

EDUCATION



THE UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Report to the Education Interim
Committee

Effective Teachers in High Poverty Schools Incentive Program Report

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Effective Teachers in High Poverty Schools Incentive Program Report

STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

U.C.A. Section 53F-2-513 requires the Utah State Board of Education, after the third year salary bonus payments are made, to evaluate the extent to which a salary bonus improves recruitment and retention of effective teachers in high poverty schools by at least surveying teachers who receive the salary bonus and examining turnover rates of teachers who receive the salary bonus compared to those who do not. Moving forward, the State Board is required submit this evaluation annually to the Education Interim Committee.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 2017 General Session, the Legislature passed House Bill 212, *Incentive for Effective Teachers in High Poverty Schools*, which provides an annual salary bonus to eligible teachers in high poverty schools. This report is provided to the Education Interim Committee to evaluate the extent to which a salary bonus improves recruitment and retention of effective teachers in high poverty schools. During the 2024-2025 school year, 208 teachers received a salary bonus of \$7,000.

As noted in previous evaluations, this evaluation does **not** find strong evidence that the salary bonus improves teacher recruitment and retention. It finds very little evidence that the program is being used to recruit teachers at high poverty schools. In terms of retention, for many of the teachers surveyed, their main reason for teaching in their current school is that they find satisfaction in working with students from low- income families and diverse backgrounds and the impact they make in the lives of their students. In other words, the data suggest that teachers stay in high poverty schools due to a broader subset of factors. Many teachers described the salary bonus as a form of recognition and motivation. Fifty-eight teachers (66%) indicated that the salary bonus had influenced their personal career decisions, often encouraging them to stay in their schools. However, eight teachers (9%) shared that they expect to either leave the teaching profession or move to a different school within the next 12 months despite receiving the salary bonus.

BACKGROUND

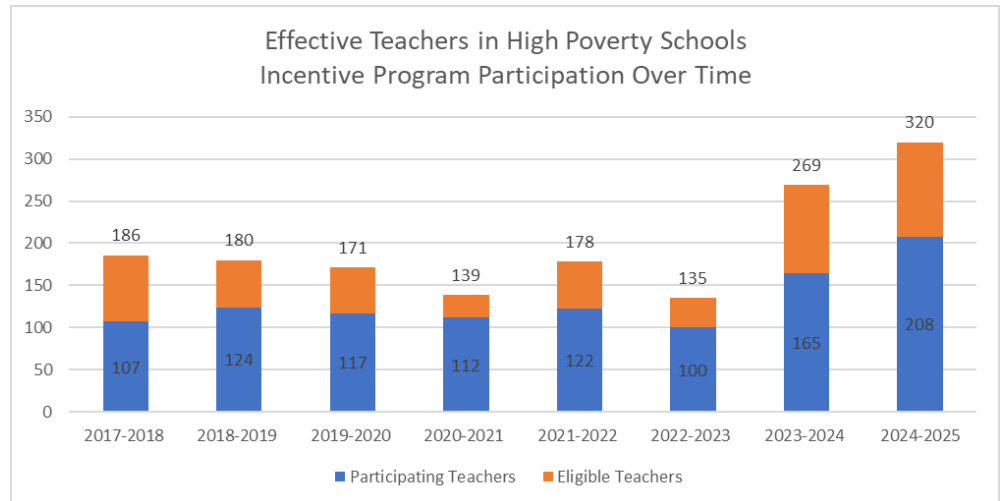
In the 2017 General Session, the Legislature passed House Bill 212, *Incentive for Effective Teachers in High Poverty Schools*, which provides an annual salary

bonus to eligible teachers in high poverty schools. For the purposes of the program, a high poverty school means a public school in which more than 20% of the enrolled students are classified as children affected by intergenerational poverty (IGP) or 70% or more of the enrolled students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Alternatively, a school qualifies if it has previously met the 20% IGP criteria and for each school year since meeting that criteria at least 15% of the enrolled students at the school have been classified as children affected by intergenerational poverty or the school has previously met the 70% free or reduced lunch criteria described above and for each school year since meeting that criteria at least 60% of the enrolled students at the school have qualified for free or reduced lunch.

