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Perceptions of Educational Leaders of Incentive Pay Programs

by

Kena Lashel Worley

November 5, 2013

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

Perceptions of Educational Leaders of Incentive Pay Programs

by

Kena Lashel Worley

This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

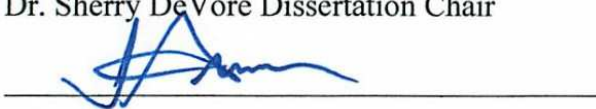
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Dr. Sherry DeVore Dissertation Chair

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Kena Lashel Worley

Signature: Kena L. Worley Date: 11-11-13

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Finally, I am very thankful to be a child of God and rely on His guidance and direction for my life. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my family who supported me, prayed for me, and filled in the gaps when I could not. My husband, Ryan, supported and pushed me beyond what I thought was possible, and my mother, Jane, showed unconditional love on a daily basis. Even though he cheered me on from heaven, my father, Ken, has always been and continues to be my constant motivation. He taught me the meaning and value of hard work and the importance of education. Without each of them, I would not be where I am today.

## **Abstract**

In this study, the perceptions of educational leaders of incentive pay programs, including Missouri's Career Ladder Program were examined. A mixed-methods design provided a process by which student achievement, professional development, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers were viewed through the lens of Marzano's (2003) Teacher Level Factors that influence student achievement. The population for the study consisted of educational leaders and educators in Missouri. The sample group was comprised of four public school superintendents, four professional development chairs, four leaders in professional education organizations, four Missouri public school board presidents, and approximately 83 Missouri public school teachers. Interviews and survey data were collected and analyzed. Four themes emerged from the study: the effectiveness of Missouri's Career Ladder Program as related to increasing student achievement, the effectiveness of incentive pay programs as related to increasing student achievement, the components of an effective professional development program, and motivation for teachers. Findings indicated positive perceptions of incentive pay programs, including Missouri's Career Ladder Program, which were thought to enhance professional development, the retention of high quality and effective teachers, and ultimately increased student achievement. Even though details of incentive pay programs vary greatly, teacher motivation and increased student achievement were consistent findings among participants. The perceptions of educators from this study may serve district and state educational leaders in future decision-making and implementation of incentive pay programs.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

According to Danielson (2009), “the capstone of any school improvement effort is the quality of teaching, which represents the single most important aspect of any school’s program for enduring student success” (p. 106) .With instructional quality as the main determiner in student achievement, it is imperative that teachers, as professionals, continue to study best practices in instruction (Danielson, 2009). Weiss (2005) contended that professional development provides the opportunity to increase staff quality. Similarly, DuFour and Marzano (2012) reported, “effective teachers have a profound influence on student achievement and ineffective teachers do not” (p. 75).

The U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, espoused, “Teachers don’t get enough support or the mentoring they need. They struggle with classroom management skills. Those master and mentor teachers helping them through rough days is hugely important. We have to build real career ladders” (as cited in Barseghian, 2010, para.13).

Professional development programs that help teachers gain knowledge and implement best practices into their instruction ultimately lead to increased student achievement and are needed to meet the demands of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Johnson, Kahle, & Fargo, 2007). One professional development incentive pay program focused on increasing student achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers, was Missouri’s Career Ladder Program.

### **Background of the Study**

The old maxim, “What gets measured gets done,” can be applied to the educational setting in the sense that what gets measured or assessed becomes the focus of

what gets accomplished (Wilson, Crosson, & Atkinson, 2004). With this principle in mind, educational leaders have closely examined professional development and incentive programs, and reviewed the legislative acts that have mandated accountability measures.

When educators fully to understand the specific criteria handed down through the Excellence in Education Act of 1985, the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993, and more recently NCLB, analysis of individual district professional development plans and incentive programs, such as Missouri's Career Ladder Program becomes necessary (Honowar & Olson, 2008). One time U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard Riley (2003), concurred:

The development of national and state standards will have significant and long-term implications for the professional development of teachers. Providing students with opportunities for high-quality instruction will require us to begin to view professional development as a necessity and not merely an add-on, and as an integral part of the daily work of teachers rather than an occasional break from classroom instruction. (p. 1)

With the standards for educational accountability increasing each year, school districts are continually evaluating their curriculum, programs, and state and national test scores in an effort to meet and exceed these standards (Burk, Holliday, & Dick, 2004). In an effort to "reward excellent educators for the work they do over and above what is required of good educators" (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], 2008, p. 1) the MODESE implemented Missouri's Career Ladder Program which was derived from the Missouri Career Development and Teacher

Excellence which was established by the national Excellence in Education Act of 1985 (MODESE, 2008).

Career Ladder was a three-tier program of opportunities for teachers to earn a salary supplement for spending a minimum of 60 hours outside of contracted time in appropriate, approved activities (MODESE, 2008), such as tutoring students to increase achievement. School districts that chose to participate in Missouri's Career Ladder Program developed a plan and submitted the plan to the MODESE by April 15<sup>th</sup> of the year prior to participation (MODESE, 2008).

Participating school districts were required to pay up to 60% of the Career Ladder monies earned by teachers, while the MODESE (2008) supported the program with the remaining percentage (MODESE, 2008).

For the 2008-2009 school year, there were 348 Missouri public school districts, representing 18,000 teachers, that participated in the Career Ladder Program (MODESE, 2009). The total cost to the state of Missouri was \$37,065, 214. (MODESE, 2009).

During the 2009-2010 legislative sessions funding for the program was eliminated due to economic constraints.

When academic performance is one element of determining school funding, districts are forced to ensure that the curriculum, programs, and educators in the district are constantly evaluated, analyzed, and improved (Monk, 2007). In an effort to increase student achievement, school districts employ various programs and strategies. Often increasing student achievement begins by examining the instructional practices presented to students (National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2007).

**Accountability for increasing student achievement.** According to the MODESE (2008), “The Outstanding Schools Act calls for increased accountability in improving student academic performance for all of Missouri’s public school districts and school buildings” (p. 5) With federal legislation such as the NCLB Act tying funding directly to student achievement and school performance, and similar demands being made on schools at state and local levels, every decision educators make must directly or indirectly relate to the goal of increasing student achievement (Smith, 2005; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapely, 2008).

To clearly articulate the goal of increasing student achievement, the reasons behind and the avenues to achieve the goal, public school districts must be guided by federal and state mandates (Yoon et al., 2008). In an ever-changing society, educational leaders must accept the challenge of increasing standards. According to the Associated Content’s Education column (2007):

There is a desire to fill a particular educational gap in society. Some teachers love learning and want to share their knowledge with others. They want to help someone else learn new things and improve their skills. These teachers are a great benefit to our society and the children within it. (para. 5)

Improving student achievement is the goal of educators even without the legislative mandates (Dearman & Alber, 2005). Whether motivated by desire or mandate, it is important to set standards, create benchmarks, and establish a common language to be used (Danielson, 2002).

**Professional development for educators.** Professional development has been a topic of research and discussion since its beginnings in the early 1970s (Liebierman & Miller, 1978). Generally defined, “professional development is the process of ensuring that professionals are constantly learning techniques and information about how to better their skills in their jobs (eLead, 2010, para. 1). This process was established to help educators learn and improve in their field, which ultimately leads to increased student achievement (Timperely, 2008). For practicing teachers to stay current and learn the latest techniques and strategies in education, continuous, systematic professional development is necessary (eLead, 2010, para. 1).

In 1993, the MODESE mandated that, “a school district shall allocate one percent of monies received pursuant to Section 163.410, RSMo., exclusive of categorical additions, to the Professional Development Committee (PDC) of the district as established in subdivision (1) of subsection 4 of section 168.400 RSMo” (MODESE, 2010, p. 4). The MODESE (2010) also provided detailed funding guidelines for district professional development programs. As of August 2010, The Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 was modified with the passage of House Bill 1543: “During a period in which the school funding formula is not fully funded, school districts will not be held accountable for the dedicated 1% allocation to professional development, but all other legislated professional development requirements are still in place” (Professional Development Guideline and Changes, 2010, Missouri House Bill 1543, section 163.410).

**Retention of high quality and effective teachers.** Current Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, posited, “Our ability to attract and retain teachers will shape the future of education in the next 25-30 years,” (Barseghian, 2010, para 4). In an effort to



retain high quality and effective teachers, some districts have considered incentive pay programs. According to Honawar and Olson (2008), “The interest in pay-for-performance systems stems from the growing recognition that some teachers are far more effective than others in raising student achievement, and that teachers—like other workers—may respond to monetary incentives,” (p. 26).

