit pay is an important factor and needs to be understood by participants, implying that there is a need for the dissemination of information regarding merit pay to teachers, especially those in the participating district.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Researchers seeking to further investigate this topic should take the following limitations and recommendations of the current study into account:

1. Currently Georgia has twenty-six Race to the Top (RT3) districts, not to mention participating districts in other states; however, only one RT3 district was involved in the survey. The remaining two districts were not RT3 districts and may have had limited knowledge regarding merit pay proposals under the RT3 initiative. Greater insight into actual perceptions of merit pay

may be gained through surveying participating districts or districts that are currently employing merit pay models.

2. This study did not determine causal factors associated with overall negative perceptions of merit pay. It may be beneficial to include data regarding previous experiences with merit pay programs by respondents.
3. Further research should be conducted to further assess teachers' understandings of merit pay programs and to identify any misconceptions.
4. Teachers employed in districts scheduled to implement merit pay should be active participants in developing the merit pay plan in order to increase buy-in and satisfaction.
5. Sufficient support should be provided to teachers facing merit pay implementation.
6. Considerations of the possible negative impact of merit pay on school culture should be acknowledged and supports provided for avoidance.
7. The only districts represented in the study were rural districts. Future research efforts may need to focus on including urban and suburban districts in addition to the rural districts in an effort to more closely representing the overall perceptions of Georgia teachers. Other considerations would be to include middle and high school teachers as well. The researcher also suggests including administrators in the study to gain knowledge regarding their intent in developing, supporting, and implementing merit pay plans.

Dissemination

This dissertation will be electronically published in Georgia Southern University's electronic dissertation database. The researcher will provide copies of the dissertation to the superintendents of the participating districts, as well as in RT3 districts that may request information. The researcher will present findings at various conferences or workshops including at the Georgia Educational Research Association (GERA) national conference. The researcher will publish the dissertation in a variety of journals in order to disseminate the results to a multitude of readers.

Concluding Thoughts

An education is one of the most powerful gifts that we can offer our future generation. In the ever-changing field of education, teachers often feel overwhelmed with learning new systems and serving in new capacities, all the while teaching our youth so that they may have a successful future. With impending policies such as merit pay, teachers deserve to be versed in the policy and allowed to, at the very least, voice their opinions and concerns.

As I sit here reflecting on my educational career, I must say that I am so very thankful for the grade school teachers and GSU professors who have blessed my life with their knowledge and dedication to preparing me to go forward and accomplish my life goals. As a result of their guidance and care, I have evolved into a lifelong learner who shares a passion for teaching others. My success began and continued because of the teachers who cared enough to encourage me and light a fire in my life.

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Appendix A

Question and Framework Alignment

TSPP Survey Question	Tie to Research Question	Construct
7. Incentive pay for teachers based on OVERALL performance (i.e., grade-level, department, or interdisciplinary team) is a positive change to teacher pay practices.	Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance?	Vroom-Motivated to perform a task if performance leads to desired outcome, outcome must be seen as positive, goals must be considered attainable
8. Incentive pay for teachers based on GROUP performance (i.e., grade-level, department, or interdisciplinary team) is a positive change to teacher pay practices.	Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance?	Vroom (positive outcome/ attainable goal)
9. Incentive pay for teachers based on INDIVIDUAL teacher performance (student achievement, evaluations, professional knowledge, etc.) is a positive change to teacher pay practices.	Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance?	Vroom (positive outcome/ attainable goal)
10. Rewarding teachers based on performance (student achievement, evaluations, professional knowledge, etc.) will destroy the collaborative culture of teaching.	Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance?	Vroom (positive outcome/ attainable goal)
11. Rewarding teachers based on performance (student achievement, evaluations, professional knowledge, etc.) will cause teachers to work harder.	Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance?	Vroom (positive outcome/ motivation)
12. Rewarding teachers based on performance (student achievement, evaluations, professional knowledge, etc.) will result in teachers working together more often.	Should merit pay for teachers be determined based on overall school performance or individual teacher performance?	Vroom (positive outcome/ motivation)
13. District and state officials should be more concerned about increasing base pay as opposed to devising teacher performance pay programs.	What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative?	Vroom (positive outcome)
14. Earning an advanced degree	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/ positive outcome)
15. Time spent in professional development	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/ positive outcome)
16. High test scores by students on a standardized test	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/ positive outcome)
17. Student gains (improvement/	What factors do elementary teachers in	Vroom (attainable goal/

