

North Carolina
Public School
Teachers:
*Reactions to Teacher
Evaluations and
Merit Pay*

Megan M. Oakes, MPA

Master of Public Administration
Department of Public and International Affairs
University of North Carolina, Wilmington
meganoakes4@gmail.com

Janna Siegel Robertson, Ph. D

Professor of Education
Watson College of Education
University of North Carolina, Wilmington
robertsonj@uncw.edu



May 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A survey on North Carolina teacher evaluation and merit pay was administered online to North Carolina public school teachers during April 2014. There were 800 respondents to this survey.

Teacher Evaluation:

- Over two-thirds of teachers agreed with their evaluation but only half believed they received helpful feedback for their teaching. Less than one fourth of teachers agreed that the teacher evaluation process would improve their teaching or student achievement
- Only 31% of teachers agreed that the process helped them to improve as a professional and 70% agreed that the process of evaluating their teaching performance takes more effort than the results are worth
- Over 70% of teachers believed that their most recent Standards 1 through 5 ratings accurately reflected their abilities, however, only 49% agreed that their most recent Standard 6 rating (EVAAS scores) accurately reflected their ability to contribute to the academic success of students

Standard 6 and use of EVAAS (student growth data):

- The majority of teachers reported insufficient training, time, and understanding of Standard 6 (student growth data) data to guide instruction
- Less than one in ten teachers predicted positive impact on teacher morale, teacher retention or improved teaching after 3 years of EVAAS data, while the majority predicted there would be a negative impact on teacher morale, teacher retention, and the quality of instruction

Student Assessment:

- Three out of four teachers agreed they spent too much instructional time helping students prepare for state-mandated assessments and even more teachers (85%) agreed their students spent too much time taking assessments
- Only 11% of teachers agreed the benefits to their students from required assessments are worth the investment of time and effort

Merit Pay:

- Less than 10% of teachers agreed that performance-based pay would incentivize teachers to work more effectively, attract more effective teachers into the profession, help retain more effective teachers in the profession, improve the quality of teaching at their school, or improving student learning
- The vast majority of teachers (89%) agreed that performance-based pay will disrupt the collaborative nature of teaching
- Only 1% of the teachers agreed that tying merit pay to career status would have a positive impact on teacher morale, retention, or the quality of teaching while the majority of teachers indicated this reform will have negative impacts

Race to the Top: Only 4% of teacher respondents agreed that they had a positive view of Race to the Top teacher evaluation standards

Teacher Future Plans: One in five teachers reported they plan to leave education in North Carolina as soon as they can

Purpose of the Study

Being one of twelve states to be awarded the Race to the Top (RttT) grant in 2010, North Carolina commenced a statewide initiative to standardize the teacher evaluation process across counties. Being a RttT grantee state, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) was required to expand its existing evaluation system to explicitly include student growth data as part of the evaluation process for each district. In 2012, the North Carolina State Board of Education officially included student growth as an integral component in the evaluation system for determining a teachers' effectiveness and adopted Standard 6: *The Ability to Contribute to the Academic Success of Students* calculated the SAS Institute's "Education Value-Added Assessment System" (EVAAS). Given its importance, teachers rated overall "ineffective" based on the included student growth data, which accumulates to 1/6 of the evaluation process, can ultimately face dismissal.

In the summer of 2013, the North Carolina legislature abolished career status (tenure) and created the Top 25% Law; a controversial merit pay system determined by a summative evaluation score that awards only the top 25% of teachers per district. Each school district is responsible for determining the weighted evaluation criteria for recognizing the top 25% of teachers who will be eligible to receive a four-year contract and a \$500 annual salary supplement in exchange for giving up their career status and due process rights. However, career status may be officially eliminated for every North Carolina teacher in 2018. The status of this law is uncertain since two school districts (Guilford and Durham) and North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) contested this law and we are awaiting final rulings on the state impact.

Recently released NCDPI statistics and survey results indicate that educators across the state have grown increasingly dissatisfied with these two recent educational reforms. Additionally, North Carolina currently ranks 46th in the nation in teacher pay and teachers are going on a seven year salary freeze, even during the wake of an economic recession. In Imig's and Smith's survey (2013), they found that over 96% of educators indicated that they believe public education in North Carolina is headed in the wrong direction and, as a result of the legislative changes, over 74% of North Carolina teachers and administrators said they were less likely to continue working as an educator in the state. In fact, as of 2013 about 1 out of every 7 teachers have left their LEA's, resulting in the largest turnover rate the state has witnessed in 5 years (NCDPI, 2013).