Monetary incentives are often used to increase performance in various professions (Hayes, 2006). In the 1980s, merit or performance pay for teachers made sense to political and business leaders who supported the incentives in an effort to promote increased performance and student achievement; however, most merit pay endeavors were wrought with problems (Epstein, Sanders, & Sheldon, 2009). By the late 1990s, most states had abandoned the idea (Southern Regional Education Board, 2002).

Missouri was one of the states that attempted to pay effective teachers more money for their service above and beyond their contracted time. The Career Ladder Program was developed in 1985, and Missouri was one of six states to create such a program in an effort to “provide students opportunities for enhanced learning experiences, remedial assistance, and various extended day/year activities” (Wieberg, 2007, p. 2). Missouri continued the Career Ladder Program until 2010 when legislators discontinued state funding due to budget concerns.

With the increased pressure on educators derived from the strict guidelines and benchmarks mandated by NCLB, professional development is seen as one way to drive increased student achievement by improving and retaining effective teachers (Laine & Otto, 2000). This study sought to examine the effectiveness of incentive pay programs, including Missouri’s Career Ladder Program, by exploring the perceptions of Missouri

public school superintendents, board of education presidents, teachers, and representative from state and national professional educational organizations as related to increasing student achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the U.S. Secretary's Fifth Annual Report on Teacher Quality (2006), it is imperative that states continue to improve student achievement, and teacher quality is critical in securing the educational future of the nation. Educators are, however, increasingly pressured to accomplish more. One only has to look at the national mandates of NCLB, and the yearly increased performance steps laid out by this Act, to realize the expectations for student growth increases significantly each year culminating in 2014 with all students performing at grade level as evaluated by individual state standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). These mandates leave little time for trial and error and self reflection as to what are effective strategies for professional development and retention of quality teachers that ultimately lead to increased student achievement (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005). Research is scarce regarding motivators for teacher retention and professional growth, such as incentive pay opportunities, (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2009).

The goal of education is increased student achievement (Marzano, 2007). This goal is obtained through student contact with high quality and effective teachers (Darling-Hammon & Richardson, 2009). Teachers hone their skills to become high quality and effective educators through intentional professional development (Darling-Hammon & Richardson, 2009). Guskey and Yoon (2009) stated:

Since districts and schools have limited resources, these expenditures diminish their ability to deploy more effective professional development strategies, which research is beginning to show require significant expenditures over a sustained time period (p. 3)

Until 2010, school districts in Missouri were mandated to allocate at least 1% of the district's budget toward a professional development program. When the state experienced budget challenges, changes were made mandating one percent of state funds received through the school foundation program (MODESE, 2013). According to Guskey and Yoon (2009), public schools have spent about \$20 billion annually on professional development activities.

Effective professional development costs districts money (Odden, Archibald, Fermanich, & Galligher, 2012). The MODESE (2013) declared, "Professional learning for educators is the crucial element in the equation for success. If the destination is to reach higher levels of learning for all students, then professional learning for the adults in the school system must be part of the school culture," (p. 2). According to Odden et al. (2009), "Even when reform-minded districts and school leaders want to deploy effective professional development strategies, they rarely know how much the programs cost" (p. 52).

As new teachers enter the field of education and college students consider career opportunities, the issue of retirement is seldom on their minds. According to Costrell and Podgursky (2009), retirement planning should start early in one's career. In 2010, the Missouri Public School Retirement System (PSRS) was exploring ways to cover liabilities that were wiped out due to the 2008 stock market meltdown (Young, 2010). In

2012, however, the PSRS declared itself as the 45<sup>th</sup> largest pool of assets in the U.S. and 107<sup>th</sup> in the world (Hilgedick, 2013). Moreover, “Although some pension systems across the nation are on the ropes, Missouri’s is not,” shared Hilgedick, (2013, p. 1).

The strength of the retirement system is one important aspect of retirement planning (Costrell & Podgursky, 2009). Another aspect for perspective and new teachers to consider is their retirement benefits. According to the PSRS, Director of Member Services, R. Peterson (personal communication, September, 30, 2013), the cut of the career ladder program impacted educator retirement benefits. The final average salary of a Missouri educator is calculated using the member’s highest three consecutive years of salary (R. Peterson, personal communication, September, 30, 2013); therefore:

If an educator participated in the Missouri Career Ladder Program earning the maximum of \$5,000, for at least three consecutive years, the program cut could have hurt the retirement income significantly, possibly hundreds of dollars per month depending on the salary amounts.

The state of Missouri previously spent millions of dollars and over 18,000 Missouri educators spent hundreds of thousands of hours participating in Missouri’s Career Ladder Program in the 2008-2009 school year alone (MODESE, 2008b). In an effort to ultimately increase student achievement, the effectiveness of the program that is now a non-funded state program due to 2010 budget cuts (Wieberg, 2010) and other alternative pay incentive programs must be analyzed to justify further implementation and future funding as well as to retain high quality and effective teachers.

## **Purpose of the Study**

In the current economic condition, all areas of school funding are being closely examined. Missouri's Career Ladder Program has received much media attention due to the fact that the MODESE did not fully commit to funding the program for the 2009-2010 school year until a Fiscal Year 2011 appropriation was made (Wieberg, 2010), and with the passage of House Bill 1543, which removed the requirement of the state to provide further funding. In a June, 2009, letter to the Missouri Commissioner of Education; Allen Icet, Chairman of the House Budget Committee, and Gary Nodler, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, wrote, "The General Assembly cannot assure that the participants in the Career Ladder Program for the 2009-2010 school year and beyond will be supported by state appropriation, and these participants should be noted of these changes" (para. 2).

With final cuts to the Missouri Career Ladder program determined, the purpose of this study was to closely examine the effectiveness, as determined by perceptions of educational leaders, of incentive pay programs including Missouri's Career Ladder Program, as it relates to increasing student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers. The results of this study may provide state and local legislators and administrators current data of the perceptions of the effects of incentive pay programs on professional development programs and the retention of highly qualified and effective teachers which ultimately lead to increased student achievement. Research data analysis may enable research-based, state budgetary decisions and future funding considerations for alternative pay programs.

## Research Questions

In an effort to increase student achievement by retaining quality teachers, the Missouri Career Ladder Program was established in 1985 (MODESE, 2008). The goals of the program were to recognize master teachers, provide opportunities for professional growth, enhance education to improve student achievement, support district and statewide education goals, and to provide incentives by way of a salary supplement and career advancement program (MODESE, 2008). The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions of Missouri public school superintendents, teachers, and district professional development chairs of alternative pay incentives to replace the career ladder program?

2. What are the perceptions of Missouri public school superintendents, teachers, and district professional development chairs of alternative pay incentives as related to student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers?

3. What are the perceptions of state and national professional educational organizations of alternative pay incentives as related to student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers?

4. What are the motivators for Missouri public school board presidents to approve allocation of funds for district sponsored alternative pay incentives?

## Conceptual Framework

Marzano (2003) proposed three general factors that influence student academic achievement: school-level factors, teacher-level factors, and student-level factors. The teacher-level factor of Marzano's (2003) three general factors that influence student achievement was examined. Within this factor, three educational constructs were identified to form the underpinnings of this study: student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and retention of high quality and effective teachers. Other researchers echoed the importance of teacher effectiveness.

According to Danielson (2002), "The purpose of schools is to effectively teach students, promoting high levels of student learning," (p. 67). Danielson (2002) also posed the question in her book, *Enhancing Student Achievement*, "What is high-level learning and what does it include" (p. 5)? Danielson (2002), went on to propose that legislators have provided at least a partial answer to these questions with state assessments and performance mandates. Reeves (2004), argued that accountability for learning happens in the classroom, and that "more real accountability occurs when teachers actively participate in the development, refinement, and reporting of accountability" (p. 3).

Current U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan asserted, "A rigorous and fair accountability system measures student growth, rewards schools that accelerate student achievement, and identifies and rewards outstanding teachers and leaders" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 1) Similarly, Silman and Glazerman (2009) reported, Missouri's Career Ladder Program was designed to improve classroom instruction through professional and curriculum development, teacher satisfaction and retention, and ultimately student achievement.

Educators must be continually aware of the effect they have on students (Hattie, 2012). Hirsch (2009) determined, “Improving professional learning for educators is a crucial step in transforming schools and improving academic achievement.” According to Schmoker (2006), teacher collaboration is one method of professional learning that continually focuses on awareness of student learning. Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), contended that sustained and intensive professional development for teachers is related to student achievement.