An eligible teacher must be employed as a teacher in a high poverty school at the time the teacher is considered for a salary bonus and, in the two years prior, achieves a median growth percentile of 70 or higher while teaching at an eligible public school in the state a course for which a standards assessment is administered. During the 2020 General Session, the Legislature passed House Bill 107, *Effective Teachers in High Poverty Schools Incentive Program Amendments*, which increased the bonus amount from \$5000 to \$7000 and expanded the definition of an eligible teacher to include those who are employed in a high poverty school and teaches grade Kindergarten, 1,2, or 3, and achieves at least 85% of students whose progress is assessed as typical or better at the end of the year assessment while teaching at an eligible public school in the state at which a benchmark assessment is administered as described in U.C.A. Section 53F-2-503. During the 2022 General Session, the Legislature added teachers teaching Kindergarten.

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Since the inception of the program, the number of participating teachers has ranged from a low of 100 teachers in the 2022-23 school year to a high of 208 in the 2024-2025 school year. The initial year of the program, 2017-18, saw the lowest rate of eligible teachers who participated in the program (58%). The highest percentage of eligible teachers participating was in 2020-21 (81%). In the most recent school year, 2024-2025 208 teachers participated, reflecting 65% of eligible teachers. A total of 613 teachers have received the salary bonus in the program's eight-year existence.



SALARY BONUS

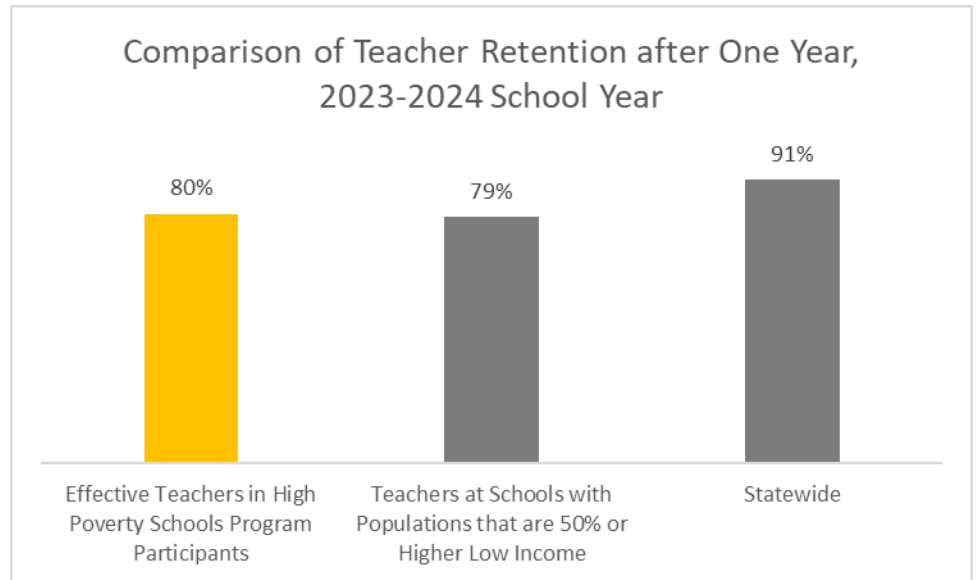
From the start of the program through the 2019-2020 school year, the annual salary bonus in statute was \$5,000 per eligible teacher. However, the Board has not been able to award the full amount in previous years because program participation has exceeded the funding appropriated for the program. The Legislature has appropriated \$801,000 ongoing for the program and charter schools and school district are statutorily required to pay half of the awarded salary bonus. Thus, program expenditures cannot exceed \$1,602,000 annually. The actual salary bonus awarded per teacher for the last 5 years is included in the figure below. The most recent bonus amount was \$7,000 per eligible teacher.