growth) on the appropriate mandated test (SLO or CRCT)	Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	positive outcome)
18. Student gains (improvement/growth) on a test other than the SLO or CRCT	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
19. Performance evaluations by supervisors (administrators)	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
20. Performance evaluations by peers	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
21. Independent evaluations of portfolios (e.g., student and/or teacher's work)	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
22. Student evaluations of teaching performance	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
23. Collaboration with other faculty and staff	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
24. Working with students outside of class time	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
25. Efforts to involve parents in students' education	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
26. Serving as a master or mentor teacher	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
27. National Board Certification	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
28. Parent satisfaction with teacher	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
29. Teaching in hard-to-staff fields (i.e., subjects that are difficult to find and retain qualified and effective teachers)	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)
30. Teaching in hard-to-staff schools (i.e., schools that have difficulty in finding and retaining qualified and effective teachers)	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom (attainable goal/positive outcome)

31. The principal at my school works to create a sense of community in this school.	What is the relationship between feelings of support teachers receive from the principal and attitudes towards the idea of merit pay?	Herzberg
32. The principal at my school sets high standards for teaching.	What is the relationship between feelings of support teachers receive from the principal and attitudes towards the idea of merit pay?	Vroom (attainable goal/ positive outcome)
33. The principal at my school ensures that teachers have sufficient time for professional development.	What is the relationship between feelings of support teachers receive from the principal and attitudes towards the idea of merit pay?	Herzberg
34. The principal at my school provides support (mentors, peer observation opportunities, PLCs, etc.) to improve instruction in the school.	What is the relationship between feelings of support teachers receive from the principal and attitudes towards the idea of merit pay?	Herzberg
35. Teachers in my school seem more competitive than cooperative.	Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay?	Herzberg
36. Teachers in my school do not really trust each other.	Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay?	Herzberg
37. Teachers in my school feel responsible to help each other do their best.	Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay?	Vroom (attainable goal/ positive outcome)
38. Teachers in my school expect students to complete every assignment.	Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay?	Vroom (attainable goal/ positive outcome)
39. Teachers in my school encourage students to keep trying even when the work is challenging.	Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay?	Vroom (attainable goal/ positive outcome)
40. Teachers in my school think it is important that all of their students do well.	Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay?	Vroom (attainable goal/ positive outcome)
41. Teachers in my school can be counted on to help out anywhere, or anytime, even though it may not be part of their official assignment.	Do teachers' perceptions of their school culture impact their attitudes towards merit pay?	Vroom (desired outcome)
42. Is there anything about merit pay for teachers that the researcher has not asked that you would like to share?	What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative?	Vroom
43. Are you generally in favor of a merit pay system for teachers? Why or why not?	What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative?	Vroom
44. Under the Race to the Top initiative, merit pay systems will be implemented in participating school districts. In Georgia the merit pay formula will be based on student achievement and teacher evaluations. Do you agree with this formula? Why or why not? What improvements would you make to the formula?	What factors do elementary teachers in Georgia believe should be rewarded with merit pay? (e.g., advanced degrees, student achievement, etc.)	Vroom

45. What aspects of merit pay do teachers dislike?	What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative?	Vroom/ Herzberg
46. What dollar amount do you think is appropriate for an annual merit pay bonus?	What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative?	Vroom/ Herzberg
47. Other than money, what motivators would you like to see used for teacher incentives?	What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative?	Vroom/ Herzberg
48. What aspect of merit pay do teachers dislike?	What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative?	Vroom/ Herzberg
49. In regard to the purposed merit pay plan, what is your understanding of the details of the merit pay plan? (Check all that apply)	What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Georgia regarding the implementation of merit pay under Georgia's Race to the Top initiative?	Vroom/ Herzberg