In light of the controversies with these two recent educational reforms, a statewide study was conducted to address the following research questions:

1. What are North Carolina teacher's views of their teacher evaluations? Focus was on the new Standard 6 which includes student growth data (EVAAS).
2. What are North Carolina teacher's views of the merit pay proposal? Focus was on the requirement of teachers to give up career status to receive the 4 year contract at the increased pay rate of \$500 additional per year.
3. What are North Carolina teacher's views of the impact of teacher evaluation and merit pay on teacher morale, teacher retention, and quality of instruction?

Method

Several survey questions were taken from Tennessee's Consortium on Research, Evaluation, and Development's *First to the Top Survey's* that were distributed in Tennessee from 2011 to 2013. The Consortium is responsible for carrying out a detailed, focused program of research as part of Tennessee's Race to the Top grant. Other survey items were added as a result of the literature review and primary research questions.

The survey was made available online in which the data was collected anonymously and remained strictly confidential. The survey questionnaire was distributed on SelectSurvey.net and comprised of 28 questions, 2 of which being open-ended for comments on evaluation and merit pay. The survey was open for the month of April, starting April 1 and closed April 30, 2014.

Timeline and Dissemination

Permission for this study was approved by UNCW's federally mandated Institutional Review Board (IRB) on March 31, 2014. During the first 10 days, approximately forty-six North Carolina official and unofficial education associations were contacted through personal emails or posted directly on their Facebook pages in hopes that they would pass along the survey to their members and colleagues (complete list available at request). Emails that were sent to the official associations included all executive directors, board members, and publicly available staff contact information on the main website. In some cases, easily accessible teacher emails were accessed in some school districts and sent invitations. Administrators in some districts were asked to disseminate the study to their teachers. Not all counties or schools were individually reached out to due to the enormous number of NC public schools.

Three professional associations promoted the survey description and link to participate on their official websites and social media pages. They included: The North Carolina Association for Educators (NCAE), the Professional Educators of North Carolina (PENC), and the NC Civic Education Consortium (NCCEC). Other associations promoted the survey explicitly on their social media pages alone, such as: the North Carolina Association of Elementary Educators (NCAEE), Public Schools First NC (PSFNC), and the NC STEM Learning Network.

Participants

The survey received a total of 800 responses from teachers out of 95,116 employed teachers in North Carolina for the 2013 Fiscal Year according to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI, 2014). Respondents represent 85 counties out of 100 counties in North Carolina; however, only 49 counties participated at a rate of 1% or more (with 1% equaling 4 or more respondents per county). The survey results yield a fairly representative sample of the different levels in teaching experience and grade levels. However, the results are consistent with subjects taught and highest level of degrees held by teachers. Demographic information is available by request.

Validity and Reliability Considerations

Although participants on this study were self-selected and made aware of the survey through emails, social media, and private and professional networks, attempts were given to gather a large sample size so a variety of North Carolina public school teachers from different areas of the state were included. Participants who were not teachers were excluded including counselors, administrators, librarians, media specialists, consultants, coaches, speech language pathologists, pre-K teachers, NCDPI Employees, and support staff. Respondents that did not identify grades/subjects taught or county they worked on the survey were also excluded since it was unclear if these individuals were K-12 teachers from North Carolina. These processes eliminated 34 surveys, leaving the 800 included.

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF MOST RECENT TEACHER EVALUATION

As part of being an evaluator in North Carolina, the State Board mandates that principals and peers are responsible for “Identifying the teacher’s strengths and areas for improvement and make recommendations for improving performance” (NCDPI, 2014). Component 6 of the evaluation process is a “Post-Observation Conference,” in which “The principal shall conduct a post-observation conference no later than ten school days after each formal observation. During the post-observation conference, the principal and teacher shall discuss and document on the Rubric the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher’s performance during the observed lesson” (NCDPI, 2014).

Findings

- 80% of teacher respondents understood their most recent evaluation
- 68% of teacher respondents agreed with their evaluation
- 50% of teacher respondents do not believe they received feedback helpful to their teaching

Table 1. Most Recent Teacher Evaluation.

Questions (number of respondents)	Yes	No	Not Sure
In regards to your most recent evaluation, did you understand why your evaluator rated you at the level he or she did? (n=797)	80%	13%	8%
Do you agree with the rating you received? (n=795)	68%	21%	11%
Thinking of your most recent observation, did you receive feedback designed to help you improve your teaching? (n=795)	46%	50%	4%

Participant Commentary

“The evaluation instrument itself is good for self-reflection and for discussion with evaluators. The process is very cumbersome for administrators, and the feedback I receive as a consequence is not especially helpful, as administrators are pressed for time and their comments are not thorough. I receive high marks in my evaluations - rightfully so I believe - but I don’t receive suggestions for improvement, and though I feel like I am successful, I do believe there is always room for improvement. However, I don’t think my administrators have the time to consider improvement for high performing teachers as they have so many other demands with their jobs and the evaluation process itself.”