Providing proper support and professional development is a key strategy in retaining high quality and effective teachers, (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2009). According to Heller (2004), teacher retention does affect teaching and learning. Strauss (2012), also acknowledged that increases in teacher compensation through merit pay opportunities may lead to increased job satisfaction and retention of teachers.

Throughout this study, parallels were drawn to analyze Marzano’s (2003) teacher-level factors as related to the intended outcomes of the Missouri Career Ladder Program.

### **Research Design**

When analyzing qualitative research, the focus should be to fully understand the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2007). The constructs of this study were chosen to both fully understand, as well as promote strategies for increased student achievement as identified in Marzano’s (2003), model of effective teachers as related to academic accountability, professional development for educators, and retention of highly qualified and effective teachers; all of which were goals of Missouri’s Career Ladder program (MODESE, 2008).



Conducting interviews for qualitative research can provide “in-depth details pertaining to participants’ experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic” (Turner, 2010, p.754). For this study, Missouri educational leaders were interviewed to obtain perceptions of incentive pay programs including the Missouri Career Ladder Program. During an interview, whether face-to-face, via electronic communication, or over the telephone, the interview questions should be open-ended and allow the interviewee to chart the direction of the interview (Siegle, 2002).

While the interview questions were predetermined, the interviewees had the opportunity to express opinions beyond the initial questions. When the constant comparative method is used, the goal of the researcher should be to analyze conceptual similarities, to develop topic categories, and to discover patterns throughout the interviews (Boeije, 2002). Once the interviews were conducted, responses were analyzed using open and axial coding. Open coding was used to determine categories and themes, while axial coding was used to analyze categories to expose links and relationships (Straker, 2008).

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

The following limitations were identified:

1. The study was limited geographically to public school superintendents, teachers, district professional development chairs, board of education presidents, and educational organization representatives in Missouri.
2. The level of experience and interaction with the Missouri Career Ladder Program by the public school superintendents, teachers, district professional development

chairs, board of education presidents, and educational organization representatives was not considered.

3. The interview questions were created by the researcher with research bias controlled through triangulation of on-going review of data and critiques by an educational researcher.

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. It was assumed that the public school superintendents, teachers, district professional development chairs, board of education presidents, and educational organization representatives superintendents, based their interview responses on their own personal and professional experiences.

2. It was assumed that the public school superintendents, teachers, district professional development chairs, board of education presidents, and educational organization representatives interpreted the questions as intended.

### **Summary**

The NCLB Act has dramatically increased the focus on increasing student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shriner, 2006). Educational leaders are charged with implementing best practices in both programs and practices in an effort to increase student achievement. Marzano (2003), asserted, “if we follow the guidance offered from 35 years of research, we can enter an era of unprecedented effectiveness for the public practice in education” (p. 1). This study was conducted in order to examine the effectiveness of one Missouri professional development program designed to ultimately increase student achievement and provide perceptions of educators of alternative pay incentive programs.

The Missouri Career Ladder Program has undergone little research to measure its effectiveness of increasing student achievement (Booker & Glazerman, 2009); however, since its inception in 1985, millions of state dollars and thousands of educators have participated in the program that was designed to reward educators for work they perform beyond their required contract (MODESE, 2008). In an effort to ultimately increase student achievement, the effectiveness of the program that is now a non-funded state program due to 2010 budget cuts (Wieberg, 2010) must be analyzed in order to justify further implementation and future funding of alternative pay incentives.

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Missouri educational leaders of the Missouri Career Ladder program as it relates to student achievement, professional development, retention of high quality and effective teachers, and current and future funding for the program.

In Chapter Two, a review of relevant literature was presented to examine the constructs of student academic achievement, professional development for educators and retention of high quality and effective teachers as viewed through the lens of one factor of Marzano's three general factors that influence student achievement. Educational accountability, professional development for educators, retention of teachers, alternative pay programs, and the Missouri Career Ladder Program were discussed.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature**

A review of literature surrounding the perceptions of alternative pay incentive programs as related to teacher retention, quality professional development, and ultimately improved student achievement is included in this chapter. This review begins with an in depth examination of school accountability and state and federal mandates as the platform for alternative pay incentive programs. School reform and accountability in the United States in the past 20 years have been the driving force behind such programs as Career Ladder, and thus, a review of the educational accountability movement, as well as an analysis of the NCLB of 2001 and state and federal measures of success is necessary. Missouri's Career Ladder Program will also be presented as one alternative pay program designed to provide educators with a sound method of increasing student achievement.

### **Academic Accountability for Educators**

Even though academic testing has been present in American schools since the nineteenth century (Ravitch, 2002, p.1) the philosophy of holding teachers as well as students accountable for student performance has emerged during the last 50 years. During the nineteenth century, teachers were required to pass a knowledge level test in order to gain employment as a teacher, but once they were hired, there were no other assessments of ability. The philosophy of educators during that time was that if students failed, it was the fault of the students. Ravitch (2002) asserted:

The idea of accountability-holding not only students but teachers, schools, even school districts accountable for student performance-is a more contemporary invention. A long standing and fundamental conflict between the education profession and laypeople as to the purpose and uses of testing may explain why

accountability does not share testing's long pedigree. It may also help to explain much of the controversy that surrounds testing and accountability in our schools today. (p.1)

Researchers and educators alike are today constantly striving to find ways to increase student achievement through school accountability. To do this, various laws, reforms, and programs have been established at the district, state, and federal levels. The following analysis of related literature provides a historical background on school and teacher accountability and various methods and programs that have been implemented in an effort to increase student achievement.

### **The Ramifications of the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993**

With increasing student achievement and school accountability under the lens, lawmakers, passed the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 to require an increase in the amount of state revenues allocated specifically for educational use (MODESE, 2008). According to a state funding report from the Coalition to Fund Excellent Schools, and the Jefferson City Public Schools (2008), this act generated the revenues needed, but the sustainability of generating such funds was found to be impossible.

By 1998, it was determined that the rate at which the monies were being expended was not going to be able to sustain the foundation formula. Since that time, of Missouri has had to make cuts in its educational budget. However, the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 showed Missouri's commitment to public education and increased student achievement (MODESE, 2008). This act called for increased accountability for improving academic performance and the economic funding to aid in the necessary changes and improvements (MODESE, 2008).

Through the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993, Missouri developed the Show-Me Standards, which were 73 identifiers of what Missouri public education students should know and be able to do when they graduate from high school (MODESE, 2008). Along with the Show-Me Standards, this act brought forth Curriculum Frameworks intended to aid in curriculum development and alignment with the Show-Me Standards. The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) was also created and implemented as a new state wide assessment program to provide districts and the state with indicators as to how well students in Missouri compared academically with other students in the United States (MODESE, 2008).

Missouri lawmakers also believed that to improve student performance, the performance of educators must also be improved. The Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 also brought increased support for professional development by mandating that at least 1% of a district's budget and 1% of the state's educational budget be devoted to professional development (MODESE, 2008). Other areas of focus brought on by the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 were defined professional standards for new educators, and increased funding for technology in the schools (MODESE, 2008). The Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 brought about specific focus areas for Missouri Public Schools with the intent of improved student achievement and school accountability. Since that time, many changes have occurred in federal and state educational mandates. However, the Show-Me Standards, the Curriculum Frameworks, the Missouri Assessment Program, Professional Development for Educators, Professional Standards for New Educators, and public school technology funding have continued to be a focus for the state of Missouri.

## **No Child Left Behind**

The U.S. federal government has had a long history of interest in public school operation and student achievement (Costrell & Peyser, 2004). Either from internal pressures, or the mandates of the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, most states were committed to standards-based reform prior to NCLB. The 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act required states to develop comprehensive academic standards with curriculum-based tests that were to be given yearly at three grade levels in both mathematics and reading (Costrell & Peyser, 2004). According to Costrell and Peyser, (2004), the reauthorization lacked “teeth.” By the time the NCLB Act was enacted in 2002, a mere 21 states were in compliance with the accountability mandates of the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), came an era of public education reform unparalleled in our nation’s history. This law, signed by President George Bush in 2002, effected public education from Kindergarten through high school. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2004), NCLB was founded on four pillars: accountability for results, an emphasis on scientifically researched based programs and procedures, expanding options for parents, and increasing local flexibility and control.

Accountability, in an effort to increase student achievement, is a provision of NCLB. According to Costrell and Peyser, 2004, NCLB fulfills the promise of earlier educational mandates by putting into place specific implementation and compliance timelines if states wish to receive federal educational funding. The overarching

achievement goal set by NCLB was to have every student performing at a proficient or advanced level, as set by each state, by 2014.