Alignment of Questions

Questions 1-6 collect demographic data

Appendix B

TSPP Permission from Author

Jessica Edenfield - RE: Survey assistance/ permission

Page 1

From: "Matthew Springer" <mgspringer@gmail.com>
To: jedenfield@burke.k12.ga.us
Date: 3/13/2013 1:03 PM
Subject: RE: Survey assistance/ permission

Hi Jessica,
Please feel free to use the instrument. Also, any citation or reference to original work, is appreciated.
Best regards,
Matthew

From: Jessica Edenfield [mailto:JEENFIELD@burke.k12.ga.us]
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2013 10:35 AM
To: matthew.g.springer@vanderbilt.edu
Subject: Survey assistance/ permission

Good morning, Dr. Springer! My name is Jessica Edenfield and I am currently pursuing my Doctorate of Educate in the area of Educational Leadership at Georgia Southern University. I am currently working on my pre-prospectus for my dissertation. As a teacher in one of Georgia's Race to the Top school districts, I am very interested in teacher perceptions of merit pay programs. I have read some of your research and found it to be very beneficial. I would truly appreciate it if you would grant me permission to use the Teacher Survey on Performance Pay that you used for your study in Florida. I would not be able to use all sections; however, I would like permission to use the sections that are not state-specific. I will be glad to share my research with you when I am finished. Also, I would appreciate any other information that you could share regarding merit pay. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Jessica Edenfield

Appendix C

Psychometrics on TSPP

Jessica Edenfield - RE: Survey assistance/ permission

Page 1

From: "Matthew Springer" <mgspringer@gmail.com>
To: jedenfield@burke.k12.ga.us
Date: 3/19/2013 11:00 AM
Subject: RE: Survey assistance/ permission

J,
 No problem. I do not have the psychometrics off hand. Its been several years since we looked at these properties. Sorry.
 Matt

From: Jessica Edenfield [mailto:jedenfield@burke.k12.ga.us]
Sent: Tuesday, March 19, 2013 8:44 AM
To: mgspringer@gmail.com
Subject: RE: Survey assistance/ permission

Thank you so very much for granting your permission for me to use your instrument! I truly appreciate your willingness to help me! Do you happen to have any information regarding the psychometrics of the survey? Thanks so much!

Jessica
 >>> "Matthew Springer" 03/13/13 1:03 PM >>>

Hi Jessica,
 Please feel free to use the instrument. Also, any citation or reference to original work, is appreciated.
 Best regards,
 Matthew

From: Jessica Edenfield [mailto:JEDENFIELD@burke.k12.ga.us]
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2013 10:35 AM
To: matthew.g.springer@vanderbilt.edu
Subject: Survey assistance/ permission

Good morning, Dr. Springer! My name is Jessica Edenfield and I am currently pursuing my Doctorate of Educate in the area of Educational Leadership at Georgia Southern University. I am currently working on my pre-prospectus for my dissertation. As a teacher in one of Georgia's Race to the Top school districts, I am very interested in teacher perceptions of merit pay programs. I have read some of your research and found it to be very beneficial. I would truly appreciate it if you would grant me permission to use the Teacher Survey on Performance Pay that you used for your study in Florida. I would not be able to use all sections; however, I would like permission to use the sections that are not state-specific. I will be glad to share my research with you when I am finished. Also, I would appreciate any other information that you could share regarding merit pay. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Jessica Edenfield

Appendix D
Amended TSPP

Selection Criteria

Please indicate that you are a teacher certified in Georgia to teach Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade.

