

Teacher Perspectives on Performance Pay: A Phenomenological Study

by

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**An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler School of Education,
Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor in Education**

Abstract

Teacher Perspectives on Performance Pay Programs: A Phenomenological Study.
Emily Hernández Balcells, 2012: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler School of Education. ERIC Descriptors: Teacher Perspectives, Teacher Attitudes, Performance Pay, Merit Pay, Teacher Evaluation.

The research literature is unequivocal in that in order for educational initiatives to be successful, teachers must embrace them. Therefore, this applied dissertation was designed to gauge the degree of understanding and acceptance of an inaugural performance pay program among the teachers employed at one elementary school located in a Florida public school district. This qualitative research study was also intended to phenomenologically discern and examine the teachers' perceptions of the addition of a first-time performance pay component to an existing traditional salary step system and the performance pay's impact on their daily teaching practice. Hence, the researcher collected the lived experiences of the participants regarding receiving performance pay bonuses, teaching practice, performance evaluations, as well as recruiting, producing, and retaining quality teachers.

The writer administered an individual, face-to-face, open-ended interview protocol to nine teacher participants. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and verified for accuracy with each participant before coding. Initial coding of participant responses yielded 43 themes. Closer phenomenological review generated four cluster themes: (a) study subjects did not have a clear understanding of the performance pay initiative or specifically, how bonuses were being calculated; (b) participants found the new compensation component unfair; (c) the teachers felt the incentive amounts were unsubstantial; and (d) the respondents articulated being motivated by the community of students, rather than by monetary inducements.

The findings suggest that the teachers in the study did not perceive their district's plan as one that affected their daily teaching practice, nor did the subjects perceive the compensation scheme as sustainable or worthwhile. The researcher makes recommendations for change in current practice of performance pay, for modification of policies regarding compensation structures for educators, and for future directions of performance pay research.