To measure the attainment of this goal, each state developed benchmarks to measure student progress. States were also required to disaggregate student demographic information into sub-groups to ensure no student, or no one group of students, failed to attain proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). States were mandated to determine their definition of adequate yearly progress (AYP). Any school or school within a district that fails to meet AYP for two years in a row, whether on the school wide AYP score or a sub-group AYP score, will be labeled as “in need of improvement” according to the mandates of NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Another pillar of NCLB was professional development for educators. Any school or district that is identified as “in need of improvement” was required to spend at least 10% of their Title I funds toward assisting teachers (MODESE, 2008). In addition to this, the mandated high-quality assessments are intended to provide teachers and administrators with data to determine professional development of the district. Paige (2004) argued, “Great teachers are the key to unlocking the potential in every child and finally closing the staggering achievement gap,” (p. 5).

To echo Paige, the U.S. Department of Education Secretary, in 2004, NCLB required districts to provide teachers with professional development opportunities that was not only useful and relevant, but also focused on student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). NCLB gave districts the flexibility to use innovative methods for training and recruiting highly qualified and effective teachers by invoking



merit pay plans and incentive pay for those educators who qualify under specific guidelines set by each state (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

### **Professional Development for Educators**

According to the Missouri Professional Development Guidelines for Student Success (MODESE, 2009), “Everyone who affects student learning, ranging from the board of education members, central office administrators, principals, and teachers, to classified/support staff and parents, must continually improve their knowledge and skills in order to ensure student learning,” (p. 51). Professional Development is defined as “the process of ensuring that professionals are constantly learning techniques and information about how to better their skills in their jobs” (e-Lead, 2009, para. 2). Professional Development can take shape in numerous ways, but according to Díaz-Maggioli (2004), professional development is a career long process designed for teachers to fine-tune their skills in order to effectively meet the needs of students. Díaz-Maggioli (2004) went on to declare effective professional development should be a job-embedded commitment.

A study conducted by the American Educational Research Association (2005), reported, “Extended opportunities to better understand student learning, curriculum materials and instruction, and subject-matter content can boost the performance of both teachers and students” (p. 4). With knowledge and research pointing to the fact that professional development can be effective in increasing student achievement, but should be job-embedded and systemic, school district administrators should examine the professional development practices within their schools to determine the alignment of their programs with current research. In this study, Missouri’s Career Ladder Program

was one such professional development and alternative pay incentive program that was evaluated for effectiveness.

### **Alternative Pay Incentive Programs**

Some educational reform advocates argue that intrinsic rewards are the single motivators for educators to work hard and improve student achievement, therefore laying the groundwork for the need for incentive pay programs (Figlio & Kenny, 2006). Neal, (2008) contended that private businesses have the opportunity to reward employees with bonuses, promotions, and other forms of reward pay for both objective and subjective evaluations. Those same opportunities are not found in the governmental employment arena of education.

Muralidharan and Sundararaman, (2007) espoused the idea of policy makers that improving student achievement through incentive pay programs is gaining momentum; however, little evidence of the effectiveness of such programs exist. Falk and Dohmen's 2008 study of educators in Germany concluded incentive pay programs may change the composition of personality types that choose education as a profession by disrupting the well-being of current teachers and sending teacher out of their self selected profession.

According to Ingvarson, Kleinhenz, and Wilkinson (2007), incentive pay programs are most effective in increasing student achievement when educators and educational organizations share the responsibility of creating program guidelines. Similarly, Woessman, (2010) reported results from his cross-country study on incentive pay programs and suggested that countries which employ incentive pay programs saw significantly increased student achievement in math, science, and reading than countries that did not use incentive pay programs. The U.S. educational system has adopted various

alternative pay incentive programs, and Missouri's Career Ladder Program is one such program.

### **Missouri's Career Ladder Program**

The MODESE partnered with Missouri school districts, beginning in 1985, in a variable match program that was designed to reward excellent teachers for the work they do above and beyond their contract requirements (MODESE, 2008). This program operated state-wide and was funded jointly by the state of Missouri and the participating district. Participating districts contributed between 40-60% of the total costs, with poorer districts receiving a higher percentage of state funding (National Center on Performance Incentives, 2008).

In the 2009 Missouri Career Ladder Program Annual Report, it was noted that 348 school districts, representing approximately 18,000 Missouri teachers, participated in the program during the 2008-2009 school year and cost Missouri approximately \$37,065,214 to fund. The Missouri Career Ladder Program expanded significantly since its inception in 1985 when only 63 districts representing 2,400 teachers participated in the program during the 1986-1987 school year, (The Career Ladder Program Annual Report 2008-2009 School Year, 2009).

In order to participate in the Missouri Career Ladder Program, a Missouri school district was required to submit a plan and application for the program to the MODESE by April 15<sup>th</sup> of the school year prior to participation (MODESE, 2008). Once the application was approved, the District Career Ladder Plan (DCLP) served as the organizational foundation for the district's career ladder program (MODESE, 2008). According to the MODESE, "Teachers who clearly meet the Qualifications and

Responsibilities established as specific criteria (168.500.2(3), RSMo) for the district Career Ladder shall have a reasonable expectation of participating on the Career Ladder” (Required Elements of the District Career Ladder Plan, 2010). The DCLP was required to contain nine elements in order for the plan to be accepted by the MODESE (MODESE, 2008).

The first required element of the DCLP mandated teacher responsibilities through the Career Ladder Plan must be directly related to increasing student achievement as defined by the District School Improvement Plan (MODESE, 2008). For the second element, teachers were required to hold an appropriate certification for which they were teaching unless extenuating circumstances occur, and work a regular full-time contract through the employing district (MODESE, 2008).

The third required element of the DCLP mandated teachers to meet specific criteria prior to applying for participation in the Career Ladder Program (MODESE, 2008). In order to participate in stage I, teachers must have taught for at least five years in a Missouri Public School and have met the expected level of performance on their latest district Performance Based Teacher Evaluation (PBTE), (MODESE, 2008). To qualify for stage II, teachers must have received a PBTE rating that meets the expected performance rating on all criteria on their latest evaluation, with at least 10% of the evaluation areas being shown to be above the expected level in the area of instructional processes (MODESE, 2008).

The teacher must also have successfully completed two years of service on stage I of career ladder (MODESE, 2008). To qualify for stage III, teachers must have successfully completed three years of service on stage II of career ladder, and have met district

expected levels on their latest PBTE with at least 15% of the scores above the expected performance rating, and at least one of those areas must be instructional processes (Required Elements of the District Career Ladder Plan, 2010). According to the MODESE, the district school board could also have imposed additional qualifications for each stage as long as the qualifications were commiserate with the provisions written in 168.500 - 168.515, RSMo.

The fourth required element of the DCLP mandated school districts to provide evidence of the creation of the DCLP from the teacher, administrator, and patron input (MODESE, 2008). The fifth required element of the DCLP mandated the creation of a Career Ladder Review Committee in each district (MODESE, 2008). This committee of appointed teachers and administrators were charged to present a list of teachers participating in the Missouri Career Ladder Program and recommend payment to the local Board of Education (Required Elements of the District Career Ladder Plan, 2010).

The sixth element of the DCLP required all participating Career Ladder districts to create provisions for assessment of the program (MODESE, 2008). The assessment was administered under the guidance of the local school board with assistance from administrators and teachers, and included information about teachers' interests and perceptions as well as the benefits to students and the school (MODESE, 2008). In conjunction with this assessment, the seventh required element of the DCLP called for Career Ladder procedures and forms to be included in the district PBTE (Required Elements of the District Career Ladder Plan, 2010).

In order to satisfy the eighth requirement, the DCLP had to contain evidence of how evaluators continually trained in the PBTE (MODESE, 2008). This training was

mandated to be comprehensive in nature and at the very least address formative observation, knowledge of effective teaching practices, summative evaluation, and strategies to assist teachers in the improvement process as well as contain measures to ensure the validity of the process among evaluators, (Required Elements of the District Career Ladder Plan, 2010).

The final mandate of the DCLP provided procedures for appealing decisions made regarding the denial or approval process of the career ladder. These procedures included, but were not limited to substantive and procedural appeals to the PBTE, the opportunity to have decisions reviewed by the parties rendering the decisions as well as the opportunity to have the decisions reviewed by the local superintendent and the local school board (MODESE, 2008). The appeals were required to be attended to in a timely fashion and based on the teacher's application to and placement on any stage of career ladder within the qualifications for that particular stage as written in the DCLP, (Required Elements of the District Career Ladder Plan, 2010).