1. I am certified in the state of Georgia to teach Pre-kinergarten through fifth grade.

- Yes
- No

Demographic Information**2. How many years have you been a teacher?****3. What grade(s) do you teach?**

- Pre-Kindergarten
- Kindergarten
- 1st
- 2nd
- 3rd
- 4th
- 5th

4. What subject(s) do you teach?

- Reading
- Math
- Writing
- English/ Language Arts
- Social Studies
- Science
- P.E.
- Art
- Music
- Other

5. Are you currently teaching in a district that is part of the Race to the Top initiative (RT3)?

- Yes
- No

6. What is the highest level of education you have earned?

- Bachelor's
- Masters
- Ed.S.
- Ed.D.

7. What is your race?

- African American
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Native American
- Other

8. What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

9. What is your curret marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed

10. From which of the following sources have you learned about merit pay? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional readings | <input type="checkbox"/> Peers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> News media | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional organizations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administrators | <input type="checkbox"/> Classes/ Professional Development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local BOE members | <input type="checkbox"/> I do not have any knowledge regarding merit pay. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

I. Incentive Pay

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each general statement about incentive pay that could be rewarded in addition to base pay.

11. Incentive pay for teachers based on OVERALL performance at the school (school-based performance awards) is a positive change to teacher pay incentives.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Don't Know

12. Incentive pay for teachers based on GROUP performance (i.e., grade-level, department, or interdisciplinary team) is a positive change to teacher pay practices.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Don't Know

13. Incentive pay for teachers based on INDIVIDUAL teacher performance (student achievement, performance evaluations, etc.) is a positive change to teacher pay practices.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Don't Know

14. Rewarding teachers based on performance will destroy the collaborative culture of teaching.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Don't Know

15. Rewarding teachers based on performance will cause teachers to work harder.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Don't Know

16. Rewarding teachers based on performance will result in teachers working together more often.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Don't Know

17. District and state officials should be more concerned about increasing base pay as opposed to devising teacher performance pay programs.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Don't Know

II. What should be awarded with performance pay?

The teacher salary schedule rewards experience and education. In select districts and states around the country, several additional factors have been suggested for determining performance pay for individual teachers. Please provide your opinion of the importance of each factor listed below.

18. Earning an advanced degree

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

19. Time spent in professional development

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

20. High test scores by students on a standardized test

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

21. Student gains (improvement/ growth) on the appropriate mandated test (SLO or CRCT)

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

22. Student gains (improvement/ growth) on a test other than the SLO or CRCT

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

23. Performance evaluations by supervisors (administrators)

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

24. Performance evaluations by peers

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

25. Independent evaluations of portfolios (e.g., student and/ or teacher's work)

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

26. Student evaluations of teaching performance

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

27. Collaboration with other faculty and staff

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

28. Working with students outside of class time

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

29. Efforts to involve parents in students' education

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

30. Serving as a master or mentor teacher

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

31. National Board Certification

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

32. Parent satisfaction with teacher

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

33. Teaching in hard-to-staff fields (i.e., subjects that are difficult to find and retain qualified and effective teachers)

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

34. Teaching in hard-to-staff schools (i.e., schools that have difficulty in finding and retaining qualified and effective teachers)

- Not Important
- Low Importance
- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

III. School Environment Part A

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your school principal?

35. The principal at my school works to create a sense of community in this school.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral/ No Opinion
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

36. The principal at my school sets high standards for teaching.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral/ No Opinion
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

37. The principal at my school ensures that teachers have sufficient time for professional development.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral/ No Opinion
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

38. The principal at my school provides support (professional development, peer observations, collaboration times, etc.) to improve instruction in the school.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral/ No Opinion
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

III. School Environment Part B

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the teachers in your school?

