

## BONUSES FOR TEACHERS IMPROVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE, BUT NOT BY MUCH



Teachers at five schools in Utah were awarded merit pay last spring. A recent study shows that, while it may have motivated the teachers, there was little change in performances from the students. Merit pay is pay that is based on how well a job is done, typically considered bonuses and often associated with the education system. A report of the Utah pilot program – a program conducted as a trial and/or on a small scale – noted that some of the schools showed improvement, but overall there was not a significant difference. Of the teachers who participated in the survey, 56 percent stated that they had altered their classroom instruction based on the program and 55 percent had augmented communication with the students' parents. The merit pay program in Utah, initiated in 2009, was intended to compensate teachers whose adeptness was a reflection of his/her students' accomplished performances. The Utah Education Policy Center at the University of Utah was responsible for assessing the program. Schools that were actively involved in the program included Midway Elementary in Salt Lake City, Ashman Elementary in Richfield, Manila Elementary in Pleasant Grove, Wasatch Peak Academy in North Salt Lake, and Canyon Rim Academy in Salt Lake. A story appearing on KSL.com in Utah quoted Kristin Swenson, who works at the policy center, as saying, "[The



teachers] worked very hard. They were very proud to be a part of this program. They took this very seriously." In the program's first year, each teacher who took part in the program was awarded the full 2,000-dollar bonus in helping to develop the criteria. By the second year, teachers could earn bonuses based on criteria: 40 percent on student achievement, 40 percent on the quality of instruction, and 20 percent on parent satisfaction. The bonuses were anywhere from 500 to 2,600 dollars, with the average at approximately 1,786. "The teachers that were at these schools where they were more instrumental in developing the plans expressed more satisfaction with the program," said Swenson. She further stated that each school developing individual criteria was effective but also proved to be somewhat of a burden, as it "made the evaluation extremely difficult." Swenson offered recommendations to lawmakers should they decide to expand the program. While she suggested a list of prearranged evaluation plans to provide basis, she additionally recommended working with teachers and allowing them to create their own plans. "The teachers said that the money wasn't motivating," stated Swenson, adding that the teachers "also said that they don't teach for the money." Swenson believes that the program could be proficient in other areas and more schools, though she did warn that merit pay can dissuade workers as much as it encourages. She noted that "the plans and the planning all focus on collaboration. They did not want to breed competition among the teachers and that needs to be maintained."