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The Perceptions of Teachers in a Rural South Georgia County Regarding Merit Pay Based on Student Achievement

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS IN A RURAL SOUTH GEORGIA COUNTY REGARDING MERIT PAY BASED ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

by

RENEE SASSER

(Under the Direction of Russell Mays)

ABSTRACT

The study explored the perceptions of teachers in a rural south Georgia county regarding merit pay based on student achievement. The study examined 205 teachers' personal and professional demographics and perceptions of the use of student achievement in awarding merit pay.

The study employed a descriptive, survey approach to address the research questions. A self-designed survey questionnaire was developed to explore teachers' perceptions of merit pay and included a quantitative orientation.

Findings indicated that the majority of the teachers who responded to the survey worked at the middle school level, were greater than 50 years old, and had between 0 –9 years experience. They typically held a Master's Degree. The majority of the respondents worked at a school that did not make AYP for the 2009 – 2010 school year.

Respondents did not want a merit pay plan implemented in the district even though the district is a Race to the Top Grant Award recipient that mandates a merit pay plan be implemented. The teachers were undecided if student achievement should be used to award a merit pay plan if one were to be implemented. The teachers indicated that a merit plan would negatively impact the school climate, which would destroy collaboration, which in turn could lead to a negative impact on student achievement. Teachers also indicated that teacher

evaluations would have administrators playing favorites toward those teachers who "do not rock the boat" or raise questions about certain practices. The teachers were undecided on the number of evaluations that would be adequate to award merit pay.

Based on demographics, there were no significant differences in the years of experience, the school level, and AYP status. There were differences with age. The younger the teacher, the more motivated the teacher was to improve student achievement in order to be awarded merit pay. The less education the teacher obtained, the more undecided the teacher was with improving student achievement in order to be awarded merit pay. The teachers, who had attained a Specialist's Degree, were more undecided on using student achievement in order to be awarded merit pay.

INDEX WORDS: Merit pay, Student achievement, Pay-for-performance

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all teachers everywhere, because all teachers deserve merit pay. I have spent years on this dissertation and have found that the teachers in one district do not want a merit pay plan. I would have thought all teachers would have wanted to be eligible for merit pay, because they do so much above the required expectations.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to all the students I have taught over the past 29 years. They have been the joy of my life, and the reason I look forward to getting up each morning and reporting to work. They come with such openness and willingness to learn new ideas. Without them, my life would be so much less.

Last, but not least, I would like to acknowledge my daughter, Amy Sasser. She was there for every Saturday class for five semesters; driving me to class each Saturday and waiting on me to drive me back home. She drove me to the candidacy exam in Statesboro early one Saturday morning, since I was so nervous. She also cleaned the house, bought the groceries, made sure the bills were paid, and took care of all the domestic chores. Amy spent many nights with me at school while I typed on this dissertation. She has been there for every moment. I truly love her.

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Second, I would like to acknowledge my chair, Dr. Russell Mays, who has graciously worked with me and unselfishly devoted much of his time to helping me with revisions. Without his encouragement and wisdom, this work would never have been completed. I chose him to be my chair the first time I met him. His love for children is evident in his conversations. I knew that I could work with someone who loves children as much as I do.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Lucinda Chance, who actually participated in a merit pay plan. Her insight and thought-provoking questions helped guide me in the direction this dissertation needed to be written.

Also, I would like to thank Dr. Phillip Smith, the methodologist for this project. He took time out of his busy teaching schedule to meet with me and explain the steps in the process of using SPSS to analyze the data and which data to report.

Through much support from my committee, this project was completed. Hopefully, teachers across the nation may benefit from a merit pay plan. All teachers are deserving of financial and emotional incentives. Teachers give so much of themselves each day for the reward of helping children.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Education obtained with money is worse than no education at all," Socrates. Pay for performance may take teachers away from the focus on learning and put the focus more on teaching to the test. There are many areas of learning that cannot be measured by a standardized test or pay-for-performance goals. Student achievement is important and needs to be taken into account in today's advanced societal needs. Alternately, teachers should not be discouraged from using innovative instructional strategies and for teaching classes of students who are not high academic achievers.

The use of merit pay has been a part of educational history for well over a hundred years. States across the country have implemented different types of merit pay systems to improve student achievement in a similar manner that the business world offers merit pay to increase productivity and customer satisfaction. The problem with the model used in the business world is that schools just are not businesses. The process of education cannot be evaluated for increased academic achievement through traditional business means. However, the public has called to the attention of politicians for accountability of school systems to hire and retain the best teachers while improving student achievement.

Since different types of merit pay programs have been implemented in school systems across the country, many studies have been conducted to determine if the implementation of a merit pay plan can increase student achievement while still fostering a collegial school climate. Then the problem of finding the money to reward all the productive educators and sustain the merit pay plan became a concern. With cuts in the federal budget, there may be no way to fund the new initiatives to reach the basic and below-basic students we currently are not reaching. The manner in which school systems deal with teacher compensation will affect the future of

school finance. The baby boomers are a large sector of the population and the key to school finance may be in getting them to invest in schools. This investment will be driven by results of the pay-for-performance programs historically and currently being implemented.

The biggest obstacle in determining criteria for merit pay plans and implementation of the plans is the teachers' perceptions of such a program. Getting teachers to support a plan is crucial to the success of the merit pay plan. Salary reform efforts can face opposition without teacher involvement. The lack of an objective system of evaluating teachers' performances remains an obstacle to merit pay. There are different variables that are considered for merit pay: standardized test scores, administrator evaluations, professional growth activities, hard to staff subject areas, extra assignments, and years of experience. If an individual teacher's pay is tied to test scores, the perception is the teacher is teaching to the test. Evaluations by an administrator can be subjective and construed as biased. There is the belief that merit pay can create competition among teachers, which would have a negative impact on school climate.

There are as many proponents of merit pay as there are opponents. Some districts have implemented merit pay with fidelity and success and others have reported disastrous results. Implementation of a merit pay system may take place if all training and professional development has been provided, and all stakeholders approve the system.

Statement of the Problem

The obvious shortcomings of the No Child Left Behind legislation coupled with the seemingly unprecedented economic crisis that has plagued the United States in the later part of this decade have led to the resurrection of the highly politicized idea of merit pay for educators. Evidence of the popularity of merit pay among politicians can be seen in President Obama's Race to the Top plan in which evaluations take into account data on student growth and using

that data to inform decisions regarding compensating, promoting, and retaining teachers and principals. However, this revised notion of merit pay may evoke the same problems from past attempts. One component of current proposals will tie teachers' merit pay to students' academic achievement. School systems that implement performance pay must define the expected performance as well as the assessment tool used to measure students' academic achievement. The criteria will need to include variables that may impact teachers' performance. In addition, to maximize a teacher's performance, criteria need to be established to define efficient teachers.

One of the most common and controversial proposals regarding merit pay is paying teachers based on their students' standardized test scores. A system that rewards teachers based solely on test scores will limit a student's academic career. Students will be great at taking tests, but may be ill-prepared in terms of critical thinking skills or actually learning the standards.

The effects on the school climate, instructional strategies, and standardized testing may be impacted by a merit pay plan. One aspect of school climate is teacher morale, which, could be impacted negatively or positively, depending on the value placed on the input of the teachers involved. By studying teachers' perceptions regarding merit pay, school administrators may be better equipped to implement the change to merit pay in ways that are more likely to result in higher teacher morale.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of teachers in a rural south Georgia county regarding merit pay based on student achievement. Since the participating school district is a recipient of a Race to the Top grant that will fund a merit pay plan. This study determined the perceptions of the teachers in the district toward the mandated merit pay plan.

By anonymously surveying the teachers in the district, the researcher was able to provide valuable information to the district leaders in developing such a plan.

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories that advocate merit pay in the education field. Extrinsic and intrinsic factors motivate people to grow psychologically. The school districts offer opportunities for teachers to grow professionally by attending professional learning activities, mentoring new teachers, and obtaining higher degrees. Merit pay could be an extrinsic motivator to reward those teachers who participate in the professional learning activities. "Rewards provided to teachers... are a mixture of intrinsic satisfactions... and extrinsic benefits" (Mitchell & Peters, 1988, p. 75). Pastor conducted a study in 1982 that emphasized that teachers' intrinsic motivators may not be based on financial gains (cited in Ellis, 1984b). Pastor's study noted that teachers want to be involved in the decision-making process and that the teachers valued the freedom and independence to be creative in their teaching strategies (cited in Ellis, 1984a). The ideal merit pay plan would be a combination of the extrinsic and intrinsic benefits to motivate the teaching staff. By providing input into the development of the plan, this study provides an intrinsic motivator for the teachers related that is directly linked to the more extrinsic motivator of merit pay.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following over-arching research question. How do teachers in a rural south Georgia school system perceive the issue of merit pay based on student achievement?

In addition, the following supporting questions were addressed.

1. What is the perception of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect teacher evaluation?
2. What is the perception of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect the fidelity of standardized testing?
3. What is the perception of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect school climate?
4. Do age, years of experience, school level, school's AYP status, and / or level of education impact a teacher's perception regarding merit pay?

Significance of the Study

The No Child Left Behind Act required that virtually all students achieve academic proficiency by 2014. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) refers to the yearly goals that each state must establish and meet. Scores on the Criterion Referenced competency Test (CRCT), Georgia Alternative Assessment (GAA), and Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) are analyzed yearly to determine if a school, district, and the state are reaching the goals, or making AYP in reading, language arts, and mathematics. The AYP definition requires that performance goals be established for all students and disaggregated by subgroups such as race and ethnicity. . Schools in which students fail to show academic progress for five years are subject to state takeover. School leaders are searching for innovative methods to retain effective teachers and encourage their professional growth in hopes of improving student achievement. Current merit pay systems combine student achievement with teacher performance. Subjective and objective

information are gathered from colleagues, parents, administrators, and students, including teacher evaluations, student performance results and a teacher portfolio that includes "artifacts such as scholarly papers, new curricular written by the teacher, logs of parental involvement, samples of tests and assignments, lesson plans and essays reflecting on the teacher's practice" (Odden, Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2001, p.4). The public may see the need for an increase in teachers' salaries, as they realize that quality teachers are necessary in classrooms in order for students to achieve. In order to attract and retain quality teachers, an attractive financial incentive may be needed. The implementation of a merit pay system may be a possible solution to the placement of effective teachers in all classes through merit pay. The implementation of a merit pay system to improve student achievement must be researched to determine if a school system will benefit from such a program. By researching the literature and surveying the staff, the district may find financial stipends as a motivator for teachers.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was a descriptive study and utilized quantitative research methods. This descriptive study involved administering a survey to certified teachers at a given time to determine teachers' perceptions regarding merit pay. A quantitative cross-sectional survey research design was used for the current study (Creswell, 2002). The aim of this study was to provide as accurate as possible description of the perceptions of teachers in a rural Georgia school system regarding the merit pay based on student achievement. With this information, administrators may be better equipped with the knowledge necessary to successfully plan and effectively implement a merit pay plan.

Participants

This study was conducted in the five public schools in a rural, south Georgia county in which all the schools are Title I schools. The schools' staff include regular education teachers, special education teachers, activity teachers, counselors, media specialists, academic coaches, speech language pathologists, teachers of the gifted, lead teachers, and administrators. Approximately 285 certified personnel were invited to participate. These schools were chosen because the district has received a Race to the Top Grant, which mandates the implementation of a merit pay plan. The personnel serving students in these schools had diversity in age, level of degrees, and years of experience.

Instrumentation

The participants completed a survey based on information from previous research. The researcher constructed approximately 24 questions. The first 19 questions pertained to teachers' perceptions of merit pay, inclusion of test scores for awards of merit pay, effects of merit pay on the climate of a school, and information related to evaluations of teachers. The last five questions pertained to demographics.

Once the survey was developed, a panel of experts including the superintendent, two assistant superintendents, and the testing director of the participating school district, reviewed it Once the panel of experts gave feedback, the researcher revised the survey as needed. Then the final version of the survey was drafted.

Once the survey was drafted, a pilot study was conducted using a group of educators enrolled in a professional development class. Someone other than the researcher administered the survey, and participation was completely voluntary. Teachers were briefed on the directions to complete the survey. Individuals who completed the pilot study were not participants in the

final study. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated to determine reliability. The items on the survey were not scored dichotomously. The score was based on the extent to which the participants who answered a given test item one way responded to other similar test items in a similar way.

Procedures

Once the researcher had received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Georgia Southern University, the survey was approved by the panel of experts and the pilot study was completed, permission was obtained from the superintendent and building principals to conduct the proposed study in the five public schools in the district. A request was made for the researcher to be placed on the agenda for an upcoming faculty meeting at each school. At the meeting, the researcher gave a brief background on merit pay, the Race to the Top Grant district award, and the implications. The directions to complete the survey were given. Information regarding confidentiality and approval of the Institutional Research Board was announced. The teachers completed the Informed Consent Document and the survey. The researcher assured the participants that the surveys had no identifying labels and were returned to a large envelope on a table in the back of the room. Informed consent documents were returned to a separate envelope.

Data Analysis

Once all surveys were returned, statistical analysis was conducted to identify the perceptions of teachers and principals regarding specific aspects of merit pay. To test each hypothesis, an ANOVA was conducted to determine significance at the .05 level of confidence. The independent variables of this study were the participant's age, years of experience in education, school level, school's AYP status, and attainment of degrees. The dependent

variables were the effect of a merit pay system on teacher evaluations, standardized testing, and school climate.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was delimited to one school district that had been awarded a Race to the Top Grant, which mandated the development of a merit pay system. The study did not include paraprofessionals because they were not included as a component of the grant. Limitations included the fact that the researcher was a principal at one of the participating schools taking the survey. Some of the Publication dates of some sources in the literature review appeared earlier than most used; however, the issue of merit pay is a topic that has come before and is being resurrected. It was imperative that the researcher compared historical data regarding the perceptions of merit pay and previous successes and failures. The terms "merit pay" and "value added" were interpreted by individuals in many different ways and therefore impacted results. Additional limitations were that the researcher could only assume that the responses to the survey represented the actual perceptions of the respondents, and that the results may not be generalized widely as they represent data collected from a specific population.