Finally, the DCLP addressed provisions for teacher mobility from one Missouri Career Ladder District to another. The MODESE periodically reviewed DCLPs and collected Career Ladder information from participating districts, (Required Elements of the District Career Ladder Plan, 2010).

Once the DCLP was written and submitted for approval by the MODESE, districts followed the Career Ladder timetable for submission of participants, activities, and payments (Career Ladder Timetable for Districts Academic Year, 2010).

## **Summary**

School accountability for increasing student achievement is the foundation for the development and implementation of alternative pay incentive programs. This chapter provided an in-depth assessment of state and federal mandates related to accountability and increasing student achievement. Professional Development is a continual focus for educators as quality classroom instruction is essential to the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement. Likewise, alternative pay incentive programs, such as Missouri's Career Ladder Program, has provided educators monetary stipends as motivators to increase student achievement through professional development and other various academic student centered activities.

In Chapter Three the research questions driving this study were presented. The population and purposive sample were introduced. The tools used in the data collection phase, as well as the evidence supporting such instrumentation were provided. Details of the data collection process were revealed. The constant comparative method of data analysis was described.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

At its core, research of any kind has a primary objective of the advancement of knowledge and the theoretical understanding of relationships among variables (Basic Research, 2008). There are numerous types of research as well as procedures to collect and interpret research findings. For the purpose of this study a mixed-methods design was utilized.

By using qualitative research, conclusions about the perceptions of alternative pay incentives as related to teacher retention, quality professional development, and ultimately improved student achievement were made which may lead to the sustainability or reorganization of merit pay, teacher pay incentives, or career ladders throughout Missouri and the United States. To garner further insight into alternative pay incentive programs, quantitative data were obtained through surveys.

In order for this study to be relevant to other researchers or educators, it was vital that a systematic approach to and adherence of strict scientific research guidelines be followed. The following review of methodology sustains the research study and the purpose behind the study. The population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and the mixed-method design used are explained.

### **Research Questions**

The methods of this study are designed to analyze the perceptions of alternative pay incentive programs as related to teacher retention, quality professional development, and ultimately improved student achievement. The following questions guided this study:



1. What are the perceptions of Missouri public school superintendents, teachers, and district professional development chairs of alternative pay incentives to replace the career ladder program?
2. What are the perceptions of Missouri public school superintendents, teachers, and district professional development chairs of alternative pay incentives as related to student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers?
3. What are the perceptions of state and national professional educational organizations of alternative pay incentives as related to student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers?
4. What are the motivators for Missouri public school board presidents to approve allocation of funds for district sponsored alternative pay incentives?

### **Population and Sample**

To understand the perceptions of educational leaders and educators of alternative pay incentives as related to teacher retention, quality professional development, and ultimately improved student achievement, a mixed-methods study was conducted. Since the perceptions of educational leaders and educators as well as the motivators behind alternative pay incentives were analyzed, the population for the study consisted of educational leaders and educators in Missouri. The sample group was comprised of four public school superintendents, four professional development chairs, four leaders in professional education organizations, four Missouri public school board presidents, and approximately 83 Missouri public school teachers. The professional representatives from

educational organizations, including a state elementary principal's organization, a state secondary principal's association, a state superintendent's and central office administrators organization, and a national educator's association were also interviewed as part of this study.

A purposive sample was selected in order to narrow the focus of the research in an effort to better understand the problem and research questions (Creswell, 2009). According to Tangco (2007), purposive sampling is appropriate in order to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within the identified domain. The purposive sample for this research project was selected based on a specific subset of public school districts within Missouri, thus they were not randomly selected (Teddlie & Yu, 2009). Purposive sampling is used in both qualitative and quantitative data, and is fundamental to the quality of the data gathered (Tangco, 2007).

The purposive sample was derived from one Missouri public school district still using the Career Ladder Program, one Missouri public school district that previously used the career ladder program and is now implementing a variation of the program, one Missouri public school district that once used the career ladder program and is no longer using any elements of the program, and one Missouri public school district that once used the career ladder program but now implements new alternative pay incentives.

### **Instrumentation**

The tools for the data collection for this study were interview questions and a survey created by the researcher. According to Patton (2002), the main purpose of an interview is to find out what is in someone else's mind. Yin, (2009), advocated for the use of surveys to elucidate the prevalence or frequency of processes. The interview

questions (see Appendices A, B, & C) and survey (see Appendix D) were framed from Marzano's (2003) teacher level factors which influence student achievement.

The interview and survey questions were designed to allow respondents to share their perceptions and experiences of alternative pay incentive programs, including Missouri's Career Ladder Program. Specific areas of focus in both the interview and survey questions were student achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective achievement.

The survey was created using a Likert scale in order to allow respondents choose one option that best aligned with their view (Losby & Wetmore, 2012). The Likert scale survey options included: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. According to Bertram (2009), Likert scales are intended to produce measures of attitude that can be reasonably interpreted.

Furthermore, Missouri's Career Ladder Program guidelines were considered when creating the questions to analyze perceptions of alternative pay incentive programs that ultimately lead to increased student achievement. Maxwell (2008) proposed sharing interview questions with colleagues or peers to gather insight, perceptions, and necessary changes prior to conducting formal interviews. A field-test of the interview questions and survey was given to an administrative peer group to assure clarity and understanding of the questions. Meaningful data were obtained through the use of good questions asked throughout the interview and survey processes (Merriam, 2009).

### **Data Collection**

Upon approval of the Lindenwood Institution Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix E), data in the form of interview and survey responses were collected in a variety of

ways, depending on specific needs and circumstances of the participants. Data were collected in face-to-face interviews, recorded phone interviews, and electronic communication. According to Merriam (2009), accounts for complexities between the interviewer and the respondent should be made for data to result in an informed analysis.

The sample group was contacted via telephone (see Appendix F), and invited to participate in the study. A formal letter of introduction (see Appendix G), the interview questions, and a letter of informed consent (see Appendix H) were signed by each participant prior to participation in the study. The documents were sent via electronic mail to each perspective participant. Once the details of the study were understood and agreed to by each involved party, arrangements for individual interviews were established. Interview sessions were audio-taped and later transcribed for qualitative data analysis.

Upon receipt of consent to participate forms (see Appendix I) from the superintendent, arrangements were made to distribute the teacher survey information. Through an on-line survey link, respondents were able to access and participate in the survey. The electronic survey system stored all survey responses. Percentages of responses were tabulated by the electronic survey system within the five response categories. Anonymity and confidentiality of responses was addressed and agreed upon with each participant through the letter of informed consent.

### **Data Analysis**

Once responses were collected from research participants, the data analysis process began. The audio-taped interviews were transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the data analysis. After all interviews were accurately transcribed, the process of open and

axial coding began. Creswell (2009), referred to open and axial coding as the process of generating categories of information and then choosing one of the categories to position within a theoretical model. This study examined the chosen category through Marzano's (2003) theory of teacher level factors which influence student achievement.

Using the constant comparative method, key words and phrases emerged as main themes of study. Merriam (2009) described the constant comparative method as the process of comparing one segment of data to another to determine similarities and differences. Perceptions of educational leaders of alternative pay incentive programs as related to teacher retention, quality professional development, and ultimately improved student achievement were analyzed.

Survey responses were tabulated within the electronic survey system and analyzed by the researcher. Allen and Seaman (2007) contended nominal Likert scale data is typically straight forward and transparent. Individual survey questions were summarized as percentages occurring in each response category. The analysis acknowledged the discreet nature of the responses (Kislenko & Grevholm, 2008).

### **Summary**

A mixed-methods design utilizing qualitative and quantitative methodology was presented in Chapter Three. The rationale for utilizing a mixed-methods study examining the perceptions of alternative pay incentive programs as related to teacher retention, quality professional development, and ultimately improved student achievement was described. Research questions addressing the research problem preceded the population and sample descriptions.

The population of educational leaders and educators in Missouri, as well as the sample of four public school superintendents, four professional development chairs, four leaders in professional education organizations, four Missouri public school board presidents, and 83 Missouri public school teachers were presented. Participant interviews were determined to be the appropriate tool to compare emerging themes and report outcomes. Survey collection and data analysis were described.

In Chapter Four, both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to determine the effectiveness, as determined by perceptions of educational leaders of incentive pay programs including Missouri's Career Ladder Program. Four school districts were represented in the qualitative data and each numbered set were from the same school district. Qualitative interview data from four board of education presidents, four superintendents, four professional development chairs, and four educational organization representatives were analyzed and presented.