“Administrators are stretched thin. Therefore evaluations are rarely, if ever, done to a full extent for experienced teachers. My last evaluation was never done, put in after the school year was over, and I never had a conference about it, even after emailing the administrator.”

“My principal saw me for all of ten minutes and gave me an excellent rating and no feedback. How is this helpful?”

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF EVALUATOR TIME ON OBSERVATION

In addition to requiring principals and peers to conduct observations, The North Carolina State Board of Education requires that a formal observation is to last at least 45 minutes or an entire class period. The principal is required to conduct at least 3 formal observations of all probationary teachers. A peer conducts 1 formal observation of a probationary teacher. During the year in which a career status teacher participates in a summative evaluation, the principal shall conduct at least 3 observations, including at least 1 formal observation.

Findings

- 44% of teacher respondents indicated they experienced only 30 minutes of observational time or less
- Only 52% of teacher respondents indicated that the amount of time the evaluator spent observing them was sufficient to make a valid observation

Table 2. Evaluator Observation Time.

How long does your evaluator typically spend in your classroom doing an observation?	Less than 10 minutes	10-20 minutes	20-30 minutes	30-45 minutes	More than 45 minutes
All Respondents (n=798)	5%	12%	28%	39%	17%

Do you believe that the amount of time the evaluator spent observing you was sufficient to make a valid evaluation?	Yes	No	Not Sure
All Respondents (n=795)	52%	38%	10%

Participant Commentary

“While administrators are qualified to give a fair evaluation, peers are not always and their evaluations count equally. 10 minutes for a teacher not familiar with my classes or curriculum does not give an accurate picture of what I do every day.”

“It is too difficult for administrators to observe the full effectiveness of a teacher during a 30-45 minute block of time. Seeing the planning and development of a unit/project/lesson is much more informative, but time is not available so teachers are given random ratings that are difficult for administrators to validate, and more difficult for teachers to invalidate.”

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STANDARDS 1-5 AND THE NEW STANDARD 6

Standards 1-5 originated in 1998 when the North Carolina Professional Teacher Standards and Evaluation System were developed. When NC was awarded RttT in 2010, Standard 6 was introduced which included student growth information calculated as EVAAS scores. The Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation research report (2013) on teacher evaluations reported that a majority of teachers (89%-91%) were rated as “proficient” or “accomplished” in each of the five Standards. According to the NCDPI, 79% of North Carolina teachers received a Standard 6 rating of “Meeting Expected Growth” or “Exceeding Expected Growth” for the 2012-2013 school year, leaving only 20% “Not Meeting Expected Growth.”

Findings

- Over 70% of teacher respondents believed that their most recent Standards 1 through 5 ratings accurately reflected their abilities
- However, only 49% agreed that their most recent Standard 6 rating (EVAAS scores) accurately reflected their ability to contribute to the academic success of students

Table 3. Standards 1 - 6 of the Teacher Evaluation Process.

Questions (number of respondents)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. I believe that my most recent Standard 1 rating accurately reflects my ability to demonstrate leadership. (n=778)	6.30%	20.95%	57.58%	15.17%
b. I believe that my most recent Standard 2 rating accurately reflects my ability to establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students. (n=769)	5.07%	19.90%	61.51%	13.52%
c. I believe that my most recent Standard 3 rating accurately reflects my knowledge of the content appropriate to my teaching specialty. (n=767)	5.08%	16.95%	61.93%	16.04%
d. I believe that my most recent Standard 4 rating accurately reflects my ability to facilitate learning. (n=762)	5.12%	21.92%	59.45%	13.52%
e. I believe that my most recent Standard 5 rating accurately reflects my ability to reflect on my own practice. (n=764)	5.89%	22.38%	59.29%	12.43%
f. I believe that my most recent Standard 6 rating accurately reflects my ability to contribute to the academic success of students. (n=765)	20.13%	30.59%	41.31%	7.97%

Participant Commentary

“It is a joke. I get excellent ratings, and my EVAAS scores have been among the highest. That being said, the value added program is a failure. It has limited evidence that it is fair or effective, and our state jumps in with both feet.”

“As a visual arts teacher, my Standard 6 comes from the overall school meeting growth. Because we were so highly ranked already, we did not meet growth; therefore, my score for standard 6 is considered weak/not proficient. I have my National Board certification and a Master's degree. My students always receive high honors. My evaluations are high (mostly distinguished) except for Standard 6. My Standard 6 reflects that I am terrible. This is a disconnect.”