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress- A set of performance goals that establishes the minimum levels of improvement, based on student performance on state standardized tests, that schools, local education agencies, and the State as a whole must achieve within time frames specified in law.

Climate - School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and

reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

Criterion-referenced test- A test that judges how well a test-taker does on an explicit objective relative to a predetermined performance level. There is no comparison to any other test-takers. The test tells how well students are performing on specific criteria, goals, or standards.

Culture - the shared beliefs and priorities driving the thinking and actions of people within a school community.

Educational accountability- The process(es) by which school districts and states attempt to ensure that schools and school systems meet their goals.

Effective teacher – a teacher whose students achieve acceptable rates (*e.g.* at least one grade level in an academic year) of student growth.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)- Law enacted by Congress in 1965 to authorize and regulate the majority of federal K-12 education programs to improve achievement among poor and disadvantaged students.

Highly qualified – hold a bachelor's degree from a GaPSC accepted, accredited institution of higher education; hold a valid Georgia teaching certificate; have evidence of subject matter competence in the subjects they teach by an academic major or the equivalent (minimum of 15 semester hours for middle grades or a minimum of 21 semester hours for secondary; and a passing score on the State approved, required content assessment for the area/subjects they teach; have a teaching assignment that is appropriate for the filed(s) listed on the Georgia teaching certificate.

Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-382)- Reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), with a focus on changing the way education was delivered, encouraging comprehensive systemic school reform, upgrading instructional and professional development to align with high standards, strengthening accountability, and promoting the coordination of resources to improve education for all children.

Merit pay- Additional pay awarded to an employee on the basis of merit, especially to schoolteachers (Merit Pay, 2006, p.1).

Merit pay portfolio – A portfolio that contains specific artifacts to document a teacher's progress throughout the year. These artifacts may include evaluations, parental feedback, and student achievement scores.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)- A law that operates on one basic assumption- that every child, regardless of income, gender, race, ethnicity, or disability- can learn, and that every child deserves to learn.

Norm-referenced test – a test referenced to norms based on the performance of other students across the nation which is designed to compare student achievement relative to other students' achievement

Perception- The representation of what is perceived; basic component in the formation of content, a way of conceiving something.

Single salary schedule – Scale used in most states on which teacher salary is based. The scale takes into account teaching experience and educational level.

Standardized test – Tests students complete at a point in the school year. The test is given and scored in a standard matter to provide school districts with consistent data on student achievement.

Standardized testing- Testing with explicit, fixed procedures for administering, scoring, and interpreting the test. The test has been standardized or normed on a large, representative sample of individuals at specified grade levels. The test is standardized both in the sense of a common procedure for administering the test and common norms for interpreting the results.

Student Achievement- for tested grades and subjects is a student's score on the State's assessments under the ESEA; and, as appropriate, other measures of student learning, provided they are rigorous and comparable across classrooms

Student Achievement - for non-tested grades and subjects is alternative measures of student learning and performance such as student scores on pre-tests and end-of-course tests; student performance on English language proficiency assessments; and other measures of student achievement that are rigorous and comparable across classrooms.

Student growth means the change in student achievement for an individual student between two or more points in time.

Value-added - the practice of examining students' achievement gains from year to year rather than their scores at a single point in time in order to warrant merit pay.

Summary

Over the next ten years, approximately two million teachers will be needed to replace retiring teachers and to fill positions in school districts whose student population is growing (Professional Compensation for Teachers, 2002). A school district that has an effective and sustainable merit pay plan could be an attractive incentive to hire the best graduates to staff their schools. Since the imminent prospect of the participating school district being a recipient in the Race to the Top grant that will fund a merit pay plan, the research sought to examine the perceptions of the teachers in this district toward a merit pay plan. By anonymously surveying

the teachers in the district, the researcher was able to provide valuable information to the district leaders in developing such a plan.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature reviewed for this study is organized into three major sections: merit pay based on student achievement and the effects on teacher evaluations, and merit pay based on student achievement and standardized testing, merit pay based on student achievement and the effects on school climate. Preceding those three sections is a discussion on the theoretical framework of merit pay. The purpose of this review of the literature is to provide a context that will enable a more thorough understanding of merit pay and its potential impacts on student achievement, teacher evaluation, standardized testing, and school climate.

The results of this study were instrumental and relevant to the researcher since the researcher is an administrator in the participating district that has been awarded $1.9 million in the Race to the Top Grant to fund a merit pay plan for the 2011 – 2012 school year. The information gleaned from this study will provide information regarding certified teachers' perceptions regarding the use of student achievement as criteria in establishing a merit pay plan. Knowing the teachers' perceptions assisted the administrators in developing the merit pay plan, the mandated criteria and will enable a more effective implementation while maintaining the fidelity of the grant.

To reduce the perceived risk associated with a merit pay system, a thorough study of the entire issue should be completed before implementation. Data obtained can then be used in gaining teacher acceptance prior to and during implementation. A merit pay system that includes teachers' input in the development of the plan may be perceived as less risky to the teachers. Teachers interested in being part of such a system from the

start would be a key interest group, thus increasing the likelihood of more rapid acceptance through "targeting" groups most likely to look favorably upon such an innovation (Kotler & Roberto, 1989).

The first section of this review is an overview of merit pay along with the historical background. In addition, there is a need to understand the development of teacher evaluations to measure teacher efficacy based on student achievement. One criterion that has been proposed for teachers to receive merit pay is improved student achievement. The second section examines the impact of merit pay on student achievement with an emphasis on utilizing standardized test scores as a measurement tool. The third section includes characterization of school climate and the potential impact merit pay being based on student achievement had on the morale and collaboration of the faculty. The topic of school climate and merit pay will be researched, with an emphasis on job satisfaction within the framework of the school organization. This section also includes information regarding merit pay plans with an emphasis on the pros and cons established based on information learned from previously implemented merit pay plans.

> "The idea that if you're paid more you'll work harder may apply to selling encyclopedias. If you're a lion-tamer, you're not going to work any harder just because you'll be paid more. The job of a teacher is more like a lion-tamer, I think," Al Shanker, President, AFT, AFL-CIO (as cited in Noon, 2009).

Teachers work hard to avoid being eaten alive. A teacher appeases the lion's appetite and then teaches the lion tricks. This analogy was reflective of what teachers are faced with

on a daily basis. Teachers develop positive relationships with children to gain their respect and trust; only then can they teach.

Mention "merit pay" to teachers and note the facial expressions and body language indicators that reflect a negative connotation. Try "differentiated pay," "cash incentives," or "pay for performance," and the reception was one of intrigue. One may wonder if the legislature was trying to recycle an old concept that previously failed under the name merit pay. Hanshaw (2004) stated the following:

> The term 'merit' to most educators is a performance-based metric that implies that something 'special' was accomplished; something 'over and above the call of duty' was done; or that something of 'high value or regard' was the result of one's use of time. (p. 58)

The increase in experimentation with compensation reform across the country has resulted in a growing body of research documenting preliminary insights into the implementations of past reforms and current compensation programs. Some school leaders considering a merit pay plan have examined the following four strategies: set clear performance goals for the program, engage stakeholders at the beginning of the design process, use multiple measures of teacher performance, and conduct rigorous evaluations of teacher compensation programs (Laine, Potemski, & Rowland, 2010). Because the research evidence is still emerging, additional examination should build on the practical lessons learned to date. As in most educational reform efforts, the specific effects of a merit pay plan may be difficult to determine since most programs have been incorporated as a single aspect of larger systems of reform.

Theoretical Framework

The mechanics of a merit pay plan is determined by the correlation of teachers' expectations and the availability of rewards once the teacher has achieved the predetermined criteria to receive the merit pay. These conceptual underpinnings were perhaps best explained by Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory. Vroom's model of employee motivation described the processes that link behaviors to rewards and suggests that performance can be influenced positively by monetary incentives if workers have a high expectancy that performance can be achieved, if workers believe that a correlation exists between performance and the likelihood of reward, and if workers find monetary rewards attractive. Vroom's theory suggests that on-the-job experience provides people the opportunity to reflect on their subjective estimates of the relationship between effort and performance. If teachers believe that increased effort will not result in improved performance, low expectancy will cause teachers to withhold effort. If teachers withhold effort, quality instruction may not ensue, and student achievement may suffer.

Perhaps the best known theory of employee motivation was Herzberg's (1966) two-factor approach which suggests that worker behavior is influenced by two categories of rewards: motivators and hygiene factors. Herzberg (1966) defines motivators as rewards intrinsic to the content of one's work; rewards that stimulate psychological growth, a necessary precondition for job satisfaction and enhanced performance. The intrinsic motivators include but are not limited to achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and the work itself. Herzberg's (1987) work suggests that policy-makers wishing to improve teacher performance should be less concerned with salary and more attentive to making intrinsic rewards available.

> Teachers focused on the intrinsic rewards of teaching.
>
> For example, Lortie (1975) found that the most frequently reported attractors to teaching were the opportunity to work with children and the belief that teachers provide an important service to society. Feistritzer (1983) Although Lortie recognized that normative expectations of teachers as dedicated professionals may inhibit their acknowledging the extent to which material benefits influence behavior, intrinsic rewards consistently rank higher than monetary gain in teacher opinion surveys. (Weis et al, 1989, p. 115)

If money is the ultimate extrinsic reward, merit pay could be detrimental in a teacher's performance. The most important motivation of a teacher should be the improvement in student achievement (Deci, 1976).

History of Merit Pay

Historically, merit pay plans have not been accepted by most educators at any level (Balkin, 1996; Johnson, 1984, Urbansky, 1997), have lacked precise measurement and have created teacher motivation problems (Charnofsky, Cherny, Dufault, Kegley & Whitney, 1997; Ellis, 1984; Twomey, 1993; Wilcox, 1999), and have encountered legal challenges from higher education faculty (Euben, 2003). "In large school districts the pay of thousands of teachers in hundreds of schools – from kindergarten to secondary teachers in math and science – is typically set by a single district schedule," (Podgursky, 2006, p. 552). That is, teachers were paid based on the number of years of experience and the level of education obtained.

England introduced a pay for performance plan known as the Common Schools Act for primary school teachers in 1862, which lasted until 1895. The Act envisioned

rewards based on qualifications, but payments were made based on pupils' test results. It took more than 40 years to remove this system, whose detrimental effects on the breadth of the curriculum and the quality of teaching were widely understood and universally condemned (Pawsey, 1994; Selleck, 1982). The apparent concern was that the teachers were teaching to the test and not the standards necessary for success on standardized tests.

Merit pay has been slow in developing in the United States. Beginning in the early 1800s, communities paid their teachers by providing room and board. There were few educational requirements beyond the need to be able to read, write, and do math. As areas became more populated, salaries were introduced to attract more well-educated people to the area. Salaries were then based on gender, race, and the level of education.

Merit pay plans in the United States have waxed and waned over the years. Interest in merit pay has tended to be prevalent when the Americans become concerned with the state of the economy (Johnson, 1986). When the economy became troubled, the concern regarding the educational preparation of students for an advanced society made the headlines. Then a discussion regarding improving teachers' salaries becomes the topic in an effort to increase teacher motivation to teach better. Once the economy stabilized, the topic fades.

By 1950 approximately 97% of the school systems in the United States had adopted a single salary schedule (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). The Russian launch of the satellite, Sputnik, revived the interest in merit pay due to concerns in the area of science. Following the then USSR's success with Sputnik, and the subsequent scapegoat of the American education system, there was a resurgence of

interest in the 1960s, but by 1978 fewer than 4% of the schools had merit pay (Murnane & Cohen, 1986). By 1972, the lack of interest and funding could not sustain the policy. After the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk,* which recommended that teacher salaries be "professionally competitive, market-sensitive, and performance-based" (National Commission for Excellence in Education, 1983, p.30), the idea of merit pay again resurfaced (Clardy, 1988). This publication of a *Nation at Risk* led many school leaders to consider teacher incentives as a means to improve student achievement and to promote a flexible compensation system. Teacher career ladders and merit pay programs were among the most visible programs employed (Dee & Keys, 2004).

> Research on these programs suggests it was difficult to create a reliable process for identifying effective teachers, measuring the value-added to a student by an individual teacher, eliminating unprofessional preferential treatment from evaluation processes, and standardizing assessments systems across schools. Moreover, past programs included insignificant dollar amounts awarded to successful teachers, faced opposition to alternative compensation systems by teacher unions, and lacked rigorous evaluations to assess and possibly recalibrate programmatic components more effectively to bring the program to scale. (Podgursky & Springer, 2007, p. 553)

Merit pay plans that have an added monetary bonus have not lasted and have been renounced by opponents (e.g., Hatry, Greiner, & Ashford, 1994; Murnane & Cohen, 1986). The average life of merit-pay schemes in the United States has been about four to five years (Murnane & Cohen, 1986). Research indicates that performance pay schemes have emerged periodically over the past 100 years (Popham, 1997), usually during

periods of economic downturn, and subsequent scapegoat of the education system (Protsik, 1996). Problems in society often tend to be blamed on the education system.

"The public and policymakers want some type of pay-for-performance for teachers," (Odden, 2000, p. 361). Currently, teachers are paid based on their years of experience and degrees they have obtained. Murnane (1983) found that teachers with bachelor's degrees were just as effective as those with master's degrees. Hanushek (1994) found limited evidence that graduate coursework was related to teacher quality or classroom performance. Later, a study determined there was weak evidence to support teachers' education (degrees) positively and consistently impact student achievement (Hanushek, Rivkin, & Taylor, 1996). Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007) found that elementary teachers with an advanced degree were no more effective in positively impacting student achievement. Recently, a large study found no relationship between a teacher's ability to improve student achievement and holding a graduate degree (Aos, Miller, & Pennucci, 2007). An increasing salary step scale may be implemented during the first ten years of experience for teachers who are performing satisfactorily. Rockoff (2004) found that improvement in student achievement was founded in a teacher's years of experience. Each year as teachers gained more experience, their knowledge base expanded to provide quality instruction to their students. Gordon, Kane, and Staiger (2006) found no substantial gains in student achievmeent after a teacher's third year in the classroom. There were no experience effects found in elementary teachers after five years experience in the classroom. Our business and political leaders thought people went into teaching for the money. Perhaps legislators haven't looked at teacher salaries lately. People go into teaching for the love of the craft and the kids—in other words,

because they feel a "calling". Ask any teacher the reason he or she enters the teaching profession – money would probably not be the answer given.

