



Health Impact Review

Financial Incentives to Attract Excellent Teachers for Hard-to-Staff Schools and Subjects

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Executive Summary

Background and Introduction: The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) seeks funding for Financial Incentives to Attract Excellent Teachers for Hard-to-Staff Schools and Subjects. The program goal is to improve students' scores by improving the pool of experienced teachers in areas in which students are under-achieving. The program would expand the Future Teachers Program to provide conditional loans and scholarships to future teachers who teach in hard-to-staff schools. The program would also provide salary incentives to teachers with Professional and National Board Certification who teach in hard-to-staff subjects or hard-to-staff schools. The purpose of this review is to analyze the Financial Incentives Program to determine if its implementation would have an impact on health disparities in Washington State.

Methods: To conduct this review, we relied on discussions and information provided by staff from OSPI and the Department of Health, conversations with community health advocates interested in the health and education of minority populations, data from the OSPI website, limited analyses of OSPI data, and a limited review of the literature. In addition, a conceptual model was developed that illustrates how the program may ultimately impact health disparities.

Results and Discussion: We found limited and conflicting evidence in the literature to support the notion that teacher salary incentives and teacher certifications have a direct impact on improving student achievement. However, salary incentives may serve as retention incentives, which may lead to improved student achievement. There is a growing body of literature substantiating the link between length of education and improved health outcomes. Therefore, if the Financial Incentives Program is successful in improving student achievement, the program may lengthen the education of effected students, which may have a positive impact on the health of the students served by the program. To reduce disparities in health based on race and ethnicity, the program would need to successfully improve teacher quality in classrooms and schools with a disproportionate number of minority students. Financial incentives for teaching in hard-to-staff schools would help target the program toward minority students because students of color are disproportionately represented in these hard-to-staff (i.e., low income) schools. Financial incentives for teaching in hard-to-staff subjects targets the program toward minority students in some subjects; specifically, minority students are disproportionately represented in special education and English Language Learner (ELL) programs.

Conclusions: The Financial Incentives proposal has some potential to decrease health disparities in Washington. The program is most likely to reduce health disparities if the salary incentives work as retention incentives in areas with high proportions of minority students. However, the expansion of the Future Teachers Program appears to place inexperienced teachers in hard-to-staff schools, which may decrease teacher quality in these schools.