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER EVALUATION PROCESS

All North Carolina Professional Educator Evaluation Systems are to include: (NCDPI, 2014)

1. Their purpose is to support and promote effective leadership, quality teaching, and student learning
2. The design is a growth model to improve instruction and enhance professional practice
3. The evaluation instruments are based on the Framework for 21st Century Learning and the Standards for Professional Learning
4. They are flexible enough to be fair to all educators of varying levels of experience and school settings
5. The rubrics are formative in nature based on a rating scale from developing through distinguished
6. Multiple data sources, artifacts, and evidence will be used in assessing educator performance
7. They will provide the basis for performance goals and professional development activities

Findings

- 58% agreed that the processes used to conduct their teacher evaluation are fair to them
- 58% agreed the teacher evaluation process causes them a lot of stress
- Only 31% agreed that the process helped them to improve as a professional
- 70% agreed that the process of evaluating their teaching performance takes more effort than the results are worth
- 38% agreed that the teacher evaluation process clearly defines what is expected of them
- 63% agreed that their evaluators were qualified to evaluate their teaching
- Only 26% agreed that the teacher evaluation process would improve their teaching
- Only 19% agreed that the teacher evaluation process would improve their student achievement
- Only 36% were satisfied with their teacher evaluation process

Table 4. Teacher Evaluation Process Used at School.

Question (number of respondents)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. The processes used to conduct my teacher evaluation are fair to me. (n=779)	10.14%	32.22%	51.99%	5.65%
b. The teacher evaluation process causes me a lot of stress. (n=785)	8.54%	33.38%	35.54%	22.55%
c. The teacher evaluation process helps me improve as a professional. (n=777)	21.11%	47.23%	28.70%	2.96%
d. The process of evaluating my teaching performance takes more effort than the results are worth. (n=781)	3.97%	25.61%	46.61%	23.82%
e. The teacher evaluation process clearly defines what is expected of me. (n=781)	16.13%	46.35%	34.70%	2.82%
f. My evaluators are qualified to evaluate my teaching. (n=773)	12.42%	24.32%	54.72%	8.54%
g. The teacher evaluation process used in my school will improve my teaching. (n=778)	21.47%	52.70%	23.65%	2.19%
h. The teacher evaluation process used in my school will improve my students' achievement. (n=782)	29.67%	51.41%	17.39%	1.53%
i. Overall, I am satisfied with the teacher evaluation process used in my school. (n=778)	19.15%	45.24%	33.93%	1.67%

Participant Commentary

“Most of it is a popularity contest. The administrators hardly ever give negative evaluations even to the most ineffective teachers.”

“My recent administrator didn't believe in giving ‘accomplished’ so everyone here is just ‘proficient’.”

“I believe the evaluations at my current school are fair but at my previous school within the same county was very strongly influenced by personal bias of the evaluator. Having been in multiple schools within the county, it is clear that the evaluation process is very subjective even when supposedly using the same rubric. How is it fair to tie payment to such a subjective process? Clean up the process before tying pay to it.”

“The evaluation process is a complete waste of time. It is long, onerous, and pointless. The lowest ranking is an insult, and the highest ranking is impossible.”

“The administrators at our school tells us that it is impossible for me to get rated distinguished in any category, it is difficult to receive Accomplished and we should be happy if we receive Proficient. We would never grade our students on a scale where they could not receive 100% and we should be happy with 25-50%.”

“Based on the criteria and what my observers are asked to observe in the evaluation, I believe that my evaluation is ‘fair,’ but does it accurately reflect my skills and abilities as a teacher? No.”

“There is an inconsistency in using the evaluation system from administrator to administrator, school to school, and district to district. Due to this the validity of the instrument, which determines my continued employment, is strongly in question.”

“Although I receive excellent ratings, I do not value the instrument used to evaluate the system. I recently used the system as a career teacher to evaluate a new teacher. This took more than 4 hours of my time to complete between preconference, observation in classroom, post conference, and completing the EVAAS forms.”

“The human impact is not factored into the evaluation system. People with little or no knowledge of specific program areas or core subjects are being evaluated by administrators with little or no teaching experience. It is offensive.”

“I am a band director. We are put in to a box that evaluates math, science and English teachers. If you have no knowledge of music (which most people don't) then it is unfair to have an administrator evaluate me based on their knowledge alone. If I am going to be evaluated then have someone who is my peer do it, who understands what I am doing, and could give me constructive criticism. I feel like the current evaluation is too concrete and we need a more organic process to grow music education. Unless the administrator was in my profession, I do not believe they have any reason to evaluate me on how well I do as a music teacher.”