Merit Pay and Teacher Evaluations

Historically, states have tried different forms of merit pay that include supplemental pay for extended contracts, extra duties, special knowledge, mentoring, or incremental steps on a career ladder. The current trend regarding merit pay is to award teachers who meet measurable goals in student achievement (Cornett, 1995). Teachers may have had control of factors controlled in the classroom, but conditions outside the school may affect the success of a teacher and the academic achievement of a student. Merit pay scales were much less successful when the employee's performance was dependent on several factors out of the employee's control, and often an outside factor "may be more of a determinant than is the employee's ability" (Twomey, 1993, p.2). Students have many more external factors that compete with academic time today than at any time in the past. There are many more single-parent families and the two-parent families are usually consumed with work to meet financial responsibilities due to the economic situation. There is also the external pressure from peers to be involved in activities that do not involve furthering their education.

Classroom observation have been the main method used by administrators to assess teacher efficacy in merit pay schemes in the past, using a variety of observational checklists that can be perceived as subjective (Scriven, 1994, Stodolsky, 1990). Administrators would make periodic observations to classrooms to check for research-based instructional strategies and positive classroom management. Despite their degree of expertise, the research indicates that school principals are not necessarily current with

instructional trends to judge teacher performance, especially when that judgment was based on occasional and limited observations of classrooms (Medley & Coker, 1987; Stodolsky, 1990). In order for classroom observations to be reliable, a detailed, objective rubric needs to be developed. All administrators completing the classroom observations needed to receive the same training from the same trainers in order to be consistent and pervasive. School politics also caused teachers concern and alternative strategies were in place to eliminate the potential for bias in the assessments of their performance (Blasé, 1991).

With all the discussion regarding pay for performance, the most important topic of the discussion should be the criteria used to judge teacher performance. Michael Allen (1999), policy analyst from the Education Commission of the States, notes five core mandates for a successful teacher evaluation system:

- A tool to reasonably measure student learning gains against state education standards;
- A method to collect and analyze data that can generate a "value-added" correlation between individual teachers and student learning gains over time;
- Consistent analysis of data to note patterns in student performance of individual teachers;
- A professional development plan to assist teachers whose students show a pattern of poor learning (for example, additional professional learning or reassignment); and
- A buy-in from all stakeholders.

There will need to be multiple criteria to evaluate teacher performance that is more objective, not subjective. The data will need to be collected over time with fidelity. That is, it is possible that a contract (i.e., pay for performance program) designed by the principal does not encompass all relevant aspects of an organization mission, and as a result, "the use of explicit contracts could cause agents to focus too much on those aspects of the job included in the contract to the detriment of those that are excluded" (Prendergast, 1999, p. 21). The criteria for pay for performance needs to consider some aspects of a teacher's job that are not delineated in a contract. Some questions for thought regarding the criteria to judge the best teachers might be: Are the great teachersmore entertaining? Are they more intelligent in their subject area? Do they have a better rapport with their students? Are they more efficient and provide instruction that keeps students on task? Does this teacher know their students' backgrounds, social class, personal or family problems? Does the teacher need to meet all of the aforementioned criteria or some? School and district leaders should be responsible for incorporating research based programs that makes their teachers and their schools more effective in promoting student learning (Holloway, 1999).

When considering teacher effectiveness as a criteria for pay for performance, researchers have examined many components. For example, in a large-scale study of certification status and effectiveness of new teachers in New York City public schools, Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger (2005) wrote,

> In other words, there is not much difference between certified, uncertified, and alternately certified teachers overall, but effectiveness varies substantially among each group of teachers. To put it simply, teachers vary considerably in the extent to which they

> promote student learning, but whether a teacher is certified or not is largely irrelevant to predicting their effectiveness. (p. 40)

For example, there is little evidence that advanced teacher degrees, the most common educational credential, have any impact on student achievement (Hanushek, 2003). Darling-Hammond (2000) found substantial evidence that teachers who have more preparation, such as graduate work, are more confident and successful with students.

The purpose of standards in performance assessment is to define what is to be assessed, describe how it was measured, and specify the level of performance that meets the standards. Student evaluation surveys (and parent feedback) can be used to provide reliable measures of class environment (Irving, 2005). Paper and pencil tests can provide a valid means of gathering evidence about a teacher's subject matter and pedagogical knowledge (Pearlman, 2000). Direct evidence of student learning of what the teacher is expected to teach, such as, work samples over time or repeated measures on valid measures of student growth, provide evidence of increasing understanding. A valid and reliable assessment of teacher performance should show more than one form of evidence, evidence that is directly related to the quality of teaching, and evidence that is accurate and objective. Students' promotion is dependent on a rubric of different criteria that ultimately becomes a portfolio of a year's culmination of work. The awarding of merit pay could be based on the same premise of accumulating student work samples, multiple student assessments, and fulfillment of duties and responsibilities. However, the current trend is to use measures of student achievement. In 2001, under its No Child Left Behind Act, the new federal government in the United States mandated that states use "test-based" accountability systems (McCaffery, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003).

Student Achievement Measured by Standardized Test Scores

There have historically been problems with performance pay models, however, this researcher questions if they could be successful if performance is broadly defined and all parties agree to the plan. "This year, President Obama and U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have included performance pay among their goals for education," (Gratz, 2009, p. 76). "And the Obama Administration wants to up the ante to $487 million in stimulus spending. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently called performance pay "my highest priority," (Toch, 2009, p. 99). Secretary Duncan wants teachers' support and has emphasized that he does not support the idea that test scores alone should dictate evaluations, tenure, and merit pay. He does believe omitting student achievement in teacher evaluations is illogical. "A system that rewards schools, students, and teachers only for test scores will get mostly test scores," (Gratz, 2009, p. 79). This flaw in merit pay compensation will not prepare students to become the critical thinkers they will need to be to succeed in a global society if based solely on test scores. Students will be great test takers, but ill-prepared as far as learning the standards. Teachers that drill students on rote knowledge to be regurgitated on a standardized test at a later date accomplish just that – regurgitated material that has no synthesis of skills learned.

A merit pay – plan based on student achievement will need to define student achievement (Tanaka, 1996). Student achievement may be defined as measuring student scores on standardized tests, calculating improvements on attendance rates, performing in class, benchmark assessments, or by some combination of all of these or others. There will need to be a definition for student achievement for the students with disabilities and other subgroups to be equitable to the teachers teaching the at-risk students.. Once again, a common definition for

student achievement will need to be disseminated for all schools involved in any merit pay model.

"Some experts in educational measurement regard schemes such as value added as flawed because they use national norm-referenced tests that are usually insenstitive to detecting the effects of teachers 'instructional efforts' (Popham, 1997, p.270). This use of student assessment data is not the intended purpose. These tests are not intended to assess the performance of individual teachers when the test scores have not been validated for that purpose. A norm-referenced test is designed to discriminate between the students taking the test, not the teachers administering the test. In a recent review of literature on the use of value-added modeling (VAM) in estimating teacher effects, McCaffrey et al. (2003) conclude:

> VAM-based rankings of teachers are highly unstable, and that only large differences in estimated impact are likely to be detectable given the effects of sampling error and other sources of uncertainty. Interpretation of differences among teachers based on VAM estimates should be made with extreme caution. (p.113).

A valid and reliable method for assessing individual teacher performance for a high-stakes decision such as merit pay will require multiple, independent sources of evidence. There will also need to be intense training of the assessors to corroborate the evidence needed to make a decision for or against awarding of merit pay. This means that a single measure, such as using students' scores on standardized tests cannot alone provide a reliable basis for making performance-related pay decisions about the efforts of individual teachers. Performance pay plans also need to include evidence about the classroom setting in which a teacher is teaching in order to make judgments about the quality of teaching (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005).

Recent evidence indicates that standards-based assessments of teacher performance by trained teacher assessors can reach high levels of reliability (Gitomer, 2008). The key to reliability will be in the training of the assessors. The evidence also indicates that the students of teachers who did well on these performance assessments, such as those used by NBPTS certification, achieve better on standardized tests than students of teachers who did not (Milanowski, 2004). This finding could be because the NBPTS teachers have more training in using research-based instructional strategies that have been proven to improve student achievement. As a result of his research, Milanowski susggested that:

> scores from a rigorous teacher evaluation system can be substantially related to student achievement and provide criterion-related validity evidence for the use of the performance evaluation scores as the basis for a performance-based system. (p.34)

Cunningham and Stone (2005) found that the top ten percent of effective teachers who did not have NBPTS certification yielded achievement scores greater than those of an average NBPTS-certified teacher. Cavalluzzo (2004) found little difference in student gains between NBPTS-certified teachers and teachers who did not have the certification.

Performance pay plans are more likely to have a positive impact on student achievement when combined with a framework for supporting quality teaching over time than when introduced in isolation (Wilson, Darling-Hammond, & Berry, 2000). An example of a merit pay plan that is embedded is the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) that was introduced by the Milkin Family Foundation in 1999 and supported by the U. S. Department of Education. There are four elements that comprised the program: paths that provided opportunities for teachers to mentor, ongoing professional development, required researched based instructional strategies

implmented to link evaluations to teaching skills and student achievment, and performance based compensation for achieving set goals. A recent in-house research report claimed that teachers in the TAP Program were producing 'higher student achievement growth than similar teachers not in TAP schools' (Solmon, White, Cohen, & Woo, 2007).

Morrow (1992) studied performance-based pay plans in several states and districts in the USA and found that "there was no evidence in this study to support the position that it was pay-for-performance which improved student achievement" (pp. 285-286). Incentives did not necessarily improve what teachers knew and could do, or lead them to teach more effectively. Improved student achievement was more likely to result from pervasive, high quality professional learning promoted by knowledge-and-skills-based approaches to performance-based pay (Solmon et al., 2007).

In elementary schools, teachers work with a single classroom of students daily. The challenge will be determining an individual teacher's impact on students' reading and math scores from other influences on student achievement. As a result, student test scores should play a supporting rather than a lead role in teacher evaluation. Any credible performance pay plan will require detailed and objective evaluations of teachers in classrooms – multiple evaluations by multiple evaluators and based on other criteria involved in education such as how well teachers plan, teach, discipline, and motivate (Toch, 2009).

Student achievement is based on students' results on criterion referenced tests. The criterion-referenced tests are created from state standards set for each grade level. Congress has fully supported the Great Standards Project, however not one goal set for the year 2000 has been met. And perhaps most significant of all, the latest Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup survey of public attitudes showed support for a common core curriculum, assessment based on classroom

performance rather than on tests, and improvement to the current system (Rose & Gallup, 2001). At the third National Education Summit in 1999, the assembled governors and business leaders resolved to set up a system of "rewards and consequences" for teachers – "competitive salary structures" that will tie teacher salaries to student achievement and "provide salary credit for professional development only when it is standards-based," (Miner, 2000, p.4).

A valid question to ask of any proposed plan is how involvement in the plan will increase teachers' knowledge and skills in ways that will lead to improved student achievement. Research indicates that earlier merit pay plans had little impact on improving student achievement (Johnson, 1986). There was no feedback provided to indicate how to teach more effectively. Plans that provide feedback on a teacher's performance based on student scores on standardized achievement tests, may give teachers only limited information about ways to improve their instructional strategies (Darling-Hammond, 1992). Darling-Hammond (1992) further suggests, that awarding merit pay to a teacher may create the illusion that the instructional strategies used that year should be duplicated each subsequent year. That idea is invalid. Students' needs are different each year, therefore, teaching startegies need to be modified to encompass the needs of the student – not the needs of qualifying for merit pay.

The question that continue to surface regarding merit pay relates to reasons why teachers and adminstrators are concerned with incentive pay models based on performance. This dilemma was due to the need to know who must decide who is the best and on what basis. Professional athletes are paid based on their performance and contribution to the team. "But do compensation decisions really reflect employees' contributions?" (Ramirez, 20001, p. 16). As Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1987) pointed out, "Status, not contribution, has traditionally been the basis for the numbers on employees' paychecks. Pay has reflected where jobs rank in the

corporation hierarchy – not what comes out of them" (p.60). The proposal to reward teachers based on the outcome of students' test scores may not be fair since teachers cannot be held accountable for certain conditions that may impact test scores. "Unless all inputs are equalized for all teachers and administrators, how can policymakers judge the value of the outcome?"(Ramirez, 2001, p.16). Teachers deal with numerous situations that are not measurable – consoling a child who has lost a parent to divorce or death, a sick child, or a child that has had little sleep due to parents' arguing. These factors may impact student achievement. To single out a handful of teachers who, because of high student achievement, would earn more than the rest or receive bonuses is to divide the ranks of teachers at a time when it's so important to remain cohesive and stick together.

Merit Pay and School Climate

School climate can be positive, negative, or neutral. The field of education has lacked a clear and consistent definition of school culture. The term has been used synonymously with a variety of terms, including "climate," "ethos," and "saga" (Deal & Peterson, 1990). However, school climate can impact the dynamics of a school and foster a negative culture that will negatively impact student achievement. The faculty and staff need to collaborate and work together to fulfill the vision and mision of a school. Opponents also argue that individual performance awards may negatively affect the collaboration among educators that is essential to teaching, especially if the merit pay system sets up teachers competing against one another for individual bonuses (Burns & Gardner, 2010).

Stakeholders that will be affected by merit pay plans have expressed concerns about negative effects of pay for performance on collegiality (Kellor, 2005, Milanowski & Gallagher, 2000), because collegiality and trust among school staff is important in promoting student

achievement (Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The faculty need to work together as a unit toward the common goal of imprved student achievement.

When considering merit pay, one must look at the work of Frederick Herzberg (1987) regarding employee motivation. "But the satisfiers- the motivators that are essential in spurring performance to higher levels- included achievement on the job, recognition for one's contribution or for a job well done, the work itself, job responsibility, opportunities for career advancement, and professional growth" (Herzberg, 1987, p.112). There is no mention of added pay or benefits. These intrinsic rewards met the human needs that created a sense of belonging to a group. William Glasser (1997) explains human motivation through his Choice Theory. The Choice Theory explains people's need to maintain a feeling of self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and oportunity to have fun. "Ill-conceived reward systems that diminish employee loyalty and increase resentment toward management can cause incalculable productivity losses in organizations" (Ramirez, 2001, p. 18). This statement further reinforces the idea that money is not a motivator. A 2007 national survey of teachers by the Public Agenda and the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality found that if given a choice, 81% of elementary teachers and 76% of secondary teachers would rather be at a school where administrators supported teachers than at a school that paid significantly higher salaries.