39. Teachers in my school seem more competitive than cooperative.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral/ No Opinion
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

40. Teachers in my school do not really trust each other.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral/ No Opinion
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

41. Teachers in my school feel responsible to help each other do their best.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral/ No Opinion
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

42. Teachers in my school expect students to complete every assignment.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral/ No Opinion
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

43. Teachers in my school encourage students to keep trying even when the work is challenging.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral/ No Opinion
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

44. Teachers in my school think it is important that all of their students do well.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral/ No Opinion
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

45. Teachers in my school can be counted on to help out anywhere, or anytime, even though it may not be part of their official assignment.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral/ No Opinion
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

IV. Teacher Input

This sections allows participants to respond to open-ended questions in an attempt by the researcher to gather additional information.

46. Is there anything about merit pay for teachers that the researcher has not asked that you would like to share?

47. Are you generally in favor of a merit pay system for teachers? Why or why not?

48. Under the Race to the Top initiative, merit pay systems will be implemented in participating school districts. In Georgia the merit pay formula will be based on student achievement and teacher evaluations. Do you agree with this formula? Why or why not? What improvements would you make to the formula?

49. What dollar amount do you think is appropriate for an annual merit pay bonus?

50. Other than money, what motivators would you like to see used for teacher incentives?

51. What aspect of merit pay do teachers dislike?

52. In regards to the purposed merit pay plan, what is your understanding of the details of the merit pay plan? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Based solely on student achievement | <input type="checkbox"/> Can only be earned once per teacher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Based on a combination of factors (achievement, evaluations, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Money comes from local funds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individualized | <input type="checkbox"/> Money comes from grants |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divided amongst a group or department | <input type="checkbox"/> Applies only to teachers of tested subjects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increases a teacher's base salary | <input type="checkbox"/> Monetary incentive is the same for all who meet the criteria |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annual bonus | <input type="checkbox"/> Monetary incentive may increase or decrease according to factors such as years teaching, subject, grade, etc. |

Appendix E

Reminder Notice to All Participants

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Teachers' Perceptions of Merit Pay in Georgia

I am Jessica Edenfield, instructional coach of Sardis-Girard-Alexander Elementary School. I am the principal researcher in this project. I am conducting this research to complete my dissertation, which includes a study about teachers' perceptions of merit pay in regard to the current Race to the Top initiative as partial fulfillment of the Doctorate of Education degree at Georgia Southern University.

The purpose of this research is to determine the perceptions of teachers in three rural Georgia counties regarding the implementation of merit pay under the Race to the Top initiative. Due to the fact that the participating school districts are both Race to the Top (RT3) districts and nonRT3 districts, this study will determine the perceptions of the teachers in districts that will and will not implement a merit pay plan. By anonymously surveying the teachers in the districts, the researcher will be able to provide valuable information to the district leaders implementing such a plan.

Participation in this research will include anonymously and voluntarily completing a 50question survey regarding your perceptions about merit pay. The accessing and completion of this survey implies that you agree to participate and your data may be used in this research.

In regard to discomfort and risks, there is no greater risk associated with completing this survey than participating in daily life experiences. The questions are relevant to you and should cause no discomfort. If there is a question or questions that cause discomfort, the question may be omitted. You may withdraw from participating in this study at any time. It is expected that you will participate because the results of the study will be used to help determine the ways in which a merit pay plan may be devised and implemented. Participation will enable you to have input into an issue that will directly affect you.

The study offers benefits to both the individual participant, as well as to society as a whole. It is expected that you will participate because the results of the study will be used to help determine the ways in which the merit pay plan may be revised and implemented in your district. Participation will enable you to have input into an issue that will directly affect you. The benefits to society include knowing that teachers must perform according to set criteria in order to receive merit pay.

This survey will take approximately 45 minutes to complete in one session; however, answers may be saved and you may return and complete the survey at a later time if needed.

This survey is anonymous. The data will only be used by the researcher. This data will be reported in aggregate form so individual answers will not be identifiable. The surveys will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for a minimum of four years. After that time, it will be shredded.

You have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named below or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 9124780843.

If you have already completed the survey, please disregard this reminder. Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX F

Comparisons of RT3 and Non-RT3 Responses

(Y-values are indicative of percentages for each category of responses.)