Quantitative survey data obtained through a Likert scale were analyzed in an effort to obtain teacher perceptions of Missouri Career Program and incentive pay opportunities. A total of 83 teachers representing the four school districts participating in the research study participated in the survey. Survey responses were analyzed and presented in figures as a visual representation of the quantitative data.

## **Chapter Four: Presentation and Analysis of Data**

### **Background**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness, as determined by perceptions of educational leaders and teachers, of incentive pay programs including Missouri's Career Ladder Program, as related to increasing student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers. Qualitative data were obtained to understand the perceptions of the four superintendents, four professional development chairs, four school board presidents, and four educational organization leaders who participated in the interviews. Each set of numbered superintendents, professional development chairs, and school board presidents were from the same school district. Through the use of a survey, quantitative data were collected to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding incentive pay programs.

### **Qualitative Data**

To assure anonymity and confidentiality, a coding system was created to refer to fictitious names of research participants when discussing their interview responses. Code names and district incentive pay programming distinctions are contained in Table 1.

The participants were selected based on the specific criteria set forth in the population and sample: educational leaders and educators in Missouri, specifically from one Missouri public school district still using the career ladder program, one Missouri public school district that previously used the career ladder program and are now implementing a variation of the program, one Missouri public school district that once used the career ladder program and is no longer using any elements of the program, and

one Missouri public school district that once used the career ladder program but now implements new alternative pay incentives.

Table 1

*Participants and Incentive Pay Programming Distinctions*

Type of Program	Board President	Superintendent	Professional Development Chair
Using CL	BP1	S1	PD1
No incentive pay	BP2	S2	PD2
New incentive pay	BP3	S3	PD3
Variation	BP4	S4	PD4

*Note.* Type of Program: Using career ladder (CL, the district is still using the career ladder program. No incentive pay, the district formerly used the career ladder program and now offers no form of incentive pay programs. New incentive pay, the district formerly used the career ladder program and currently uses a new form of an incentive pay program. Variation, the district formerly used the career ladder program and now uses a variation of the career ladder program.



## **Board of Education Presidents**

**Interview question 1. Please share with me your professional experiences as a school board member.**

The professional experiences of the respondents ranged from six to 18 years. Within the same time frame, the respondents have served as board presidents ranging from one year to 15 years. All respondents shared their dedication or deep involvement within their respective school district.

**Interview question 2. As the school board president, did you support the career ladder program for your district? Why? Why not?**

Three of the four board presidents supported the career ladder program citing the desire to compensate teachers. BP3, however, did not support the career ladder program because, “We felt like we could use the money in more creative ways that accomplished the same goal.” BP1 was proud that his district has shown a positive difference through tutoring hours since continuing to fund the career ladder program locally. BP4 echoed the support since his district has implemented a variation of the former career ladder program which now has an increased emphasis on student contact time.

**Interview question 3. What percentage of your budget are you currently allocating for professional development? What percentage is currently being allocated for incentive pay opportunities? How did your district make that determination?**

One of the respondents was able to report a 1% professional development budget, currently allocated for professional development or incentive pay opportunities. Three respondents reported their uncertainty of the percentage, but were confident in a

significant professional development budget with comments, such as, "We've put a lot of money into that," and "It's something we are very committed to." BP1 and BP4 discussed separate professional development funds within their districts' budgets; one for the career ladder program or the variation of the career ladder program, and one fund for other professional development opportunities. Both BP2 and BP3 have professional development budgets within their districts, but the funds are not specifically allocated.

**Interview question 4. Do you feel incentive pay programs increase student academic achievement? Why? Why not?**

Respondents unanimously agreed that they believe incentive pay programs increase student achievement. BP1 strongly asserted, "a 100% return in my opinion." BP1 and BP2 agreed that students benefit from teachers who feel valued, and monetary compensation shows teacher their district values them and the work they do. BP3 spoke of a direct relationship between incentive pay opportunities and teacher accountability, while BP4 did not agree that the career ladder program was a true incentive pay program due to Missouri public employment law and his understanding of mandates with performance-based incentive pay programs.

**Interview question 5. Do you feel incentive pay programs help school districts retain high quality and effective teachers? Why? Why not?**

All board presidents agreed that incentive pay programs help their districts retain high quality and effective teachers. BP1 contended, "It allows us to be competitive with some of the larger schools in our area that maybe can pay a little bit more in base salary," and went on to say, "We have a lot of teachers who have been in it for years and stayed with it." According to BP2, good teachers are in the professional because they want to

teach, but they appreciate receiving quality pay for a job well done. Similarly, BP3 recognized the reality of meeting basic financial needs with a salary.

**Interview question 6. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, how did your district decide which incentives to offer?**

With the interview sample including one school district that no longer participates in a career ladder program of any type, the responses for this question were limited to the three remaining board presidents. Of the three, two board presidents shared their districts' desire to continue their professional development programs similarly to the career ladder program with an increased focus on student contact. BP3 recalled utilizing the human resources committee to recommend details of their incentive program. Even though the district is no longer using incentive pay opportunities, BP2 noted a change in the professional development allocations based on Common Core Standards.

**Interview question 7. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, what data are you using to determine the effectiveness of the program?**

Respondents' answers were varied, and ranged from MAP and APR scores to comparative data. According to BP1, "We also take a look at the number of kids being retained in a grade." BP4 pointed to student achievement improvement as the best gauge of the effectiveness of the incentive pay program. He went on to say, "We look at student achievement pretty hard." The remarks from BP2 concluded the need for change in the way of data collection to determine the effectiveness of the professional development program.

**Interview question 8. If the career ladder program were once again funded by the state, would your district be interested in participating? Why? Why not?**

Three out of four respondents concluded their district would be interested in participating in the career ladder program if the state were to once again fund the program. Countering the opinion, BP3 stated, “I don’t think we would because we feel like ultimately there’s going to be flaws, and we think we have a better plan.” Of the board presidents who felt their districts would once again participate, a shared theme of replenishing costs the districts currently have endured would be a financially positive move emerged. BP1 went on to say, “It would just allow us to offer more dollars if the state got back into it and it would expand our program somewhat.”

**Superintendents**

**Interview question 1. Please share with me your professional experiences as an educator.**

Respondents’ experiences in the superintendency ranged from four to eight years. All respondents were secondary administrators prior to their current positions. Three of the respondents spent time coaching, while S2 took a hiatus from education and worked in the retail marketing field. S2 and S4 have spent their entire careers in education with the same school districts. S1 is the only superintendent to hold a doctorate degree.

**Interview question 2. Do you feel teachers who participated in the Missouri Career Ladder Program were more effective because of the program? Why? Why not?**

Responses to this question were varied, with S1 emphatically declaring, “Yes!”, while S2 admitted, “I have a pretty strong opinion on that, and I would say no.” S3 and

S4 were less pronounced in their responses, but neither felt comfortable supporting a positive response. S2, S3, and S4 were all in agreement that the career ladder program paid teachers for extra time spent with students, but S3 and S4 were not confident that the extra contact time resulted in more effective teaching.

S2 went on to regard teacher extracurricular involvement with students as an important part of an educator's job:

I've always told teachers that if you don't get outside of that classroom setting and get involved with kids in some way, shape or form, whether it be tutoring, whether it be coaching, whether it be sponsorship of a club or science fair, whatever that might be, you really miss out on the aspect of dealing with kids. I feel like that it is extremely important whether you get paid or you don't get paid, that's part of the job.

Similarly, S1 declared:

I believe anytime you have teachers involved in district activities, student activities, when they are here on campus working with students, working for the district, working in the capacity as an educator, I think it is beneficial for them professionally, as well as the students.

**Interview question 3. Do you feel your professional development program was more effective because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?**

Again, the responses were varied with S1 and S2 agreeing the career ladder program increased the effectiveness of their professional development program, while S3 and S4 felt like the career ladder program did not make a positive impact. S3 did agree

that the funding from the career ladder program enabled schools with smaller budgets to provide some professional development opportunities that they might otherwise not have afforded. Contrarily, S3 also reported several instances of the program being misused. S2 concurred, “I think people found loopholes.”

**Interview question 4. Do you feel student academic achievement increased because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?**

S1, S2, and S4 agreed the career ladder program did increase student academic achievement, while S3 felt if the program were done effectively there may have been results of increased academic achievement, but in the instances where the program mandates were not followed, there was little positive change. S2 stated, “We definitely offered more before and after school tutoring programs.” S1 supported the notion with his response, “I think anytime teachers are working with students one-on-one, I think the students’ academic performance increases.”