Some merit pay plans seek to provide stronger incentives for increased professional development which may lead to higher standards of performance. There is also a push to give more status to those teachers whose knowledge and skills are critical to increased student achievement. Proponents claim that merit pay plans reinforce the development of a workplace culture that values employee growth and development (Lawler, 2000).

The proponents for merit pay fervently argue in favor of rewarding excellence in education. Thomas Hoerr (1998, p.326) states, "When it comes to determining raises, treating all teachers in a school system as if they were identical by relying on a matrix of college degrees and length of service hurts the profession, the teacherts, and the students." Paying people based on years of service may be construed by less experienced teachers as unfair. Consider a star teacher with 14 years of experience with a master's degree being paid equally to a mediocre teacher with 14 years experience with a master's degree. This is unfair to the star teacher but also diminishes his or her sense of pride in job performance when someone down the hall is marking time until summer or retirement. This type of injustice saps the enthusiasm from administrators and colleagues and negatively impacts the school climate.

A form of merit pay may improve the quality of students' educational experiences. Observations, anecdotes, and teacher perception surveys indicate that merit pay plans that have been successful clearly identified the school's vision and mission, took working conditions into account, and offered meaningful rewards for positive work ethic (Clardy, 1988). The participation in the program is voluntary and is usually viewed as favorable by the participants. A favorable viewpoint by the participants will increase the likelihood of success.

Historical Plans

Researchers have conducted comprehensive evaluations of incentive programs in only a few states (Cornett & Gaines, 1994). The obstacle to researching merit pay programs is the brevity of the programs. Merit pay programs were discontinued for several reasons: supporting politicians may have left office, educators implement the programs unfairly, teachers' unions refuse to endorse them, some programs utilize individual bonuses that foster competition among

teachers thereby creating poor teacher morale, or the programs are cost prohibitive and difficult to administer (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1995).

The Georgia Department of Educaiton designed a program to encourage schools to reward effective teaching practices. In order to receive monetary compensation, the schools must meet four goals: academic achievement goals for a minimum of 40% of the proposal (standardized tests and locally designed tests), resource development (finances, materials, equipment), educational programming (curricular improvement), and client involvement (all stakeholders). This program allows teachers to create their own school improvement plan and assume accountability for student achievement. By allowing teachers input on how they will improve instruction, the plan engages teachers in state educational reform, a needed step in implementing changes (Cornett, 1995). Giving each school the autonomy to design its own program shows a concerted effort to recognize the differences that many opponents believe an impossibility in a merit pay system (Firestone, 1994).

The practice of Georgia's program is to tie teacher and school incentive programs to comprehensive restructuring efforts (Cornett & Gaines, 1994). Utah's 21st Century program, like Georgia's, mandates that the schools create their own objectives of change (Walsh, 1998). School systems in Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin, are experimenting with a new type of teacher compensation connected to accountability (Blair, 2000).

The school system in Denver, Colorado, piloted a program in which the teachers were allowed to set their own measurable student-achievement goals that were approved by an administrator. The vast majority of the teachers in the pilot schools won bonuses of $1,500 for meeting the goals. However, based on the subjectiveness of administrator evaluations, the

teachers voted against continuing the program. On the contrary, Minneapolis, Minnesota teachers recently agreed to a contract linking pay to performance (Lonetree, 2000).

The No Child Left Behind Act has placed pressure and accountability on school systems to produce significant gains in student achievement that has contributed to the consideration of teacher incentive schemes. The Education Commission of the States is keeping track of some of the merit pay plans and reports on the topic periodically (Azordegan, Byrnett, Campbell, Greenman, & Coulter, 2005). States are expressing an increasing interest in implementing a merit pay plan. Florida has implemented a statewide teacher merit pay plan titled E-Comp. Denver has a similar plan titled ProComp. Minnesota has introduced a Q Comp plan. Houston has enacted the Governor's Educator Excellence Awards to provide funds to teachers that show students' gains in achievement scores. "In January, Houston became the largest district in the nation to approve a merit pay plan but distinguished itself from other initiatives by tying the bonuses to student test scores, "(Cook, 2006, p.5). All of these programs are funded by the Teacher Incentive Fund supported by $100 million annually by Congress.

Challenges of Merit Pay

Opponents of merit pay programs in education argue that such programs would increase negative competition, degrade the school environment, and encourage teachers to ignore the low-performing students. The culmination of these disadvantages may result in poor instruction and declining student achievement. Despite the fervent arguments heralded by merit pay supporters and opponents alike, there is very little research about the impact of merit pay programs on students or teachers. The limited research lacks detailed evaluation models to rate the impacts on student and teacher behavior outcomes (Eberts, Hollenbeck, & Stone, 2002).

The real loser in the debate over the implementaiton of merit pay is the students of the mediocre teacher. With or without a merit pay plan, all teachers need to be accountable for the same criteria legislatures want to impose to create a merit pay plan to award those teachers meeting or exceeding the criteria. All students deserve a quality education from a teacher striving to be the best educator possible. Teaching is a job that requires creativity, enthusiasm, and compassion. There is no compensating for the loss of an academic school year considering, there are only 13 years total. Time lost cannot be bought or replaced.

There are other costs associated with merit pay. The obvious cost of merit pay is the financial burden on the system to compensate those exemplary teachers who meet the established criteria to receive merit pay. However, this problem may be moot, because the public may embrace the idea of merit pay if this system will produce good schools. The main problem with the typical teacher salary is that state governments allocate money in an inefficient and unrealistic method for promoting professional learning and higher standards of teaching (Little, Gerritz, Stern, Kirst, & Marsh, 1987). The community will have more confidence in their schools and will be receptive to the increase in revenues to finance this venture if the money is available and there is some type of accountability system in place.

One aspect to consider when devising a merit pay plan is to decide on individual or group awards. "From a practical standpoint, individual awards are more targeted and provide more powerful incentives for change, while group awards are more diffuse, allowing some teachers to ride freely on the hard work and accomplishments of others" (Johnson & Papay, 2010, p.28). This "catch 22" of awarding on an individual or group basis is a con for both sides. Awarding merit pay on an individual basis may cause isolation among the staff, while awarding merit pay

on a group basis may have a select few doing all the work while the masses reap the benefits. The answer may rely on the lesser of the two evils.

Another cost of merit pay will be the change in the role of the principal. The principal will have to be cognizant of the activities and lessons being taught on a daily basis in every classroom. "Principals and teachers need to be accountable for the learning that does (or does not) take place in classrooms" (Hoerr, 1998, p. 327). A cost that should not be present in developing a merit pay system is the lack of collegiality among the staff. The staff needs to be more collaborative in sharing teaching strategies that work to benefit the entire student population that will validate the notion of pay for performance. "On the other hand, fervent foes of the practice that performance pay would not capture all that teachers do and would instead result in a counter-productive narrowing of the teacher's goals and divisive competition between and among educators who would otherwise seek fruitful collaboration,"(Ritter, & Jensen, 2010, p. 33).

Pay for performance programs may also provide the opportunity for individual teachers to cheat or game the system. Podgursky & Springer (2007) noted

> "Studies of high-stakes accountability systems have documented teachers focusing excessively on a single test and educators altering test scores and/or assisting students with test questions (Goodnough, 1999; Jacob & Levitt, 2005; Koretz et al., 1999). Related analyses have found evidence of schools' strategic classification of students as special education and limited English proficiency (Cullen & Reback, 2002; Deere & Strayer, 2001; Figlio & Getzler, 2002; Jacob, 2002), use of discipline procedures to ensure that low-performing students will be absent on test day (Figlio, 2005), manipulation of grade retention policies (Haney, 2000; Jacob, 2002), misreporting of

> administrative data (Peabody & Markley, 2003), acceptance of test exemptions / waivers demanded by parents (Neufield, 2000), and /or planning of nutrition enriched lunch menus prior to test day" (Figlio & Winicki, 2005) p. 389.

There will be a need to minimize the potential for these types of negative behaviors to occur.

A recent discussion of the problems with performance pay in education is found in Lazear's (2003) study. He realized the arguments for and against performance pay. He studied the payments for inputs and outputs. The outputs of production always received more consideration as this increased overall productivity. This idea may have the ability to attract and retain effective teachers while deflecting those who are not. A recent study by Hoxby and Leigh (2004) found evidence that highly effective female educators moving out of teaching from 1960 to the present was mainly the result of the lack of a pay for performance plan, which took away high paying opportunities for these motivated teachers and created an attraction for the opportunities afforded by the business world where efficacy is rewarded. Women were able to leave the teaching profession and receive incentive raises for productivity whereas, had these women remained in the classroom, the pay would only have been impacted by cost of living raises or level of degrees attained.

Summary

The summary of research suggests that merit pay could positively or negatively impact student achievement, teacher evaluations, and school climate. In order for merit pay to be successful, the program will need to be developed using a collaborative effort based on a consensus of the group, not the majority. Teachers will need to participate in the development of the criteria to receive merit pay if the expectation is to have their consent and enthusiastic participation. The premise of merit pay – that rewards can motivate teachers to improve their

performance – is based upon the assumption that teachers are primarily motivated by money. Yet the theoretical examinations of teacher motivation suggest that the quality of teacher performance is more a function of intrinsic reward than salary based on Herzberg's (1966) Theory of Motivation.

There will need to be more than standardized tests to gauge a student's progress and a teacher's effectiveness. Tying merit pay to student achievement based on standiardized test scores may tempt teachers to use poor judgment during testing administration that could be misconstrued as cheating, as well as, teaching to the test and not preparing students to be critical thinkers. Due to teaching's imprecise nature, focusing on classroom evaluations may produce dysfuntional effects such as adversarial relationships between teachers and administrators. Also, there may develop adversarial relationships among staff as competition to earn merit pay eliminates collaboration which could negatively impact the school climate. A plethora of evidence will need to be collected to support rewarding a teacher for merit. The main consideration that needs to be contemplated is the financial investment that states will need to make to support a system. The economy has suffered a tremendous setback and many educational programs are faced with budgetary cuts. Is the timing right to support a pay for performance system when teachers are being furloughed? Will teachers meet the stated requirements for merit pay to learn at a later date that the funding is not sufficient to support a program? Teachers are going to provide quality instruction based on intrinsic motivation. Performance pay may be one tool to establish a more professional culture in public school teaching – but no more than that. By establishing the perceptions of teachers before implementation of a merit pay plan, administrators may be saved from attempting to implement such a system under circumstances where it has little chance of being accepted.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the perceptions of teachers in a rural, south Georgia district regarding merit pay relevant to student achievement, teacher evaluations, and school climate. The current study was important and timely in that the school district in which the researcher is employed is one of the 26 districts in Georgia to receive the Race to the Top Grant, which mandates a merit pay program. This quantitative study surveyed the certified teachers in the district to gather information that was used to develop the criteria through which the teachers could earn merit pay. In addition, getting the teachers' input and using that input will increase their commitment to and acceptance of the plan when it is developed.

Much of the literature on merit pay extols the importance of defining merit pay, determining how student achievement would be incorporated into the equation involving teacher evaluations, and the effect of merit pay on the school climate. There is increasing recognition, nationally and internationally that career paths and pay systems can be, and need to be, linked to evidence of increasing capacity to promote student learning outcomes; and thereby becoming stronger levers for ensuring professional development and quality learning outcomes for all students (Sclafani & Tucker, 2006).

This chapter is an overview of the methods through which the research will be conducted. The following five sections are included: (1) research questions, (2) research design, (3) participants (4) instrumentation, and (5) procedures.

Research Questions

By conducting this study, the researcher addressed the following overarching research question: How do teachers in a rural south Georgia school system perceive the issue of merit

pay based on student achievement? In addition, the following supporting questions were addressed:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect teacher evaluation?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect the fidelity of standardized testing?
3. What are the perceptions of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect school climate?
4. Do age, years of experience, school level, school's AYP status, and / or level of education impact a teacher's perception regarding merit pay?

Research Design

This study utilized descriptive quantitative research methods, which described data in abbreviated terms (Sprinthall, 2000) by utilizing statistical analysis. A quantitative cross-sectional survey research design was used for the current study (Creswell, 2002).

This descriptive study used data gathered from the subjects one time to establish associations between variables. In quantitative research the goal is to establish the relationship between one thing (an independent variable) and another (a dependent variable) within a population (Hopkins, 2008). The aim of this study was to establish the association between merit pay based on student achievement and school climate, merit pay based on student achievement and standardized testing and merit pay based on student achievement and teacher evaluations.

The study included surveying teachers regarding their perceptions of merit pay. The survey required less than 20 minutes to complete. The purpose of survey research was to generalize from a sample of participants to a population so that inferences were made with regard to the perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors of the population (Strahan, et al., 2003). Additionally, the survey design was chosen so that the data could be collected in an efficient and cost effective manner.

Once all surveys were returned, analysis was conducted to discern the perceptions of teachers regarding specific aspects of merit pay. To determine whether or not relationships exist, an ANOVA, used to categorize the respondents' answers and compare their responses about their perceptions of merit pay, was conducted using SPSS. Statistical significance was determined by applying a .05 level of confidence. The independent variables of this study were the participant's age, years of experience in education, school level, school's AYP status, and attainment of degrees. The dependent variables were the opposition of merit pay, the effect of a merit pay system on school climate, classroom observations conducted by the principal, and inclusion of student achievement on standardized testing,

Participants

This research study examined teachers' perceptions regarding merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which the initiation of a merit pay plan may affect the fidelity of standardized testing, teacher evaluations, and school climate. This study was conducted using the five public schools in a rural Georgia county in which all the schools qualify for Title I funding. There was one primary school consisting of grades Pre-K through grade 2, an elementary school consisting of grades 3 through 5, another elementary school consisting of grades Pre-K through grade 5, a middle school, and a high school. The schools included regular

education teachers, special education teachers, activity teachers, counselors, media specialists, academic coaches, speech language pathologists, teachers of the gifted, lead teachers, and administrators. Approximately 351 certified personnel were asked to voluntarily participate. Hawkins (2001) found that teachers perceive things differently than principals. Therefore, principals were not asked to participate in the study. These schools were chosen because the district will receive $1.9 million from the Race to the Top Grant to implement merit pay beginning in the 2011-2012 school year. These schools had teachers who are diverse in age, level of education, and years of experience. There were no gender or age requirements or any other identification process that might jeopardize confidentially. There were no inducements to recruit subjects. It was expected that the subjects participated because the results of the study were used to help determine the ways in which the merit pay plan will be designed. Participation did enable them to have input into an issue that will directly affect them. This research did not include minors.