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STANDARD 6

Standard 6 includes EVAAS data that was first reported to teachers on October, 2013. According to the NCDPI (2013) Frequently Asked Questions, “Since there is so much room for error in a single test score, student-level growth data is also not provided in EVAAS reporting. . . . When we aggregate many students from a teacher’s classes, we can obtain an estimate of the teacher’s effectiveness that is substantially more reliable than the individual student estimate. Additionally, SBE policy requires three years of value-added data before an educator receives a status of highly effective, effective, or in need of improvement.”

Findings

- 29% of teacher respondents reported adequate training to help them utilize Standard 6 (student growth data) data to guide instruction
- 14% of teacher respondents reported enough time built into their schedule to review Standard 6 data
- 62% of teacher respondents reported struggles with understanding how to change my practice through the use of Standard 6 data
- 48% of teacher respondents reported a clear expectation within this school that teachers should use Standard 6 data to guide instruction

Table 5. Standard 6.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements based on your experiences during the 2012-2013 school year? (number of respondents)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. I receive adequate training to help me utilize Standard 6 data to guide instruction. (n=781)	24.71%	46.22%	27.53%	1.54%
b. There is enough time built into my schedule to review Standard 6 data. (n=777)	38.35%	48.01%	12.74%	0.90%
c. I struggle with understanding how to change my practice through the use of Standard 6 data. (n=777)	8.88%	29.09%	49.29%	12.74%
d. There is a clear expectation within this school that teachers should use Standard 6 data to guide instruction. (n=774)	15.25%	36.56%	42.25%	5.94%

Participant Commentary

“While I myself have been rated as Accomplished on 1-5 and Exceeds Growth on 6, I am not given any data about what my students did or did not understand. The data returned to us is not useful to guide instruction.”

“Although my Standard 6 results are positive this year, showing high growth, I worry about the high emphasis being placed on Standard 6 and feel it rests on 2 assumptions that I question: 1) That the tests are valid. In English, I do not think the tests are the best indicators of learning. 2) That ranking teachers is of benefit. The system does not reward collaboration--within or among schools. It's a competitive rather than collaborative model. The winners require losers to win. I have no problem with that in sports. I just don't think it makes sense for teaching children.”

TEACHER PREDICTIONS OF FUTURE IMPACT OF STANDARD 6

In North Carolina, no teacher will receive an official effectiveness status until there are three years of growth data attributable to that teacher (NCDPI, 2013). Since North Carolina schools are only in the second year of implementing new evaluation standards, it is recognized that teachers may not be able to tell the impacts that are occurring until the third year when EVAAS scores are officially used to determine teacher effectiveness in 2015. Despite the limitations acknowledged by using only one year of student growth data, this measure was still used for determining merit pay on yearly evaluations.

Findings

- 4% of teacher respondents predicted positive impact on teacher morale after 3 years of EVAAS data, while 89% predicted there would be a negative impact
- 3% of teacher respondents predicted positive impact on teacher retention after 3 years of EVAAS data, while 79% predicted there would be a negative impact
- 9% of teacher respondents predicted positive impact on quality instruction after 3 years of EVAAS data, while 54% predicted there would be a negative impact

Table 6. EVAAS scores after Third Year.

After teachers are eligible to be rated on their EVAAS scores in the third year, how do you predict the use of student growth data will affect the: (number of respondents)	Strong Negative Impact	Negative Impact	No Impact	Positive Impact	Strong Positive Impact
a. Morale of teachers in your building (n=791)	43.99%	44.63%	7.59%	3.54%	0.25%
b. Retention of teachers in your building (n=789)	37.90%	41.06%	18.25%	2.66%	0.13%
c. Quality of instruction in your building (n=784)	24.74%	29.21%	36.99%	8.67%	0.38%

Participant Commentary

“Never has my morale been this low, and I work in a great school with wonderful children. It highly discourages me from continuing in this career field when I am not valued as an educator.”

“I feel when education reaches the point to rate teachers based on their EVAAS scores that you will see a negative impact of teacher morale. The quality of teaching will remain but the excitement and willingness of teachers to go the extra mile will disappear.”

“I don't believe that evaluating teachers using Standard 6 is a fair and just practice. As a teacher of students with special needs, my scores on this standard will not be reflective of my ability to teach. Instead, these scores will reflect the challenges that my students face every day in the classroom as children with learning disabilities.”

“A more complex process is not necessarily a better process. The use of data to create objectivity only works if the data is relevant, meaningful, and accurate; otherwise it creates a false sense of objectivity, which is worse than no sense of objectivity at all.”

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

All North Carolina students from grades 3rd to 8th are required to take the End-of-Grade (EOG) tests and from 9th to 12th grade take the End-of-Course (EOC) tests to assess their mastery of the content areas as mandated in the North Carolina State Standards (Core and Essential). These tests are used for calculating Standard 6 data for all teachers who teach grade levels eligible to take the EOG's and EOC's, including those who teach special needs children. Many district tests are also given, usually as benchmark tests to determine student progress on the standards.