2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	School Years 2022-2025
\$4,629.62	\$4,032.26	\$3,969.80	\$4,147.04	\$7,000.00

TEACHER RETENTION

In the first three years of the incentive program, recipients of the bonus were retained at their schools at a higher rate in comparison to other teacher groups. They were retained at higher rates than both the state average and the average of other teachers at majority low-income population schools. Starting in the fourth year of the program (2020-21), teachers who participated in the incentive program were retained at slightly lower rates in comparison to the above groups.

Of the 100 teachers who received the bonus in the sixth year of the program (2022-2023), 80 were employed in the same school in the following school year (2023-2024). This retention rate of 80% was higher than retention in comparable low-income schools but lower than the state average over the same period which were 79% and 91%, respectively. These retention rates are detailed in the below figure.



The following survey data delve into why program participants choose to continue to teach in their current school and indicate that there are a variety of factors to which we can attribute the retention rate for program participants beyond just the salary bonus.

PARTICIPANT SURVEY

USB E distributed a survey to 209 recipients of the salary bonus in the fall of school year 2025-2026. Ninety-two completed the survey, reflecting a response rate of 44%. The responses were analyzed to evaluate the extent to which the salary bonus improves recruitment and retention of effective teachers.

Reasons for Teaching at Their Current School

At the beginning of the survey, teachers were asked to answer two open-ended questions, one of which asked them to briefly explain the main reasons for choosing to work at their current school. Like last year's survey responses, results showed that teachers' reasons for teaching at their current school were highly altruistic. Many expressed a desire to work with a diverse population of students and making a difference in their communities. These factors were highly influential in deciding to teach in a high poverty school. Below are responses that are representative of teachers' strong desire to work with diverse students and make an impact in their lives:

I want to make a difference in the lives of students who grew up in a similar situation that I did.

I came to this school to be part of a greater change. I want to impact the student here, help them reach their academic goals, and help them succeed in additional skills they are working on.

I student taught at this school and came to love the students and families here. I enjoy working with students who are learning English or have other learning barriers, it is very rewarding to me.

Respondents also expressed that their proximity to the school, history in the community, and school culture were very influential in selecting a teaching assignment.

I live in this area. I know the community, how our community works, and how to help all.

I enjoy working in a Title 1 school. I get along well with the other teachers and my principal is very supportive.

I chose to work at my current school because it is close to my place of residence. I also find it rewarding to help students who are struggling and see them make very significant growth each year.

A smaller number of teachers listed financial factors, including the bonus as being reasons for choosing to work at their current schools.

The main reason I choose to stay at my Title 1 school is the the [sic] Bonus I receive from this stipend. It makes me feel valued by the state and worthwhile to stay at a more difficult Title 1 school.

I work there because it is title 1 and I have a chance to receive the high poverty bonus.

Influential Factors in Deciding to Continue Teaching at a High Poverty School

When asked what factors are important in deciding to continue teaching in a high poverty school, teachers generally shared factors that are not associated with monetary motives. The most common factor mentioned was having a supportive environment created by their leadership, colleagues, and the parents of students. Other intrinsic factors included those that align to the major reasons why many of the teachers choose to work at their current school, such as their opportunity to make an impact in students' lives as described above.

Factors for me to decide to stay are an environment where I feel challenged and yet, supported. I also stay because I feel as though I have made an impact on the community in a positive way. I would be far pressed to say that the money, especially that from the bonus, is a factor for me to stay. However, it is an extra incentive that I appreciate to acknowledge the work of myself and my students throughout the year.

Support for behaviors, consistency from administration

Support from admin and the district. Access to supplies I need to teach. Working with professional and dedicated coworkers.

Only 8 of the 92 teachers (9%) responded that salary was one reason for staying. Eight of the teachers (9%) explicitly stated that the salary bonus is influential.