The certified teachers in the five public schools in a rural, Georgia school district were chosen to participate in this study because the participating district had been awarded $1.9 million to implement a merit pay plan for the 2011 – 2012 school year. This population was selected as they are personally involved and have a vested interest in the outcomes of the study. These teachers had the opportunity to voice their perceptions of merit pay based on student achievement and to have input on the criteria which will be used to determine how merit pay will be awarded in their school system.

Personnel serving in other school districts in the surrounding area were not asked to participate since they are not recipients of the Race to the Top Grant and may not have the same level of interest and may or may not have the same perceptions.

Instrumentation

The participants completed a survey based on information the researcher had obtained from a review of the literature. The researcher-designed survey included 24 items. The first 19 items pertained to teachers' perceptions of merit pay, inclusion of test scores for awards of merit pay, effects of merit pay on the climate of a school, and information related to evaluations of teachers. The last five items were used to gather demographic data.

Once the researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board of Georgia Southern University and approval from the participating school district, the survey was reviewed by a panel of experts from the participating system: the superintendent, two assistant superintendents, and the testing director. Once the panel of experts provided feedback, the researcher revised the survey as needed to delete unnecessary items and/or combine items to create the final survey instrument.

Once the survey instrument was completed, a pilot study was conducted using a group of educators enrolled in a professional development class-none of whom participated in the final study. The pilot study was administered by someone other than the researcher and was completely voluntary. Teachers were briefed on the directions to complete the survey. Data was entered in SPSS to determine Cronbach's alpha to check for validity and reliability.

Procedures

Data Collection

Once the survey was revised based upon input from the panel of experts and the pilot study was completed, permission was obtained from the superintendent and building principals to conduct this study in the five public schools in the district. The researcher communicated with the principal at each school requesting to be placed on the agenda for an upcoming faculty

meeting, and a mutually agreeable date was selected. At the faculty meeting, the researcher presented a brief background regarding merit pay and the implications for the district as a recipient in the Race to the Top Grant Award. After the presentation, directions for completing the survey were given. An informed consent document was distributed with the survey as required by the Institutional Research Board of Georgia Southern University. The teachers received and completed the survey. The researcher assured the participants that the surveys had no identifying labels. The participants returned completed surveys to a large envelope on a table in the back of the room. The participants returned informed consent documents to a separate envelope.

Data Analysis

The data were collected from the tabulated results of the survey. Analysis was conducted to determine if a relationship exists between a teacher being awarded merit pay based on a set criteria for improving student achievement using an ANOVA test with one dependent variable of merit pay and five independent variables of teachers' age, years of experience, school level, school's AYP status, and level of education. Categorizing the questions from the survey created the five dependent variables. Combining questions 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8 of the survey in its present form created the first dependent variable, perceptions of merit pay using student achievement and the effect on school climate. Combining questions 5, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 of the survey in its present form created the second dependent variable, perceptions of merit pay using student achievement and the inclusion on teacher evaluations. Combining questions 4, 6, 9, and 12 of the survey in its present form created the third dependent variable, perceptions of merit pay using student achievement and the effect of using standardized tests. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the collected data. The researcher

analyzed the results to determine the participants' perceptions regarding merit pay in relation to student achievement, teacher evaluations, and school climate and whether or not there are patterns or relationships between those factors and the demographic data collected during the study.

Reporting the Data

The data were presented in narrative, tabular, and graphic formats. The results were presented not only as a completed dissertation, but also to members of the administrative staff and the Board of Education of the participating county as data to include in their design of the merit pay system, which they must implement as a result of the Race to the Top Grant award, which they have received.

Summary

This study attempted to determine the perceptions of teachers regarding merit pay being based on student achievement. A quantitative method was used to conduct this study. The participants for this study were the members of the certified staff, excluding principals, of the six schools in a rural Georgia school district. Permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Georgia Southern University before the survey was conducted. A survey was given to all participants and the survey was returned anonymously. Participation was voluntary. Data was analyzed to determine the participants' perceptions regarding merit pay in relation to student achievement, teacher evaluations, and school climate and whether or not there are patterns or relationships between those factors and the demographic data collected during the study. Results were used by the participating school district in developing a merit pay plan as required by their receipt of the Race to the Top Grant.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The researcher conducted a quantitative, descriptive study to obtain the perceptions of teachers in a south Georgia county regarding the implementation of a merit pay plan based on student achievement. The participating county is a recipient of a Race to the Top (RT3) Grant, which requires a merit pay program be implemented in the 2011 – 2012 school year. The researcher designed the survey that was used in this study. Once permission from the Georgia Southern University Institutional Research Board was granted, the researcher explained the study to the principals of the six participating schools at a scheduled principals' meeting at the participating district's central office and asked principals for permission for each school to participate in the study. Each principal was eager to participate.

In order to determine the perceptions of the teachers, a survey was administered to each faculty at each of the six participating schools at the end of a regularly scheduled faculty meeting. The schools represented teachers of students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. A brief explanation was given regarding utilizing student achievement as criteria in a forthcoming merit pay plan for the next school year. The faculties were encouraged to complete the survey in order to have input on a merit pay plan that would be implemented for their county for the next school year.

The survey contained 24 items. The first 19 items asked the participants to indicate their opinion regarding each statement using a Likert scale. The statements included the topics of merit pay and school climate, merit pay and teacher evaluations, and merit pay and standardized test scores. The Likert scale was a five-point scale with 1 representing strong disagreement, 2

representing disagreement, 3 representing undecided, 4 representing agreement, and 5 representing strong agreement. The last 4 items requested demographic information that included level of education, age, grade taught, and years of experience. The researcher's quantitative findings were reported in narrative form, and tables were used to report the statistics. Quantitative data analysis was accomplished utilizing the computer program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14.0. Analyses generated frequencies, means, percentages, and standard deviations for the items on the survey.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following over-arching research question. How do teachers in a rural south Georgia school system perceive the issue of merit pay based on student achievement?

In addition, the following supporting questions were addressed.

1. What is the perception of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect teacher evaluation?
2. What is the perception of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to the issue of merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect the fidelity of standardized testing?
3. What is the perception of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to the issue of merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect school climate?

4. Do age, years of experience, school level, school's AYP status, and / or level of education impact a teacher's perception regarding merit pay?

Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional survey research design was used for the current study. Creswell (2002) wrote, "A cross-sectional study can *examine current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices*" (p. 398). A survey instrument was used to collect data for this non-experimental study. Survey research was employed so that "*current attitudes, beliefs, and opinions*" (Cresswell, 2002, p 398) could be obtained from the study participants. This permitted the researcher to examine the data and determine the participants' perceptions regarding merit pay using student achievement as one criterion. The demographic section of the survey enabled the researcher to determine if age, years of experience, level of school, and level of education impacted participants' perceptions regarding merit pay.

To test for validity, the researcher submitted the survey to a panel made up of the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Federal Programs, and a School Psychologist representing the participating school district. A cover letter and the survey were sent by email. The researcher asked for recommendations of any adjustments that needed to be made to the survey. The panel made no suggestions for revisions. An Analysis of Variance test (ANOVA) was used to calculate descriptive statistics based upon participants' responses.

Findings

Respondents

There were 205 respondents to the survey. The respondents were a diverse population in terms of degrees held, age, levels taught, and years of experience. Of the 205 respondents, the largest group, 101 (49.3%) reported holding a Master's Degree, the second largest group, 60

(29.3%) reported holding a Bachelor's Degree, and the smallest group of respondents, 36 (17.6%) reported holding a Specialist's Degree. No respondents reported holding a doctoral degree. Eight participants did not answer this question on the survey. These data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Frequencies and Percentages of Level of Education of Participants

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's Degree	60	29.3
Master's Degree	101	49.3
Specialist's Degree	36	17.6

The age of the respondents was evenly distributed, ranging from 20 through more than 50 years of age. The largest number of participants, 49 (23.9%) reported their age as 50 or older. The group reporting their age as being from 30 – 39 was next largest with 48 (23.4%) so indicating. Respondents whose ages ranged from 40 -49 numbered 47 (22.9%), and those between the ages of 20 and 29 made up the smallest group numbering 41 (20%). Twenty participants did not answer this question on the survey. These data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Frequencies and Percentages of Age of Participants

Age of Participants	Frequency	Percentage
20 –29	41	20
30 – 39	48	23.4
40 – 49	47	22.9
>50	49	23.9

Participants taught grades ranging from kindergarten through grade 12. A greater number of respondents participated from primary and elementary grades than from middle or high schools. Primary (K-2) teachers numbered 53 and made up 25.9% of the population. Teachers of elementary grades (3-5) numbered 58 (28.3%). The largest single group included 60 middle school teachers, who made up 29.3% of the population and the smallest was high school teachers, who numbered 24 and made up 11.7% of the total. Ten participants did not indicate the level of their teaching. These data are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Frequencies and Percentages of School Level of Participants and AYP Status

School Level of Participants	Frequency	Percentage	AYP Status
Primary (K – 2)	53	25.9	Yes
Elementary (3 – 5)	58	28.3	Yes
Middle	60	29.3	No
High	24	11.7	No

Participants reported years of experience in categories ranging from zero through nine to more than 30 years. The largest group of respondents, 83 (40.5%) reported between zero and nine years of experience. It was interesting to note that as years of experience increased, the size of the group declined. The second largest group, 49 (23.9%) was made up of teachers who reported between 10 and 19 years of teaching. That group was followed by 41 respondents (20%) who reported 20 – 29 years of experience and 15 teachers (7.3%) who reported 30 or

more years of teaching service. Seventeen respondents did not indicate their years of experience. These data are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages of Years of Experience of Participants

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0 –9	83	40.5
10 – 19	49	23.9
20 – 29	41	20.0
>30	15	7.3

The demographic data obtained were used during analysis of the data to determine whether or not any of the categories; degrees held, age, levels taught, or years of experience, appeared to have any impact on the perceptions of the respondents. Responses to the survey items, which were used to obtain participants' perceptions of merit pay utilizing the inclusion of student achievement, follow.

Survey Responses

A survey was designed by the researcher that was used to obtain participant's perceptions of a merit pay plan, which utilizes student achievement as one criterion. The perceived effects of the implementation of merit pay on three factors: school climate, teacher evaluations, and standardized testing were also explored by grouping survey items into categories. The researcher grouped survey items to create the three factors, which became dependent variables used in the analyses.

Factor 1, school climate. The first dependent variable, school climate, included items 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8 of the Merit Pay Survey. Data were obtained as follows for the first factor, school climate.

In response to item 1, "My school district should not implement a merit pay plan based on student achievement," 120 of 204 respondents (58.6%) either agreed or strongly agreed that a merit pay plan should not be put in place. The most frequently received response was Strongly Agree (5), which was selected by 68 respondents (33.2%). Only 34 or 204 (16.6%) indicated that a merit pay plan should be put in place. Of the remaining respondents, 50 (24.4%) were neutral on the issue and one did not respond to that item.

In response to item 2, "Merit pay would attract and retain more teachers in my school district by fostering collaboration," 135 respondents (65.8%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that having a merit pay plan in place would attract and retain more teachers to the school district. The most frequently received response to item 2 was Disagree, which was selected by 78 respondents (38%). Only 31 (15.1%) of the respondents indicated agreement or strong agreement with the statement. Of the remaining respondents, 39 (19%) were neutral.

Item 3, "I would participate in a merit pay system if it was implemented in my school district," was the only item included in this factor to which the most frequently selected response was 3, Neutral. Seventy-six respondents (37.1%) selected Neutral as their response, which equaled the number of respondents (76, 37.1%) who indicated that they would not participate in a merit pay system if implemented by selecting either Strongly Disagree or Disagree. Of the respondents to this item, 51 (24.9%) indicated that they would participate in a merit pay plan if implemented. Two individuals did not respond to this item.

All 205 respondents indicated a response to item 7, "A merit pay plan would improve morale among the staff at my school," with 137 (66.8%) indicating that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The most frequently selected response, in fact, was Strongly Disagree, with 74 (36.1%) so indicating. Fifty respondents (24.4%) indicated that they were neutral on the issue, while 28 (8.7%) indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the item.

The final item in the factor, School Climate, was item 8, "If some form of merit pay were implemented, cooperation among teachers would change to counterproductive competition." The most frequently selected response to that item was 4, Agree, which was indicated by 73 (35.6%) of the 205 respondents. They were joined by 64 (31.2%) of their colleagues who provided the second most frequently selected response, 5, Strongly Agree. This resulted in 137 (66.8%) of respondents indicating that they either agree or strongly agree while only 37 (18%) indicated either that they disagree or strongly disagree that competition would replace cooperation, while 31 (15.1%) were neutral.