Findings

- 75% of the teacher respondents agreed they spent too much instructional time helping students prepare for state-mandated assessments
- 66% of the teacher respondents agreed they spent too much instructional time helping students prepare for district-mandated assessments
- 85% of the teacher respondents agreed their students spent too much time taking assessments
- 60% of the teacher respondents agreed their students try their best on state mandated tests
- Only 11% of the teacher respondents agreed the benefits to their students from required assessments are worth the investment of time and effort

Table 7. Student Assessments.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning assessment during the 2012-2013 school year. (number of respondents)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. I spend too much instructional time helping students prepare for state-mandated assessments. (n=784)	2.30%	22.70%	41.71%	33.29%
b. I spend too much instructional time helping students prepare for district-required assessments. (n=777)	2.96%	30.63%	37.19%	29.21%
c. My students spend too much time taking assessments. (n=779)	1.03%	14.25%	35.04%	49.68%
d. The majority of my students try their best on state mandated assessments. (n=780)	10.77%	29.23%	45.51%	14.49%
e. Overall, the benefits to my students from required assessments are worth the investment of my time and effort. (n=780)	46.54%	43.21%	8.33%	1.92%

Participant Commentary

“I teach students with autism. Despite demonstrating strong classroom growth in academic, social, and communication skills, my students do not perform well on standardized tests. They do not understand the relevance of the process. . .Last year, one of my students progressed from a first to a third grade level of reading but just chose A on his EOG. Now he and I are both labeled failures.”

“The overemphasis on high stakes testing narrows the curriculum, stifles innovation, and destroys true academic excellence.”

“The weight of these tests makes it very difficult to not ‘teach to the test,’ and in my experience, this does not improve student readiness for college. I don't remember taking many multiple-choice tests in college.”

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STATE MANDATED MERIT PAY

As previously noted, educators have been subjected to a law passed by the North Carolina state legislature in 2013 that eliminated tenure/due process rights in exchange of a merit pay bonus of \$500, only awarding the top 25% of teachers based on their summative evaluation scores.

Findings

- Less than 10% of teacher respondents agreed that performance-based pay would have the following positive impacts:
 - cause teachers to work more effectively
 - attract more effective teachers into the profession
 - help retain more effective teachers in the profession
 - improving the quality of teaching at my school
 - Improving student learning
- 89% of the teacher respondents agreed that performance-based pay will disrupt the collaborative nature of teaching in their school

Table 8. Merit Pay.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about merit pay for teachers? (number of respondents)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Performance-based pay will cause teachers to work more effectively. (n=790)	61.90%	29.37%	7.72%	1.01%
b. Performance-based pay will attract more effective teachers into the profession. (n=786)	64.63%	28.63%	5.98%	0.76%
c. Performance-based pay will help retain more effective teachers in the profession. (n=785)	64.20%	26.50%	8.15%	1.15%
d. Performance-based pay will be successful at improving the quality of teaching at my school. (n=785)	65.22%	28.28%	5.86%	0.64%
e. If performance-based pay is implemented at my school, students learning will improve. (n=785)	63.69%	30.45%	5.10%	0.76%
f. Performance-based pay will disrupt the collaborative nature of teaching. (n=788)	4.57%	6.85%	23.60%	64.97%
g. Performance-based pay will cause resentment among teachers at my school. (n=791)	3.92%	4.30%	27.31%	64.48%
h. Performance-based pay will negatively impact my school. (n=785)	4.71%	5.73%	25.35%	64.20%

Participant Commentary

“If you want quality instructional practices happening in every classroom, then performance-based pay is counter-intuitive. It discourages collaboration and creates a competitive atmosphere in the educational environment. Why would I want to share my best practices so you can improve? If your growth for students is higher than mine, then I may no longer get a salary boost.”

“Teaching should be collaborative. If teachers are going to be pitted against one another for ‘top spots’ they will quickly stop helping out their neighbors.”

“So long as test scores are the only measurement of teacher ‘merit,’ this change will have a devastating impact on student learning. My classes are becoming increasingly test-prep oriented because that is my only chance for a raise. I can get good test scores if that's what the state wants, but it's not what my students need.”

“Merit pay will drive good teachers away from low-performing schools. It's not that teachers don't believe they can impact students, but there are too many others variables at play when it comes to student performance.”

“I was chosen as part of the 25% of teachers this time based on the rating system my LEA came up with but I declined to give up my tenure. Merit pay is the most ridiculous implementation I have ever seen as an educator. The criteria for choosing the teachers on the list were vague. As an art educator or special education teacher or media specialist, one would never expect to see pay if it were based on test scores alone.”