**Interview question 5. Do you feel that your district retained high quality and effective teachers because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?**

S1, S2, and S4 validated the retention of high quality and effective teachers due to the career ladder program in their districts. S3 shared the opposing viewpoint, “I don’t see most teachers going to a school district because they have great professional development.” S1 conveyed his opinion of the career ladder program aiding when comparing salaries to surrounding school districts, some of which are larger, and can often offer high salaries. S4 asserted, “It helped our teachers on the higher-end of the salary schedule to make more money, which allowed them to stay here and not seek a bigger district with a higher pay scale.”

**Interview question 6. How did your district's professional development program change after the career ladder program was no longer funded by the state?**

S1's district continued to fund the career ladder program in its entirety, which resulted in very few changes within the program. Similarly, S4's district funded the program with some modifications to expectations. The districts of S2 and S3 took a different approach by absorbing the allocated monies into the salary schedule and creating other professional development opportunities within the district.

**Interview question 7. What types of incentive pay opportunities does your district currently participate?**

Responses to this question were split, with S1 and S4's district continuing career ladder type programs, while S2 and S3's districts' incentive pay offerings were minimal. According to S1, "We have a Career Ladder Program still here in the district that we kept the district portion of." Similarly, the district of S2 chose to continue the district portion of the funding, while renaming the program, Professional Rewards Opportunity, or PRO Plan which also changed the hour requirement and program expectations.

According to S3, the only incentive pay opportunity available in his district required six hours each school year of technology training in order to advance on the district pay scale. S2 spoke of extra duty contracts for coaching, club and organization sponsorships, and stipends for curriculum work.

**Interview question 8. Do you feel teachers respond positively to incentive pay opportunities? Why? Why not?**

Three out of four superintendents agreed that their teachers responded positively to incentive pay opportunities. S3, however, expressed, "I think it depends on what the

incentive is. Sometimes pay is not the best incentive.” S1 asserted his belief that incentive pay helped to keep teacher morale high. He went on to share:

I would say the majority of the time most of these teachers are doing these anyway because we have teachers who are dedicated, stay after school, come in early, and help students anyway they can. It makes it feel a little more worthwhile outside of just the reward of helping students. It also motivates those teachers that may not, but, it is a financial benefit for them to go ahead and work with students.

S3 concurred by stating, “I think anytime someone is doing something and they are offered to get paid for it, something they might doing anyway, that is just a perk.”

**Interview question 9. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, what aspects of the incentive are non-negotiable for educators? Why?**

The common incentive pay non-negotiable discussed was student contact hours. S1’s district required 60% of the program hours to be spent in tutoring, and S4’s district required 40 hours of student contact time as a program non-negotiable. Even though the districts of S2 and S3 changed their incentive pay drastically from the original career ladder program, there were still identifiable non-negotiables within the professional development parameters. S2 commented, “I hate to use this word like ‘double-dipping;’ I don’t think that we want to pay people when they are actually on contracted time.” S3 referred to his district’s six-hour yearly technology requirement in order to advance on the pay scale.



**Interview question 10. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, how did your district decide which incentive to offer?**

Responses from S1 and S4 indicated positive experiences with the former career ladder program, and therefore, felt little need for change. S4 concluded, “We looked at what we thought were the most effective parts of the career-ladder program for us and that student-contact time of tutoring we felt was number one.” When referring to changes in the incentive pay program, S1 commented, “The only difference is, and I think it has actually improved our Career Ladder Program significantly, is making that tutoring, that 60% tutoring.” S3’s district took a different approach by moving away from previous practices into a purposeful district-driven initiative. Even though S2’s district no longer offered incentive pay opportunities resembling the original career ladder program, the district did mandate any extra contract curriculum work must correlate to the core district curriculum.

**Interview question 11. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, what data are you using to determine the effectiveness of the program? How did you determine these data?**

Due to state mandated Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) and End of Course (EOC) exams, all district superintendents were able to garner data from these exams to determine the effectiveness of their incentive pay programs. Similarly, S4 pointed to MAP and EOC data to determine which students should participate in tutoring, which is a significant component of the district incentive pay program. S1 also referenced one district test, the Northwest Educational Achievement (NWEA) exams as a data source. S3 took a different approach, “I make them show me, and I don’t necessarily look at

individual students, but I want to know where your kids are at and where they started and where they are now, so I have my principals do this once a year.” S2 admitted, “That is not something we have been able to track.”

**Interview question 12. If the career ladder program were once again funded by the state, would your district be interested in participating? Why? Why not?**

None of the four superintendents agreed their district would be willing to participate in the career ladder program if the program details were the same as the previous career ladder program. S1 and S4 would once again participate, as long as the district initiated, increased student contact hours remained. S2 wavered between the positives and negatives, saying, “It would be silly on our part not to try to get it, but then, you get yourself into a situation like this if the state can’t fund it.” S3 felt strongly that his district would not be willing to once again participate in the career ladder program, citing inequity for teachers.

Not every teacher we have is a great teacher, and that is just the facts of it. I wish they were, but they’re not. I don’t want this teacher who does average and this teacher who excels to be getting a \$5000 stipend, because if I’m the great teacher, I’ll be looking at them and saying, I do ten times more than they do, my kids are ten times more successful, and they get the same stipend that I’m getting.

## **Professional Development Chairs**

**Interview question 1. Please share with me your professional experiences as an educator.**

The participants' experiences in the field of education ranged from 19 to 30 years. PD2 and PD3 are currently administrators within their respective school districts, while PD1 is an elementary teacher, and PD 4 is a high school teacher. As administrators, both PD2 and PD3 currently serve as curriculum directors. PD3 hold a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. PD4 has served her current district for 18 of the last 19 years of her career, PD1 has served her district for the entirety of her 26 year career, while PD2 and PD3 have both worked in multiple school districts prior to their current positions.

**Interview question 2. Do you feel teachers who participated in the Missouri Career Ladder Program were more effective because of the program? Why? Why not?**

None of the participants responded with a definite answer, but rather felt the effectiveness was determined by various factors such as intrinsic and financial motivation. PD 1 commented, "If someone is really motivated to improve themselves, then it absolutely did improve it." Additionally, PD4 said, "I think if you were a really good teacher and you feel you need some extra training in your area, then you're going to get it whether you're rewarded or not."

Even though PD3 did not feel like she observed teachers becoming more effective because of the program, PD2 felt the career ladder program covered training expenses for teachers. PD2 related, "I think teachers would have done many of what was

asked of them to fulfill career ladder requirements, whether they got paid or not. It just helped to cover the expense.”

**Interview question 3. Do you feel your professional development program was more effective because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?**

Three of the four professional development chairs felt the career ladder program did increase the effectiveness of their district’s professional development program. PD1 felt that professional development opportunities were better attended and motivation was higher due to the financial incentive. PD 2 shared similar thoughts:

It was easier to get teachers to take risks and give time up for PD with CL due to the compensation. I have found that you really do find out who is attending PD for the compensation and who really wants to learn and grow professionally now that CL is gone.

Also in agreement was PD4 whose district has continued a modified professional development program the original career ladder program. “It was a good program and they wanted to continue it, not just for the teachers’ professional development but also I think mainly for the student contact with tutoring,” replied PD4. Contrarily, PD3 felt that the career ladder program provided additional compensation for tasks educators were originally responsible for. She also questioned the accountability of the educators to implement new learning or curriculum writing created from the career ladder program. “I also think it was probably one of those things that was a good idea on paper. In order to make it really effective I think it probably should have had more structure,” (PD3).

**Interview question 4. Do you feel student academic achievement increased because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?**

Responses to this question were varied, with PD1 and PD4 enthusiastically in agreement, while PD2 was uncommitted either way, and PD3 felt strongly to the negative. PD4 shared her personal experiences with the former career ladder program and now the districts' modified version of the career ladder program. PD4 stated, "I know from my personal experience in the last two years, I have gone to a ton of workshops just to learn about all the new and upcoming things, even just websites that you can use, so I do think it's been very beneficial." PD1 believed that teachers implemented new learning from the program into their classroom, which benefited students.

With the opposing viewpoint, PD3 shared, "I think a lot of it was hoops that they just jumped through and just things that they should have done anyway, and now that it is gone [they] are probably doing anyway. So, as a general rule I would say probably not." PD2 was unsure and felt that the effect on student achievement depended mainly on what teachers chose for their professional development opportunities.