Summarizing the factor, School Climate, then, a majority of respondents (58.6%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the system should not put a merit pay plan in place, while 65.8% either strongly disagreed or disagreed that having a merit pay plan would attract and retain teachers to the school district by fostering collaboration. Respondents were more evenly distributed in their responses to whether or not they would participate in a merit pay plan if implemented, with 76 (37.1%) indicating that they would not participate, 76 (37.1%) indicating their neutrality on the issue, and 51 (24.9%) indicating that they would participate in a merit pay plan. More divided perceptions were indicated regarding whether or not a merit pay plan would improve morale among the staff at their school, with 137 (66.1%) of the respondents indicating

that a merit pay plan would not improve morale and a much smaller number, 28 (8.7%) indicating that a merit pay plan would improve morale. Item 8, which asked perceptions regarding whether or not the implementation of a merit pay plan would replace cooperation with counterproductive competition, received similarly divided responses with 137 (66.8%) of respondents indicating their perception that cooperation would be replaced by competition and 37 (18%) indicating that cooperation would not be replaced by competition. The difference in responses between items 7 and 8 was that fewer respondents indicated neutrality to item 8 than to item 7.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics for Merit Pay as Related to School Climate

Question	N	Mean	Mode	SD
1. My school district should not implement a merit pay plan based on student achievement.	204	3.68	5	1.241
2. Merit pay would attract and retain more teachers in my school district by fostering collaboration.	205	2.25	2	1.090
3. I would participate in a merit pay system if it were implemented in my school district.	203	2.72	3	1.124
7. A merit pay system would improve the morale among the staff in my school.	205	2.08	1	1.038
8. If some form of merit pay were implemented, cooperation among teachers would lead to counterproductive competition.	205	3.73	4	1.209

Factor 2, teacher evaluations. The second dependent variable, teacher evaluations, included items 5,10,11,13,14,15,16,17,18 and 19 of the Merit Pay Survey. Data were obtained as follows for the second factor, teacher evaluations.

In response to item 5, "In order to earn merit pay, a teacher should expect to work additional hours beyond school hours to prepare a merit pay portfolio," 105 of 203 respondents (51.2%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that a teacher should be expected to work additional hours beyond school hours to prepare a merit pay portfolio in order to earn merit pay. The most frequently received response was Strongly Disagree (2), which was selected by 65 respondents (31.7%). Only 62 of 203 (30.2%) indicated that a teacher should not be expected to work additional hours beyond school hours to prepare a merit pay portfolio in order to earn merit pay. Of the remaining respondents, 36 (17.6%) were neutral on the issue and two did not respond to that item.

In response to item 10, "If some form of merit pay were implemented, administrators would play favorites and reward teachers who are "pets" or don't "rock the boat" in school," 102 respondents (49.8%) either agreed or strongly agreed that if some form of merit pay were implemented, administrators would play favorites and reward teachers who are "pets" or don't "rock the boat" in school. The most frequently received response was Agree (4), which was selected by 60 respondents (29.3%). Only 50 of 205 (24.4%) indicated that a merit pay plan would not permit administrators to play favorites and reward teachers who are "pets" or "don't rock the boat." Of the remaining respondents, 53 (25.9%) were neutral on the issue.

Item 11, "Teachers that exceed a school district's requirements in the classroom, as documented by performance evaluations, should receive merit pay," 87 respondents (42.4%) either strongly agreed or agreed that teachers that exceed a school district's requirements in the

classroom, as documented by performance evaluations, should receive merit pay. The most frequently received response was Agree (4), which was selected by 64 respondents (31.2%). Of the remaining respondents, 70 (34.1%) indicated disagreement or strong disagreement with the statement. Of the 205 respondents, 47 (22.9%) were neutral on the statement.

All 205 respondents indicated a response to item 13, "A teacher's number of years experience is an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay," with 147 (71.7%) indicating that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The most frequently selected response was Disagree, with 90 (43.9%) so indicating. Twenty-two respondents (10.7%) indicated that they were neutral on the issue, while 36 (17.6) indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the item.

All 205 respondents indicated a response to item 14, "A teacher's advanced degree is an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay," with 138 (62.3%) indicating that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with a teacher's advanced degree being an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay. The most frequently selected response was Disagree, which was selected by 84 (40.5%) of the 205 respondents. Forty-one respondents agreed or strongly agreed on the statement, while 26 (12.7%) were neutral on whether advanced degrees should be a measure of merit pay.

In response to item 15, "Evaluations by all administrators assigned to a building are an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay," all 205 respondents answered; with 111 (54.1%) disagreeing that evaluations by all administrators assigned to a building are adequate measures to qualify for merit pay. The most frequently selected response was Disagree, with 73 (35.6%) so indicating. The other nearly one-half of the respondents were divided between agree and

strongly agree, with 47 (22.9%) so indicating, and with 47 (22.9%) selection a neutral position on the issue of administrator evaluations being an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay.

On item 16, "Merit pay should be based on the results of an administrator's decision after reviewing a cumulative portfolio that includes achievements and successes of the teacher throughout the year. The portfolio should exclude student's standardized test scores," 83 (40.5%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. The most frequently selected response was Agree (4), which was indicated by 65 (31.7%) of the 205 respondents. Seventy-one (34.7%) of the 205 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while fifty-one of the respondents were neutral on the issue.

In regard to item 17, "My administrators do not evaluate teachers a sufficient number of times to make an accurate decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit pay," 89 (43.4%) of the 205 respondents disagreed with the statement that their administrators do not evaluate teachers a sufficient number of times to base a decision on a teacher receiving merit pay. Sixty-three (30.7%) of the 205 respondents agree that their administrators do not evaluate teachers a sufficient number of times to award merit pay. Fifty-three (25.9%) of the 205 respondents were neutral on whether their administrators evaluated a teacher a sufficient number of times to award merit pay.

On statement 18, "Five or more evaluations throughout the school year would be a sufficient number of times to base a decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit pay," was divided accordingly: 77 (37.6%) agreed or strongly agreed with five or more evaluations being a sufficient number, 66 (32.2%) were neutral, and 62 (30.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with five or more evaluations being a sufficient number to award merit pay.

The most frequently selected response was Neutral (3), which was selected by 66 (32.2%) of the respondents.

The final item in the factor, Teacher Evaluations, was item 19, "Five or less evaluations throughout the school year would be a sufficient number of times to base a decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit." The most frequently selected response to that item was Disagree, which was indicated by 65 (31.7%) of the 205 respondents. Altogether, 107 (52.2%) of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with five or less evaluations being a sufficient number of times to award merit pay. Of the remaining 205 respondents, 34 (26.6%) selected agree or strongly agree with five or less evaluations being sufficient to award merit pay.

Summarizing the factor, Teacher Evaluations, almost one-half of the respondents (49.8) agree or strongly agree that administrators would play favorites with "pets" if a merit pay plan were implemented, and about one-half of the respondents (54.1%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with evaluations by all administrators assigned to a building being an adequate measure to award merit pay. Of the 205 respondents, 89 (43.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed on whether their administrators conducted an adequate number of evaluations to award merit pay, 77 (37.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that five or more evaluations would be enough, but 107 (52.2%) of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with five or less being an adequate number of evaluations to award merit pay. More divided perceptions were indicated regarding a teacher's number of years of experience, with 146 (71.7%) of the respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing using this factor to award merit pay while 36 (17.6%) agreed or strongly agreed. Item 14, which asked perceptions regarding whether or not advanced degrees should be used in awarding merit pay, received similar divided responses, with 138 (62.3%) of respondents indicating their perception that advanced degrees should not be considered in

awarding merit pay and only 41 (20%) indicated agreement or strong agreement in using advanced degrees to award merit pay.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics for Merit Pay as Related to Teacher Evaluations

Question	N	Mean	MODE	SD
5. In order to earn merit pay, a teacher should expect to work additional hours beyond school hours to prepare a merit pay portfolio.	203	2.66	2	1.230
10. If some form of merit pay were implemented, administrators would play favorites and reward teachers who are "pets" or don't "rock the boat" in school.	205	3.42	4	1.142
11. Teachers, whose performance exceed a school district's requirements as documented by performance evaluations, should receive merit pay.	204	3.05	4	1.247
13. A teacher's number of years experience is an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay.	205	2.22	2	1.124
14. A teachers' advanced degree is an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay.	205	2.32	2	1.181
15. Evaluations by all administrators assigned to a building are an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay.	205	2.55	2	1.130
16. Merit pay should be based on the results of an administrator's decision after reviewing a cumulative portfolio that includes achievements and successes of the teacher throughout	205	3.01	4	1.196

the year. The portfolio should exclude students' standardized test scores.				
17. My administrators do not evaluate teachers a sufficient number of times to make an accurate decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit pay.	205	2.86	2	1.202
18. Five or more evaluations throughout the school year would be a sufficient number of times to base a decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit pay.	205	3.02	3	1.093
19. Five or less evaluations throughout the school year would be a sufficient number of times to base a decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit pay.	205	2.49	2	1.101

The third factor, standardized testing, was measured by questions 4, 6, 9, and 12 of the Merit Pay Survey. The results are reported below.

To item 4, "Teachers who volunteer to teach at-risk students should receive merit pay," met with majority agreement, with 93 (45.4%) of the 205 respondents indicating either agreement or strong agreement. Only 70 (34.1%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 42 (20.5%) were neutral on the issue. The most frequently selected response was Agree, which was selected by 58 (28.3%) of the respondents.

Item 6, "Teachers who work in a Title I school or area should receive merit pay," received one of the most balanced responses. 82 (40%) of the 205 respondents indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement while 76 (36.5%) indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Only 47 (22.9%) were neutral on this issue. The most frequently selected response was Agree, with 59 (28.8%) so indicating.

Item 9, "If some form of merit pay were implemented, teachers would become more motivated to increase student achievement on standardized test scores," was also an item which elicited strong responses with 80 (39.1%) of the 205 respondents indicating either agreement or strong agreement that merit pay would motivate teachers to increase student achievement on standardized tests, and an almost equal number, 77 (37.6%) either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Forty-eight (23.4%) were neutral on the issue. It is interesting to note that the highest number of responses among the agree/strongly agree group was in agree, 60 (29.3%) rather than strongly agree. The same held true for the disagree/strongly disagree group, with the highest number of responses, 45 (22%) in the disagree category. The most frequently selected response was Agree.

The final item in the standardized testing factor was item 12, "Teachers who volunteer to teach in a low-performing school should receive merit pay." Of the 205 respondents, 86 (42%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while 71 (34.6%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that teachers who volunteer to teach in a low-performing school should receive merit pay. The most frequently selected response to this item was Agree, 59 (28.8%), while 48 (23.4%) indicated that they were neutral on the issue.

The Merit Pay as Related to Standardized Testing factor could be summarized by stating that three of the four items resulted in strong opinions being expressed in somewhat equal directions toward either agree or disagree, with less than 25% of the respondents indicating neutrality towards the issues that made up the factor. While clearly divided opinions were expressed, those opinions were more on the moderate side (agree or disagree) rather on the extremes (strongly agree or strongly disagree).

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics for Merit Pay as Related to Standardized Testing

Question	N	Mean	MODE	SD
4. Teachers who volunteer to teach at-risk students should receive merit pay.	205	3.14	4	1.318
6. Teachers who work in a Title I school or area should receive merit pay.	205	2.97	4	1.281
9. If some form of merit pay were implemented, teachers would become more motivated to increase student achievement on standardized tests.	205	2.96	4	1.238
12. Teachers who volunteer to teach in a low-performing school should receive merit pay.	205	3.08	4	1.236

Response to Research Questions

The data from the 205 surveys were compiled and entered into SPSS 14.0 and calculated to determine how teachers answered the research questions of the study. The data was reported from the survey of the findings to answer research questions of the study. Significant findings for the study were listed. The overarching question of the study was: How do teachers in a rural south Georgia school system perceive the issue of merit pay based on student achievement?

From the data analysis, the researcher revealed that perceptions of teachers regarding the issue of merit pay based on student achievement were disagreeable. The mean was 2.36 out of a 5–point Likert scale with a standard deviation of .820. The low standard deviation score meant that the teachers were homogeneous in their disagreement with a merit pay plan based on student achievement.

Research Question 1: What is the perception of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect school climate? In analyzing the teachers' responses regarding the effect of a merit pay plan on school climate, 33.2% of the teachers agree that the district should not put a merit pay plan in place. Thirty-eight percent of the teachers disagreed that a merit pay plan would improve morale among the staff. Thirty-five and six-tenths percent of the teachers agreed that if a merit pay plan were implemented, cooperation would turn into counterproductive competition. The frequencies and percentages are noted in Table 8.

Table 8
Frequencies and Percentages of Significance Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing Regarding School Climate

Survey Question	N	Frequency	Percentage
1. My school district should not put a merit pay plan in place.	204	68	33.2
7. A merit pay system would improve the morale among the staff in my school.	205	63	30.7
8. If some form of merit pay were implemented, cooperation among teachers would change into counterproductive competition.	205	73	35.6

Research Question 2: What is the perception of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect teacher evaluation? Twenty-nine and three-tenths percent of teachers agreed that if some form of merit pay were implemented, administrators would play favorites and reward teachers who are pets. Thirty-one and two-tenths percent of teachers agreed that teachers that exceed the district's requirements, as documented by performance evaluations, should receive merit pay. However,

35.6% of teachers disagreed that evaluations by all administrators assigned to a building are an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay. The teachers were not as clear on the number of evaluations needed to receive merit pay. Thirty-two and two-tenths percent of the teachers were undecided and 31.7 disagreed if five or more evaluations would be a sufficient number of times to base a decision on awarding merit pay. Thirty-one and seven-tenths percent of the teachers agreed and 31.2% of the teachers were undecided if five or less evaluations would be a sufficient number of times to base a decision on awarding merit pay. The frequencies and percentages are noted in Table 9.

Table 9
Frequencies and Percentages of Significance Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing Regarding Merit Pay as Related to Teacher Evaluations

Survey Question	N	Frequency	Percentage
10. If some form of merit pay were implemented, administrators would play favorites and reward teachers who are "pets" or don't "rock the boat" in school.	205	60	29.3
11. Teachers that exceed a school district's requirements in the classroom, as documented by performance evaluations, should receive merit pay.	204	64	31.2
15. Evaluations by all administrators assigned to a building are an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay.	205	73	35.6
18. Five or more evaluations throughout the school year would be a sufficient number of times to base a decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit pay.	205	66	32.2

19. Five or less evaluations throughout the school year would be a sufficient number of times to base a decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit pay.	205	65	31.7

Research Question 3: What is the perception of teachers in a rural south Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect the fidelity of standardized testing? Teachers disagree with the perception that merit pay would affect standardized testing. Twenty-eight and three-tenths percent of teachers disagree that teachers who volunteer to teach at-risk students should receive merit pay. Twenty-three and nine-tenths percent of teachers disagree that if a form of merit pay were implemented, teachers would become more motivated to increase student achievement on standardized tests. Twenty-eight and eight-tenths percent of teachers disagree that teachers who volunteer to teach in a low-performing school should receive merit pay. The frequencies and percentages are shown in Table 10.