“This is not fair to those courageous teachers that volunteer to work with special needs students. Most of these students will not pass end of grade tests. You will have great teachers not want to work with inclusion students because it will affect their pay. Those are the kids that need great teachers. I love working with special needs students and it is truly rewarding, but if merit pay is implemented I will be punished for my passion.”

“If the state would just pay teachers a fair wage then they would not have to worry so much about this because there would be enough good teachers that would stay in the profession that they wouldn't have to try to weed out the bad teachers.”

“I believe the incidents of cheating by individual teachers and system wide with increase exponentially. When so much rides on the results of one test I think cheating is inevitable.”

“Merit-based pay will lead to teachers competing with each other, and students (or teachers) cheating on testing just to gain the upper hand. Issues like this have sprung up across the U.S. when districts or schools were given bonuses for high achievement. If we move to this style of program, it is inevitable for something like that to happen in North Carolina.”

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF TYING CAREER STATUS TO MERIT PAY

In order to assess implications of offering a merit pay bonus in exchange of career status in North Carolina, three main variables were measured through perceptions of survey respondents: impacts on teacher morale, the quality of instruction and retention.

Findings

- Only 1% of the teacher respondents agreed that tying merit pay to career status would have a positive impact on teacher morale, retention or quality of instruction
- 95% of the teacher respondents reported that tying merit pay to career status would have a negative impact on teacher morale
- 84% of the teacher respondents reported that tying merit pay to career status would have a negative impact on teacher retention
- 53% of the teacher respondents reported that tying merit pay to career status would have a negative impact on quality of instruction

Table 9. Eliminate Career Status in exchange for Merit Pay.

To what extent has the legislative change to eliminate career status in exchange for merit pay affected the: (number of respondents)	Strong Negative Impact	Negative Impact	No Impact	Positive Impact	Strong Positive Impact
a. Morale of teachers in your building (n=788)	74.11%	21.70%	3.17%	0.63%	0.38%
b. Retention of teachers in your building (n=788)	50.76%	33.12%	15.23%	0.63%	0.25%
c. Quality of instruction in your building (n=782)	27.11%	26.34%	45.40%	0.64%	0.51%

Participant Commentary

“Quite frankly, the merit pay is a bone being thrown at teachers who are desperate to pay their bills.”

“I have to work 3 jobs and eat ramen noodles 5 to 7 days for at least one of my meals just to barely scrape by. . . This is all with cutting out cable, getting a different car for a lower car payment, cutting out all meals out, gym membership, haircuts, any and all things extra, and I still can't seem to make ends meet. Merit pay won't work for people like me because I'm working too hard to stay in this profession as it is.”

“There are so many different variables to student performance that merit pay is completely ridiculous. If things don't change, I will be joining many of my co-workers in looking for a different occupation. My passion is teaching but this is the last straw.”

“Due to the implementation of merit pay in NC I have chosen to relocate to another state that does not have merit pay and that evaluates in an objective manner. I came to NC after teaching in both Florida and Georgia and NC, by far, is the worst state to teach in. They do not treat their teachers in a professional manner, they underpay their teachers and overwork them, and do not have adequate discipline for their students.”

“At least seven teachers (out of thirty-five) are guaranteed to leave my school this year due to the new legislation. Two resigned mid-year and will not remain in the profession. Three more will also leave the profession. The impact is heavy and negative.”

“There is no way to equitably institute a merit pay system for teachers in North Carolina. It is a waste of taxpayer money and will do nothing to retain teachers or to improve the quality of the teaching force.”

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNOR’S TEACHER NETWORK

Gov. Pat McCrory and State Superintendent June Atkinson recently announced the establishment of the Governor's Teacher Network, through which teachers will apply to serve for one year as content experts for North Carolina's Race to the Top initiatives. Teachers will be paid \$10,000.

Findings

- Less than 5% of teacher respondents reported any positive impact of the Governor’s Teacher Network on teacher morale, retention or quality of instruction
- Teacher respondents overwhelmingly reported negative or no impact of this new program

Table 10. Governor’s Teacher Network Program.

To what extent do you predict the Governors Teacher Network program will affect the: (number of respondents)	Strong Negative Impact	Negative Impact	No Impact	Positive Impact	Strong Positive Impact
a. Morale of teachers in your building (n=786)	27.99%	21.76%	47.20%	2.42%	0.64%
b. Retention of teachers in your building (n=779)	23.49%	18.87%	55.84%	1.28%	0.51%
c. Quality of instruction in your building (n=776)	19.85%	13.66%	61.86%	3.87%	0.77%

Participant Commentary

“Money would be better spent raising the salaries of all teachers so that the profession is more attractive and competitive.”