Have programs such as the Effective Teachers in High Poverty Schools bonus helps so

much. I am able to put in extra work to support my students reach their academic needs, and feel a sense of financial support when I reach the percent needed to receive the bonus. Having supports for students and families is also important to me.

Job Satisfaction and Salary

Teachers were also asked to rate their satisfaction with their current salary (not satisfied; somewhat satisfied; satisfied; very satisfied; extremely satisfied). About 16% of teachers indicated that they were very or extremely satisfied with their current salary, 39% were satisfied, and 45% indicated that they were somewhat satisfied or not satisfied. When asked if they had considered leaving the teaching profession because of salary, about 53% of teachers responded “Yes” and 47% responded “No”.

Expectations Around Leaving the Teaching Profession

Survey respondents were asked whether they expect to leave the teaching profession within the next 12 months. In response, 86 teachers indicated “No” (98% of total respondents) while two teachers indicated that they expect to leave the teaching profession within the next 12 months (2%).

The teachers responding “Yes” were asked to specify the extent to which various reasons influenced their desire to leave the teaching profession within the next 12 months. Both educators indicated that family needs, burnout, and needing a higher salary were highly influential factors.

Expectations Around Leaving Their School

Teachers were asked whether they expect to move to a different school within the next 12 months. Only six teachers indicated that they expect to move to a different school. Of these teachers, dissatisfaction with school leadership was the most influential factor in their decision.

Recruitment and Retention

Like previous survey results, we did not find evidence that local education agencies (LEAs) are using the Effective Teachers in High Poverty Schools Incentive Program on a broad level for recruitment. When asked, “Prior to receiving the salary bonus, did you know about the Effective Teachers in High Poverty Schools Incentive Program?”, out of the 88 teachers who answered, 46 teachers or 52% percent indicated “No”. Those who indicated being aware of the program prior to receiving the salary bonus shared that they had learned about it through peers or leadership at their school.

To further examine if the salary bonus serves as a recruitment tool, teachers were asked if they had recently moved schools because they wanted to be eligible for the salary bonus. Out of the 16 teachers who reported having recently moved schools, only one teacher indicated that they moved because they wanted to be eligible for the salary bonus.

The subject of retention is a more difficult one to parse. As seen above, participant teachers in recent years have generally had a lower retention rate at their schools in the year following the award year. While over half of these teachers have considered leaving the teaching profession because of salary

(53%), their response to open-ended questions reveals that many of the teachers teach and stay teaching in a high poverty school for reasons not related to salary or performance-pay incentives.

When asked if the salary bonus has influenced their personal career decisions, 58 out of 88 teachers (66%) responded “Yes.” A review of their responses to this question shows that the salary bonus is viewed as a form of recognition and motivation by many of them.

Representative of such views, are the following responses:

It makes me feel valued, and since its a sizable amount I decide to stay at Title 1 each year.

As I stated, I'm at retirement age and the salary bonus that I should receive this year and next year has definitely influenced my decision to continue teaching.

Along with the satisfaction and motivation that comes from being valued and recognized, some teachers expressed that the bonus helped them to grow in the profession.

Having the opportunity to be rewarded for hard work, high expectations, and big goals has absolutely been an influential experience. It is so nice to receive that bonus after working so hard on helping students become successful.

Conclusion

The survey conducted in this evaluation does not find strong evidence that the salary bonus improves teacher retention. One-year retention at the school level is lower than the state average and only slightly higher than retention at comparable low-income schools. However, survey respondents indicate that their reasons for staying are dependent on a broader subset of factors than the bonus alone. Many indicated that school culture or their own altruistic motivations were more impactful in their decision to move to or remain at a high-poverty school. There is little evidence that the program is being used to recruit teachers at high poverty schools. Many teachers did describe the salary bonus as a welcome form of recognition for their efforts.