Table 10
Frequencies and Percentages of Significance Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing Regarding Merit Pay as Related to Standardized Testing

Survey Question	N	Frequency	Percentage
4. Teachers who volunteer to teach at-risk students should receive merit pay.	205	58	28.3
9. If some form of merit pay were implemented, teachers would become more motivated to increase student achievement on standardized tests.	205	60	29.3
12. Teachers who volunteer to teach in a low-performing school should receive merit pay.	205	59	28.8

Research Question 4: Do age, years of experience, school level, school's AYP status, and / or level of education impact a teacher's perception regarding merit pay? Responses to survey items were analyzed by age using ANOVA. The results of the ANOVA indicated that there were significant differences between age on question 9 [$F(3.181) = 3.710$, $p = .013$] and question 13 [$F(3.181) = 2.727$, $p = .046$]. Table 11 shows the means for those questions for which significant differences were found.

Table 11
Means of Significance Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing among Age Groups

Survey Question	20 – 29	30 – 39	40 – 49	>50
9. If some form of merit pay were implemented, teachers would become more motivated to increase student achievement on standardized test scores.	3.39	3.21	2.68	2.76
13. A teacher's number of years experience is an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay.	1.90	2.06	2.36	2.49

The younger teachers agree that if some form of merit pay were implemented, teachers would become more motivated to increase student achievement. There is less agreement as the teacher ages, except the teachers over 50 are less likely to agree than the 40 – 49 age group. However, the younger teachers disagree that the number of years of experience is an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay. As the teachers' age increases, there is incrementally more agreement that the number of years is an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay.

Responses to survey items were analyzed by years of experience using ANOVA. The results of the ANOVA indicated that there were no significant differences found.

Responses to survey items were analyzed by school level using ANOVA. The results of the ANOVA indicated that there were no significant differences found. Since the school level also includes those schools that made AYP or did not make AYP the previous year, there were no significant differences found in the schools that did make AYP versus the schools that did not make AYP.

Responses to survey items were analyzed by level of education using ANOVA. The results of the ANOVA indicated that there were significant differences between level of education on question 3 [F (2,192) = 7.861, p - .001] and question 19 [F (2,194) = 4.850, p = .009].

Table 12 shows the means for three levels of education for those questions for which significant differences were found.

Table 12
Means Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing among Levels of Education

Survey Question	Bachelor's	Master's	Specialist's
3. I would participate in a merit pay system if it were implemented in my school district.	2.92	2.86	2.08
19. Five or less evaluations throughout the school year would be a sufficient number of times to base a decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit pay.	2.42	2.36	3.00

Teachers with a Bachelor's Degree were more undecided about participating in a merit pay plan. Teachers with a Master's Degree were undecided, but not as much as teachers with a Bachelor's Degree. Teachers with a Specialist's Degree disagreed with participating in a merit pay plan.

Teachers with a Specialist's Degree were undecided about five or less evaluations being adequate to base a decision on whether a teacher would qualify for merit pay. Teachers with a Bachelor's and Master's Degree disagreed with five or less evaluations being adequate to base a decision on whether a teacher would qualify for merit pay.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of teachers regarding merit pay based on student achievement. A total of 205 teachers from a primary, elementary, middle, and high school located in a southern, rural district in Georgia were asked to participate by completing a Merit Pay Survey. The mean scores and standard deviations were computed for school climate, teacher evaluations, and standardized testing to determine if merit pay would have an impact on these items.

The data revealed that participants perceived that merit pay would have an adverse impact on school climate. Almost two-thirds of the respondents, 65.8%, agreed or strongly agreed that merit pay would not attract or retain new teachers and 66.8% agreed or strongly agreed that cooperation would turn into counterproductive competition with a merit pay plan. The data revealed that the teachers were divided into thirds on whether five or more evaluations would be adequate to base a decision on whether a teacher should qualify for merit pay as the teachers were 37.6% agreeing, 32.2% neutral, and 30.2% disagreeing. About one half of the teachers did agree on three items regarding teacher evaluations: 54% disagree that evaluations are sufficient to award merit pay, 51.2% disagreed with completing extra work beyond school hours to receive merit pay, and 49.8% agreed that administrators would favor those teachers who were pets and did not rock the boat and would ultimately award those teachers merit pay. The majority of the teachers disagreed with using years of experience (71.7%) and advanced degrees

(62.3%) to award merit pay. Close to one half of the respondents were in agreement on the following issues regarding student achievement: teachers should receive merit pay if they teach at-risk students (45.4%), teach in a low socio-economic area (40%), or teach in a low-performing school (42%).

There were three items that had unusually high numbers of respondents who selected neutral for their response, and three items that had unusually low numbers of respondents who selected neutral as a response. The items numbered 3, in which the respondents would participate in a merit pay plan, 18, in which five or more evaluations were an adequate number of evaluations, and 19, in which five or less evaluations were an adequate number of evaluations. Of the 205 participants, 37.1% selected neutral on participating in a merit pay plan, 32.2% were neutral on five or more evaluations being an adequate number of evaluations, and 21.2% thought five or less evaluations were enough evaluations for merit pay. The items numbered 8, in which cooperation would change into counterproductive competition with a merit pay plan, 13, in which using years of experience to award merit pay, and item 14, in which using advanced degrees to award merit pay had unusually low numbers of neutrality. The respondents indicated strongly, with 66.8%, that cooperation would change in to competition with a merit pay plan, while they overwhelmingly disagreed with using years of experience (71.7%) or advanced degrees (62.3%) to award merit pay. Of the six items noted, four of the items were involved in teacher evaluations: items 13, 14, 18, and 19. The factor involving teacher evaluations elicited higher percentages of neutral responses than either of the other factors.

The mean scores and standard deviations were computed to determine if age, years of experience, level of education, school's AYP status, and school level impacted teachers' perceptions regarding merit pay. There were no significant differences on years of experience,

schools' AYP status, or school level. There were differences with age and level of education. The younger the age, the more agreeable the teachers were to merit pay. The teachers with a Bachelor's degree were more undecided about participating in a merit pay plan, while the teachers with a higher degree were more in disagreement with participating in a merit pay plan.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, the researcher presented a summary, research questions, findings and discussion of findings, conclusions, implications, recommendations, and concluding thoughts. This chapter was organized by the researcher to include an overview of the study and a discussion of how the research findings related to the research in the review of the literature.

Summary

The researcher's purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of teachers in a rural Georgia school system regarding merit pay based on student achievement. Specifically, the researcher's objective was to identify these perceptions to secure information that may be useful to the superintendent and Board of Education in the district. This district is one of 26 counties in the state of Georgia named as a recipient of the Race to the Top Grant, which required the implementation of a merit pay plan. The teachers' perceptions could provide critical information in determining the criteria to use in developing a merit pay plan.

A descriptive research design was used by the researcher to address the following sub-questions:

1. What is the perception of teachers in a rural Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect teacher evaluation?

2. What is the perception of teachers in a rural Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect the fidelity of standardized testing?
3. What is the perception of teachers in a rural Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect school climate?
4. Do age, years of experience, school level, school's AYP status, and / or level of education impact a teacher's perception regarding merit pay?

The researcher used the five schools in the district. Permission was obtained from the superintendent to conduct the research. The researcher constructed a survey, had a panel of experts provide feedback, conducted a pilot study, then met with the five principals in the district to explain the study and asked permission to survey the teachers at each school. At a scheduled faculty meeting, the principal explained the survey and asked the teachers to participate on a voluntary basis. The surveys were collected anonymously, since the teachers returned the completed surveys to an envelope on a back table. The principals returned the surveys to the researcher. A total of 205 surveys were collected, which gave a return rate of 72 %. The researcher collected quantitative data in order to explore teachers' perceptions objectively and thematically.

The data revealed that participants perceived that merit pay would have an adverse impact on school climate. Almost two-thirds of the respondents, 65.8%, agreed or strongly agreed that merit pay would not attract or retain new teachers and 66.8% agreed or strongly agreed that cooperation would turn into counterproductive competition with a merit pay plan. The data revealed that the teachers were divided into thirds on whether five or more evaluations

would be adequate to base a decision on whether a teacher should qualify for merit pay as the teachers were 37.6% agreeing, 32.2% neutral, and 30.2% disagreeing. About one half of the teachers did agree on three items regarding teacher evaluations: 54% disagree that evaluations are sufficient to award merit pay, 51.2% disagreed with completing extra work beyond the school hours to receive merit pay, and 49.8% agreed that administrators would favor those teachers who were pets and did not rock the boat and would ultimately award those teachers merit pay. The majority of the teachers disagreed with using years of experience (71.7%) and advanced degrees (62.3%) to award merit pay. Slightly under one half of the respondents were in agreement on the following issues regarding student achievement: teachers should receive merit pay if they teach at-risk students (45.4%), teach in a (Title I) low socio-economic area (40%), or teach in a low-performing school (42%).

There were three items that had unusually high numbers of respondents who selected neutral for their response, and three items that had unusually low numbers of respondents who selected neutral as a response. The items numbered 3, in which the respondents would participate in a merit pay plan, 18, in which five or more evaluations were an adequate number of evaluations, and 19, in which five or less evaluations were an adequate number of evaluations. Of the 205 participants, 37.1% selected neutral on participating in a merit pay plan, 32.2% were neutral on five or more evaluations being an adequate number of evaluations, and 21.2% thought five or less evaluations were enough evaluations for merit pay. The items numbered 8, in which cooperation would change into counterproductive competition with a merit pay plan, 13, in which using years of experience to award merit pay, and item 14, in which using advanced degrees to award merit pay had unusually low numbers of neutrality. The respondents inculcated strongly, with 66.8%, that cooperation would change in to counterproductive competition with a

merit pay plan, while they overwhelmingly disagreed with using years of experience (71.7%) or advanced degrees (62.3%) to award merit pay. Of the six items noted, four of the items were involved in teacher evaluations: items 13, 14, 18, and 19. The factor involving teacher evaluations elicited higher percentages of neutral responses than either of the other factors.

The mean scores and standard deviations were computed to determine if age, years of experience, level of education, school's AYP status, and school level impacted teachers' perceptions regarding merit pay. There were no significant differences on years of experience, schools' AYP status, or school level. There were differences with age and level of education. The younger the age, the more agreeable the teachers were to merit pay. The teachers with a Bachelor's degree were more undecided about participating in a merit pay plan, while the teachers with a higher degree were more in disagreement with participating in a merit pay plan.

Discussion of Research Findings

The current study endeavored to determine the perceptions of teachers in a rural Georgia school system regarding merit pay based on student achievement. More specifically, perceptions of the impact of the implementation of a merit pay plan on three factors, school climate, teacher evaluation, and standardized testing, were also explored.

Research Question 1

What is the perception of teachers in a rural Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect teacher evaluation? Currently, teacher evaluations are completed by administrators who make periodic classroom observations to check for instructional strategies and classroom management and complete a checklist of duties and responsibilities. The respondents were undecided regarding whether or not evaluations by all administrators assigned to a building were sufficient to award merit pay.

Multiple data sets collected over time with fidelity that include objective, not subjective, data, are preferred.

Results indicated that teachers perceive that some administrators may have "pets" who would be favored and rewarded with a merit pay plan. A teacher's primary professional responsibility is to ensure that students learn, so measures of student learning should play a role in teacher evaluations. Teachers contribute to student learning in ways that can be observed and measured. Through, focused, and rigorous observation of classroom practice, examination of student work, and analysis of students' performance on high-quality assessments, it is possible to accurately distinguish effective teaching from ineffective teaching. Effective teacher evaluation should produce information that districts can easily factor into important decisions about teacher tenure, compensation, development, hiring, promotion, and dismissal (Teacher evaluation 2.0, 2001).

Respondents were also undecided as to the number of observations from administrators that would be needed to be adequate to award merit pay. The teachers were undecided if five or more evaluations were enough and undecided if five or less evaluations were enough. As the literature stated, the number of evaluations would need to be decided based on consensus of the teachers rather than the majority vote. The evaluators would need a detailed, defined rubric to rate the teachers objectively. The administrators would need training on completing the rubric. (Laine, Potemski, & Rowland, 2010) noted that effective merit pay plans must use multiple measures of teacher performance. Allen (1999), noted that five core elements must be in place for an effective teacher evaluation system which included not only collection of data, but consistent analysis of the data, a means to correlate student progress with teacher contributions, a professional development plan for teachers deemed less than effective, and buy-in from all

stakeholders. Respondents in this study did not express confidence in the current teacher evaluation procedures as a means to award merit pay, nor did they indicate high levels of buy-in for the process.

Research Question 2

What is the perception of teachers in a rural Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect the fidelity of standardized testing? Toch (2009) stated that Secretary of Education Arne Duncan placed merit pay as a high priority. While Duncan does not support the idea that student test scores should be the sole criteria for merit pay, he did indicate that student achievement cannot be omitted from a merit pay plan. Respondents in this study were undecided in all areas of using standardized testing to award merit pay. They were undecided as to whether or not teachers teaching in a low socio-economic area should receive merit pay, teachers who volunteer to teach at-risk students should receive merit pay, and if student achievement should be used in awarding merit pay. A common definition for student achievement will need to be disseminated for all schools involved in merit pay. Standardized tests are not intended to assess the performance of individual teachers when the test scores have not been validated for that purpose. Teachers should be accountable for helping students make measurable progress against ambitious standards. This does not mean that evaluations should be based solely on standardized tests or on the results of any single assessment.

The literature regarding standardized testing and merit pay varies widely, as did responses to this study. There are supporters who report, for example, that, with careful assessor training, the two can be effectively related (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005; Gitomer, 2008; Wilson et al., 2000). Others; however, warn that the concept brings difficulties for both students

and teachers (McCaffrey et al., 2003; Popham, 1997; Tanaka, 1996). Gratz (2009), for example, warned that systems which reward test scores will receive test scores, not necessarily effective learning. For example, teachers who receive merit pay for one year may misconstrue this to suggest that the instructional strategies used that year may be duplicated in consecutive years. Each year, the student population changes and the delivery method of instruction may need to change to meet the needs of the students. Students' needs are different each year.