“We are losing teachers too quickly to find replacements now, so future prospects are terrifying. Long-term subs are already being used. Parents and students complain that they cannot receive a proper education in these conditions.”

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF RACE TO THE TOP

To be competitive for Race to the Top grants, North Carolina had to demonstrate a commitment to reforming K-12 education across four interconnected areas: adopting standards and assessments, building data systems, supporting teachers and principals, and improving the lowest-achieving schools.

Findings

- Only 17% of teacher respondents reported confidence that the Race to the Top student performance targets for the grade levels in my school were attainable, while 18% were unsure of expected targets
- Only 13% of teacher respondents agreed that the Race to the Top teacher evaluation standards will have a positive impact on student achievement or teaching practices
- 51% of teacher respondents agreed that the Race to the Top teacher evaluation standards were being implemented as intended
- 30% of teacher respondents agreed that the Race to the Top teacher evaluation reform efforts were clearly communicated to them
- Only 4% of teacher respondents agreed that they had a positive view of Race to the Top teacher evaluation standards

Table 11. Race to the Top Student Performance Targets and Evaluation.

I have confidence that the Race to the Top student performance targets for the grade levels in my school are attainable. (number of respondents)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I am unsure of targets
(n=769)	29%	36%	15%	2%	18%

Question (number of respondents)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Overall, RttT teacher evaluation standards will have a positive impact on student achievement. (n=757)	33.69%	53.24%	12.95%	0.13%
b. Overall, RttT teacher evaluation standards will have a positive impact on teaching practices at my school. (n=751)	34.35%	52.46%	13.05%	0.13%
c. My school is implementing the RttT teacher evaluation standards the way there were intended. (n=736)	16.71%	32.07%	47.83%	3.40%
d. I feel that the main elements of NC's RttT teacher evaluation reform efforts were clearly communicated to me. (n=744)	28.09%	41.80%	27.42%	2.69%
e. Overall, I have a positive view of RttT teacher evaluation standards. (n=743)	78.60%	23.01%	3.36%	0.67%

Participant Commentary

"I believe that ALL stake holders, parents, students AND teachers should be held accountable for these scores; NOT just the teachers. If a kid knows, which they do, that the test doesn't hurt them one way or the other; but, can hurt their teacher, they will not put forth any effort! NOT all kids will do this, but there are some that will! I feel this is WRONG!"

TEACHERS PLANS TO STAY IN EDUCATION

There have been recent news reports of high rates of teacher resignations in North Carolina. On April 9, 2014, Wake County had a press release in which they announced that more than 600 of their public school teachers have resigned mid-year and that the County's turnover rate up 41% from last year. Simultaneously the same day, NC State College of Education announced that they are going to witness a 20% reduction in college students entering into education next year.

Findings

- 24% of teacher respondents are undecided as to how long they plan to stay in education in North Carolina
- 23% of teacher respondents plan to stay until eligible for retirement benefits
- 21% of the teacher respondents plan to leave education in North Carolina as soon as they can
- 15% plan to remain in education in North Carolina as long as they can

Table 12. Future Plans to stay in NC Education.

How long do you plan to remain in education in North Carolina? (n=793)	Response Percent
As long as I am able.	15%
Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from this job.	23%
Until I am eligible for Social Security benefits.	1%
Until a specific life event occurs (e.g., parenthood, marriage).	3%
Definitely plan to leave as soon as I can.	21%
Undecided at this time.	24%
Other, please specify :	13%

Question (n=794)	Yes	No	I don't know	If not, why?
Do you plan to return to your current school next year?	66%	5%	18%	11%

Reasons for leaving mentioned in comments included: switching careers due to an unsustainable income, moving to another state to take a higher paying teaching position, retiring early, burned out from stress and low morale, and disapproval of reforms that have occurred in the past four past years.

Participant Commentary

"I frequently feel disrespected as an educator and a professional, not by my school leadership or my colleagues, but by the government and NC legislators. I have considered/am considering leaving the profession because teachers are not valued. I have a master's degree, 9 years of experience, and stellar test scores (100% proficiency and high growth in most courses) and I make \$32,000 a year. I am constantly treated with distrust, disloyalty and disrespect by the people who are supposed to have the best interest of citizens in mind and at heart (the government)."

"I went from being a standout in my district in Florida to feeling like my administrators don't see my value. I often regret moving here because of this state's emphasis on testing and test scores, as well as the current legislature's obvious disdain for teachers. I am actively pursuing a job in other states. I could not wait to move here, for many years. Now that I am here, I cannot wait to leave."