



# Treating Different Teachers Differently

How State Policy Should Act on Differences in Teacher Performance to Improve Teacher Effectiveness and Equity

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# Introduction

Historically, state and local policies have tended to treat all teachers as if they were equally effective in promoting student learning,<sup>1</sup> but a good deal of evidence amassed over the past decade documents enormous variation in teacher effectiveness.<sup>2</sup> The effectiveness of a teacher is indeed the most important school-based factor determining students' levels of academic achievement, yet few state and district policies reflect this finding.

“Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most,” the assurance at the heart of several American Recovery and Reinvestment Act education programs (see page 3), provides the impetus for state and local policymakers to revisit their teacher policies. States and districts can achieve four objectives related to this assurance by recognizing and acting upon differences in teacher effectiveness:

- To encourage the most effective teachers to stay in the profession
- To leverage the talents and reach of the most effective teachers
- To discourage the least effective from remaining in the profession and dismiss chronically ineffective teachers
- To improve the performance of all teachers and thus improve student outcomes

These objectives are particularly important for schools and districts serving large concentrations of students living in poverty. Successful implementation of updated, effectiveness-aware teacher policies hinges on putting actionable information about teacher effectiveness in the hands of managers. Principals need fine-grained information on individual teachers' performance, and agency officials need to see patterns among teacher effectiveness data. Given the requisite information, managers have a chance of allocating resources in ways that promote improved student achievement and a more equitable distribution of teaching talent; without such information, they are driving blind.

The assurances underlying ARRA underscore the importance of improving the usefulness of information on teacher effectiveness through robust data systems and rigorous evaluation systems. This paper offers guidelines around the states' roles in promoting these information systems, and in refining policies that should treat different teachers differently. This paper is intended to offer strategies that can be incorporated into

state applications for the second round of Race to the Top, state and district Teacher Incentive Fund applications, and applications to the Investing in Innovation Fund. These federal programs all include a focus on teacher effectiveness and recognize that more differentiation is needed in the teaching profession.

The paper tackles what we are calling “infrastructure” or the foundation needed for states to use information about teachers,<sup>3</sup> such as robust data systems, professional standards for teaching, and rigorous evaluation systems. It then describes how states might better coordinate their policies on evaluation, tenure, and licensure. Finally, it outlines strategies for leveraging the expertise of highly effective teachers, working proactively with moderate performers to improve their skills, and taking urgent action with ineffective teachers to improve their performance or exit them from the classroom.

# Education programs within the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

## Investing in Innovation Fund

The Investing in Innovation Fund provides \$650 million in competitive grants to school districts and nonprofit organizations working with districts or a consortium of schools to “expand the implementation of, and investment in, innovative and evidence-based practices, programs and strategies that significantly:

- Improve K-12 achievement and close achievement gaps
- Decrease dropout rates
- Increase high school graduation rates
- Improve teacher and school leader effectiveness”<sup>1</sup>

Applicants must have a track record of success and must apply for one of three types of grants—a development grant, for proposals with research based findings or hypotheses; a validation grant, for proposals with moderate evidence to support them; or a scale up grant for proposals with strong evidence of success.

## State Fiscal Stabilization Fund

The State Fiscal Stabilization Fund provided a one-time appropriation of approximately \$48.6 billion for states to minimize reductions in education and other essential government services. In exchange for these funds, states were required to commit to advance education reforms in four core reform areas:

- Making progress toward rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities
- Establishing pre-K to college and career data systems that track progress and foster continuous improvement
- Making improvements in teacher effectiveness and in the equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students, particularly students who are most in need
- Providing intensive support and effective interventions for the lowest-performing schools

## Race to the Top Fund

The Race to the Top Fund is a \$4.35 billion competitive grant program to encourage and reward states that are “creating the conditions for educa-

tion innovation and reform” and making significant progress in student achievement and college readiness. The states selected for grants must have ambitious plans in the four core reform areas listed in the description of the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund and are intended to serve as models of the best reform practices and ideas for other states.

## School Improvement Grants Program

The School Improvement Grants program provides significant funds to “dramatically transform school culture and increase student outcomes in each State’s persistently lowest-achieving schools, including secondary schools, through robust and comprehensive reforms.”<sup>2</sup> While the program was authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2002, it did not receive funding until fiscal year 2007. It is currently funded at \$3.5 billion, 3 billion of which was provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Formula grants are awarded to states who then distribute them to the districts most in need who also demonstrate the greatest commitment and capacity to turning around their lowest-performing schools. Districts must adopt one of four defined intervention models—the turnaround, restart, closure, or transformation models.

## Teacher Incentive Fund

The Teacher Incentive Fund is a competitive grant program that supports performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems in high-needs schools. TIF funds also support pay for teachers who take on additional roles and responsibilities and for teachers who teach in subject shortage areas, such as mathematics and science. Grants may be awarded to states, districts, charter schools, and nonprofit organizations that partner with states or districts. TIF was created in an appropriations bill in 2006 and has been awarded between \$99 million and \$97 million annually until 2010 when it was awarded \$400 million. It was also awarded \$200 million in additional funding through the ARRA.

## Endnotes

- 1 U.S. Department of Education, *Investing in Innovation Fund*, October 2009, available at <http://ed.gov/programs/innovation/factsheet.html>.
- 2 U.S. Department of Education, “Fact Sheet: School Improvement Grant” (2009), available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/factsheet.html>

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