Research Question 3

What is the perception of teachers in a rural Georgia school system relative to merit pay based on student achievement and the ways in which it may affect school climate? School climate is important in the school setting to foster collaboration among teachers. Teachers who plan and work well together toward the common goal of improving student achievement build a bond that strengthens the foundation of the educational setting and improves morale. Results revealed that teachers perceive that merit pay may weaken collaboration and foster a sense of competition among teachers. The study also found that teachers perceive that a merit pay plan may be detrimental in attracting and retaining good teachers, possibly because the competition among teachers to outperform each other would be too great.

In the review of the literature, it was noted that teachers work for the intrinsic reward of a job well done when students succeed and make academic progress. The premise of merit pay – that rewards can motivate teachers to improve their performance – is based upon the assumption that teachers are primarily motivated by money. Herzberg (1966) indicated that extrinsic rewards (hygiene factors) such as merit pay were not as important in job satisfaction (a factor in school climate) as were intrinsic rewards (motivator factors). Merit pay is an extrinsic reward. Mitchell & Peters (1988) indicated that a blend of extrinsic and intrinsic motivators was

preferred by most educators. Ellis (1984b) cited a study by Pastor which found that involvement in such areas as the decision-making and being able to determine their own teaching strategies were as important to teachers as extrinsic motivators such as merit pay. The teachers surveyed reported that they would not participate in a merit pay plan voluntarily. Issues related to school climate may account for their responses. Respondents to this study may not be motivated by the extrinsic reward of money.

Research Question 4

Do age, years of experience, school level, school's AYP status, and / or level of education impact a teacher's perception regarding merit pay? Examination of teachers' age, years of experience, level of education, school level, and school's AYP status were examined. There were no significant differences on years of experience, schools' status of AYP, or school level. The schools that made AYP as well as the schools that did not make AYP did not want a merit pay plan. There were differences with age and level of education. The younger the age, the more agreeable the teachers were to merit pay. The teachers with a Bachelor's degree were more undecided about participating in a merit pay plan, while the teachers with a higher degree were more in disagreement with participating in a merit pay plan.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the analysis of the research findings. The researcher has concluded from the study that:

1. The teachers in the south Georgia district that responded to the survey can be characterized as older than 50 with a Master's Degree with 0 – 9 years of experience and teach Middle School.
2. The teachers did not want to voluntarily participate in a merit pay plan.

3. The teachers indicated that a merit pay plan would create competition.
4. The teachers indicated that a merit pay plan would not improve morale.
5. Teachers disagreed that a merit pay plan would improve student achievement. Standardized test scores should be a component of merit pay, but not the sole criteria. There were factors beyond the control of teachers that influenced student achievement and should be considered with test results.
6. Teachers may not want to teach at-risk students or special education students or students in low-performing schools. Student achievement improved as schools received rewards based on standardized testing by making AYP but not with the receipt of sanctions based on results. Standardized testing held teachers accountable for student achievement but did not accurately evaluate a teacher's instructional strategies or rapport with students.
7. Evaluations by administrators needed to be defined and created so as to be rated objectively. There should be multiple evaluations by multiple evaluators over time to award merit pay. Evaluations should not be the sole criteria for awarding merit pay. Teachers believed that administrators would play favorites in awarding merit pay.
8. The teachers disagreed that the number of years of experience and the advanced degrees should be considered when awarding merit pay.

Implications

One objective of the study was to inform the Superintendent and the local Board of Education regarding the perceptions of the teachers in the district regarding the implementation of a merit pay plan. Even though the district must implement a merit pay plan as a result of receiving a Race to the Top Grant, which mandates a merit pay plan, the teachers did give valuable input on their feelings about three aspects of the merit pay plan regarding teacher

evaluations, standardized testing, and school climate. Teachers will need to participate in the development of the criteria to receive merit pay if the expectation is to have their consent and enthusiastic participation.

The teachers indicated individual merit pay would foster competition instead of collaboration. A school-wide merit pay plan would be more beneficial, since this would include all staff to help improve student achievement. The entire staff would work toward a common goal and help those who may need ideas to improve instruction.

The stringent requirements of The No Child Left Behind legislation that requires all students be 100% proficient on state standards by 2014 has caused politicians and educational leaders to revisit the notion of merit pay in the hopes of recruiting and retaining efficient teachers. First, however, efficient teachers need to be defined, and secondly, who will identify the efficient teachers and using what criteria. A proposal to tie merit pay to student achievement has been discussed. Educational leaders are hoping that offering financial incentives will be a motivator for teachers to improve student achievement. The literature and the results of the survey indicated that teachers value intrinsic rewards and money would not make them work any harder to improve student achievement.

The demands of a merit pay plan create unique situations that require more than a "one size fits all" approach. The teachers are pivotal for leading the school in the provision of a quality education for every student and inclusion in decision-making has serious implications for successful implementation of a merit pay plan.

The utilization of a merit pay plan continues to exist as a controversial issue among teachers and the results of this study support that finding with the disagreement of participating in a merit pay plan. There is no need for a new reform to try to increase student achievement

which results in huge amounts of money being diverted away from current reforms which have not been in place long enough to determine efficacy. With the budget cuts and loss of jobs in the educational arena, this new reform of implementing a merit pay plan can be detrimental to the progress that has been made in the last decade to improve student achievement.

The teachers did not agree with implementing a merit pay plan because teachers may feel that it would create isolation among the staff in trying to outdo each other to receive the merit pay. At a time when collaboration is needed more than ever due to the elevated Annual Measurable Objectives that must be met for schools to make Adequate Yearly Progress, teachers need to plan together to improve academic achievement. The implementation of a merit pay plan may cause teachers to isolate themselves.

The teachers also indicated their disagreement in using standardized test scores to award merit pay because there is already enough pressure involved in testing. Tying student achievement scores to merit pay may cause poor performing schools to have difficulty in recruiting qualified teachers.

The teachers may not have agreed with a merit pay plan because of the idea that there would be a rubric for teachers to fulfill in order to receive merit pay. The plan may end up being a checklist of set criteria without quality, just quantity.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings of this study, several recommendations are made by this researcher. These recommendations include both recommendations for further research, policymakers, and for educators who are responsible for improved student achievement for all students as measured by implementing a merit pay plan.

1. Policymakers should ensure availability of funds in the current economic decline before implementing a merit pay plan and ensure that there will be money to sustain the plan.
2. Policymakers should consider factors regarding past failures of merit pay plans before developing legislation for a merit pay plan.
3. A similar study should be conducted with schools already participating in a merit pay plan.
4. Further research should be conducted to assess teachers' current knowledge about merit pay.
5. All teachers who are mandated to participate in a merit pay plan should be involved in developing any merit pay plan in which they are to be involved. Teachers' involvement may contribute to accepting the plan.
6. Provide sufficient support for training for teachers and administrators regarding the new teacher evaluations to receive merit pay.
7. Consider the negative implications merit pay may have on school climate if merit pay is based on individual achievements in which the teachers may refrain from sharing and collaborating on instructional strategies and resources.
8. College and university officials should be included in the creation of criteria, such as a new teacher evaluation, to prepare all future education graduates. The colleges and universities can enhance educational classes to include training on evaluation goals set forth by a merit pay plan.

Concluding Thoughts

Merit pay is not a new idea to educators today, but it has moved to the forefront with policymakers mandating education reform movements across the country. Merit pay is

clearly publicized, but it is not as clear who should receive merit pay, what criteria should be used, how teachers will be evaluated, who will make the decisions, and what impact merit pay will have on teacher evaluations, standardized testing, or school climate. Changes to pay scales are based on the data collected along with promises of rewards and sanctions. Teachers are impacted by these mandates and should have continued research as local policymakers continue to revise and pass education reforms.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

MERIT PAY SURVEY

Merit Pay Survey Conducted by Renee Sasser

In the blank next to the number of the statement, list the number that indicates your feeling regarding that statement.

5-strongly agree	4 – agree	3 – undecided	2 – disagree	1 – strongly disagree

___ 1. My school district should not implement a merit pay plan based on student achievement.

___ 2. Merit pay would attract and retain more teachers in my school district by fostering collaboration.

___ 3. I would participate in a merit pay system if it were implemented in my school district due to the RT3 Grant.

___ 4. Teachers who volunteer to teach at-risk students should receive merit pay based on student progression.

___ 5. In order to earn merit pay, a teacher should expect to work additional hours beyond school hours to prepare a merit pay portfolio.

___ 6. Teachers who work in a Title I school or area should receive merit pay.

___ 7. A merit pay system would improve the morale among the staff in my school.

___ 8. If some form of merit pay were implemented, cooperation among teachers would lead to counterproductive competition.

___ 9. If some form of merit pay were implemented, teachers would become more motivated to increase student achievement on standardized tests.

___ 10. If some form of merit pay were implemented, administrators would play favorites and reward teachers who are "pets" or don't "rock the boat" in school.

___ 11. Teachers, whose performance exceed a school district's expectations as documented by performance evaluations, should receive merit pay.

___ 12. Teachers who volunteer to teach in a low-performing school should receive merit pay.

___ 13. A teacher's number of years experience is an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay.

___ 14. A teachers' advanced degree is an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay.

___ 15. Evaluations by all administrators assigned to a building are an adequate measure to qualify for merit pay.

___ 16. Merit pay should be based on the results of an administrator's decision after reviewing a cumulative portfolio that includes achievements and successes of the teacher throughout the year. The portfolio should exclude student's standardized test scores.

___ 17. My administrators do not evaluate teachers a sufficient number of times to make an accurate decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit pay.

___ 18. Five or more evaluations throughout the school year would be a sufficient number of times to base a decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit pay.

___ 19. Five or less evaluations throughout the school year would be a sufficient number of times to base a decision on whether or not a teacher should receive merit pay.

Please check the item that most appropriately describes you.

20. What is your highest level of education?

___ Bachelor's Degree ___ Master's Degree
___ Specialist's Degree ___ Doctorate Degree

Please place an answer in the blank.

21. What is your age? _____
22. What grade do you teacher? _____
23. How many years experience in the educational field do you have? _____
24. Would you participate in a merit pay plan even if you were satisfied with your salary? _____

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL FORM

Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Phone: 912-478-0843 | Veazey Hall 3001
Fax: 912-478-0719 | IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu | P.O. Box 8005
Statesboro, GA 30460

To:	Renee Sasser Russell Mays Department of Leadership, Technology, and Human Development
CC:	Charles L. Patterson Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College
From:	Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)
Initial Approval Date:	April 21, 2011
Expiration Date:	April 21, 2012
Subject:	Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After review of your proposed research project number **H11362** and titled "**The Perceptions of Teachers in a Rural South Georgia County regarding Merit Pay based on Student Achievement.**" it appears that ( ) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to **360** subjects.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Haynes

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX C

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Perceptions of Teachers in a Rural South Georgia County Regarding Merit Pay Based on Student Achievement

1. I am Renee Sasser, principal of Blakeney 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 regarding merit pay and student achievement as partial fulfillment of the Doctorate of Education degree at Georgia Southern University.

2. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of teachers in a rural south Georgia county regarding merit pay based on student achievement. Due to the fact that the participating school district is a recipient of a Race to the Top grant that will fund a merit pay plan, this study will determine the perceptions of the teachers in the district toward a merit pay plan. By anonymously surveying the teachers in the district, the researcher will be able to provide valuable information to the district leaders in developing such a plan.

3. Participation in this research will include anonymously and voluntarily completing a 24-question survey regarding your perceptions about merit pay. Completion and return of the survey implies that you agree to participate and your data may be used in this research.

4. Discomforts 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 or you have no knowledge, the question or questions may be omitted. Also, you may elect to accept a survey, but return a blank survey to the collection envelope with the other surveys so as not to self identify. 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 will be devised. Participation will enable you to have input into an issue that will directly affect you.

5. Benefits:

a. 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 will be devised in your district. Participation will enable you to have input into an issue that will directly affect you.

b. The benefits to society include knowing that their child's teacher must perform according to set criteria in order to receive merit pay.

6. This survey will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete in one session.

7. This survey is anonymous. The data will only be used by the researcher. The 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 seven years. After that time, it will be shredded.

8. You have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above 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 912-478-0843.

9. There are no credits or financial stipends given for participation. However, your responses will be valuable in creating a merit pay plan in your district.

10. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may end your participation at any time by telling the person in charge, not returning the survey, or any other option you choose. You are not obligated to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

11. You will not be penalized for deciding not to participate in the study; or if you decide at any time that you don't want to participate further, you may withdraw without penalty or retribution

12. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study.

13. Completion and return of the survey imply that you agree to participate and your data may be used in this research.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H11362_____.

Title of Project: The Perceptions of Teachers in a Rural South Georgia County Regarding Merit Pay Based on Student Achievement

Principal Investigator: (Renee Sasser, 342 Sparrow Lane, Waynesboro, GA 30830, 706-554-5612, rmsasser@burke.k12.ga.us)
Faculty Advisor: (Dr. Russell Mays, 912-478-5605, rmays@georgiasouthern.edu)

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

_____ _____

Investigator Signature Date

APPENDIX D

BURKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Linda S. Bailey
Superintendent

(706) 554-5101

789 Burke Veterans Parkway
Waynesboro, GA 30830

March 14, 2011

Human Subjects - Institutional Review Board
Georgia Southern University
P.O. Box 8005
Statesboro, GA 30461

To Whom It May Concern:

Renee Sasser has requested permission to collect research data from the certified teachers at Burke County Public Schools through a project entitled The Perceptions of Teachers in a Rural South Georgia County Regarding Merit Pay Based on Student Achievement. I have been informed of the purposes of the study and the nature of the research procedures. I have also been given an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher.

As a representative of the Burke County Public Schools, I am authorized to grant permission to have the researcher recruit research participants from our school district. Renee Sasser is also permitted to collect research data at scheduled faculty meetings. The researcher has agreed to the following restrictions. no contact during school hours and provision of a copy of the results of the study, if requested.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 706-554-5101.

Sincerely,

Linda S. Bailey
Superintendent