**Interview question 5. Do you feel that your district retained high quality and effective teachers because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?**

PD3 was alone among the professional development chairs in the belief that the career ladder program did not have an effect on retaining high quality and effective teachers. She shared her belief that the career ladder program was not a factor in creating high quality teachers or even improving teaching, but rather just a financial incentive. Even though PD1 could not discern there was a direct correlation between the career

ladder program and retaining high quality and effective teachers, she did believe it was a primary reason.

PD2 and PD4 felt strongly that the career ladder program helped their districts retain high quality and effective teachers. PD2 relates, “We could compete with larger districts with career ladder, because we could keep those with the expertise. It leveled the playing field.” Similarly PD4 commented, “I know that it’s something that people looked at in coming and in deciding to stay or to leave, I do think it’s a big plus in retaining good teachers and in attracting good teachers to a district.”

**Interview question 6. How did your district’s professional development program change after the career ladder program was no longer funded by the state?**

Responses were split between *very little* and *drastic changes*, all with varied positive and negative feelings toward the changes. PD1’s district has continued the career ladder program with lower financial incentives and a greater focus on student contact time, which PD1 felt has been very well received. In a similar move, PD4’s district modified the career ladder program somewhat. PD4 shared, “We don’t get the same amount of money but it didn’t really change a lot. I know that because the big focus is on student contact.” She went on to say, however, “There are a lot of teachers who can’t participate in it because, especially the coaches, because they coach after school, so they don’t have a lot of time for tutoring.”

With the programming changes in PD2’s district, professional development now is more costly. PD2 related, “It does cost the district more to provide PD to the teachers because we used to just offer the training events but now we have to compensate them for their time instead of them using CL for it.”

One positive result of the change has been in increased professional development involvement from young career teachers and not limiting teachers who were eligible for the career ladder program. PD3 identified greater accountability as a positive change in her district's professional development program, "You have to get the best bang for your buck then you tend to really focus more intently on what are those really important things that we need to get for our teachers."

**Interview question 7. What types of incentive pay opportunities does your district currently participate?**

The districts represented by PD1 and PD4 maintained incentive pay programs, while the districts of PD2 and PD3 have some professional development opportunities that may result in financial gains, but are not incentive-based. PD1's district continued the career ladder program with a lower amount of required hours and less financial payout, while PD4's district created the Professional Rewards Opportunity (PRO) Plan which was a modified version of the career ladder program. "We call it Pro Plan instead of career ladder," stated PD4.

According to PD2, the only professional opportunities that result in financial gains are after contract time training sessions; and secondary level department head positions. PD3 commented on her district's requirements to advance on the salary scale, "We have a requirement of so many technology integration professional developments that our teachers have to meet in order to move up on a salary scale."

**Interview question 8. Do you feel teachers respond positively to incentive pay opportunities? Why? Why not?**

Respondents unanimously affirmed that teachers respond positively to incentive pay opportunities. PD1 referred to a change in mindset among newer teachers as compared to veteran teachers:

A lot of that has to do with the mindset of newer teachers coming in. They want to be compensated for putting in their time. Back when I first started, it was just part of your job, you did it. You didn't like it, but you did it. Now, you are really hard pressed to get people to volunteer for anything unless you are willing to hand them the money.

PD2 felt that incentive pay opportunities express appreciation for extra time spent and no longer has a problem getting teachers to attend meetings beyond the contract times. PD3 and PD4 agreed that incentive pay opportunities do not please everyone, but generally prove positive among the majority. PD3 replied, "It probably depends on the teacher." Similarly, PD4 responded with, "There's always going to be grumbling. Probably the only people who aren't are the coaches, because they just can't get the student contact time."

**Interview question 9. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, what aspects of the incentive are non-negotiable for educators? Why?**

PD2's district does not offer incentive pay opportunities other than after contract hour training sessions and secondary department head positions, all of which have mandates set forth by the district board of education and are not negotiable. PD3's



district has recently loosened the requirements of the technology training in order to advance on the pay scale, but still maintains the six-hour minimum.

The districts of PD1 and PD4, however, maintained program choices, as well as nonnegotiable, most notably student tutoring. PD1 shared, “If the school district is going to put money forth to pay teachers to do extras, they want the kids to benefit as much as possible and the only way they could control that would be the tutoring.” PD4 concurred, “The student contact is nonnegotiable, and you have to have at least three kids to count it.” Within the non-negotiables from the districts of PD1 and PD4 were also choices, such as the length of time, funding requirements, and areas of focus for professional development.

**Interview question 10. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, how did your district decide which incentive to offer?**

None of the respondents had a clear understanding of how the incentive pay opportunities, or lack thereof, occurred, but most pointed to administrative or board of education decisions. PD1 speculated:

I think the feeling was knowing how much time we already put in. The district felt like as much as they were able, they wanted to continue to compensate us for the extra time. Plus, they wanted to make sure that the kids had access to the teachers, because they knew immediately, that if there was no funding, the vast majority wouldn't tutor.

PD3 felt that the decision to hinge a salary step increase came from the board of education and their goals for the district. PD4 shared, “The plan was set up with the superintendent, the administrators, and then the Board.” According to PD2, her district

administration looked at the best way to infiltrate professional development into the district without the career ladder program and felt that beyond contract time, compensation was the best approach.

**Interview question 11. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, what data are you using to determine the effectiveness of the program? How did you determine these data?**

Respondents were again unsure of data involved in analyzing the effectiveness of the program. PD4 referred to the number of students passing classes as a possible indicator of effectiveness, while PD1 speculated as to the use of state mandated tests. The district of PD2 no longer offers a true incentive pay program, so there are no data to analyze. Similarly, PD3's district incentive pay is based solely on technology integration professional development, which does not provide data other than yearly participation numbers.

**Interview question 12. If the career ladder program were once again funded by the state, would your district be interested in participating? Why? Why not?**

Responses were varied, but all were unsure without supervisor affirmation. PD4 was hopeful that her district would participate since they are funding their own modified program. PD1 concurred, and felt her district would participate because of the positive experience with the original career ladder program. According to PD2, the district portion of the funding might be a hurdle. PD2 shared, "I would think the matching funds would be hard to come by with economy the way it is. Most districts (including ours) have funneled these funds into other accounts." PD3 would be interested in looking into

the option, but felt that restrictions would appropriate. She went on to say, “It’s going to be monitored by your administrator and tied to your evaluation.”

### **State and National Educational Organization Representatives**

**Interview question 1. Please share with me your professional experiences as an educator and/or member of your current educational organization.**

The professional representatives interviewed have had careers in public education ranging from 13 to 31 years and have been representatives in their respective professional organizations from one to 20 years. PR1 is a second career teacher who spent many years in the public library system prior to teaching middle school mathematics. PR1 shared, “I wish I had gotten into teaching sooner because once I started doing it, I really enjoyed it.”

PR2’s experiences in education include 15 years as a community relations director for a public school, six years as a public school board of education member, and 12 years as a director in his current professional organization. PR3 proudly served his professional organization as a local member, a regional board member, assistant principal representative, a middle school level principal representative, and now the president of the district organization. PR3 stated, “Being in a position to be a part of the only group that provides professional development for secondary school principals and being a part of the planning team to plan conferences, to plan regular meetings for the local association, to support my peers, has been a great privilege.”

PR4 has had the longest career in education of the respondents, with 31 years as a teacher and principal, and 20 years as the director of her professional organization. The 31 years in public education only brought PR4 to two districts, four years in the first

district, and 27 in the second. Both districts were described by PR4 as rural school districts.

**Interview question 2. For a professional development program to be effective, what components must be included in the program? Why?**

Many program components were shared through participant responses, including, teacher involvement and buy-in, relevance, sustainability and funding, alignment to curriculum and goals, fidelity, and effectiveness. PD1 and PD4 agreed that teacher involvement is crucial for a professional development program to be effective. PD4 asserted, “I think there has to be buy-in from the entire community of participants on that. It can’t always be top down. All respondents agreed that relevance to teachers and alignment of curriculum and goals were mandatory in an effective program. PD3 affirmed, “It should be a component that is cutting edge best practice, something relevant that is going to help a principal be effective in their current role. The first thing we do is we look for that alignment, we look for that relevance.”

Another agreed upon component of an effective program is funding, in order for a program to be sustained. PR4 shared her concerns about professional development funding and the current instability of the state in its ability to continue financial support. According to PR1, without state funding, districts have the opportunity to personalize professional development programs to meet specific district needs. He continued:

Now that the state is not funding professional development, it is up to the districts. I think they should take advantage of the situation and become more innovative in how they provide it for their teachers and allow the teachers to be heavily involved in creating it.”

Lastly, respondents ascertained fidelity and program effectiveness as critical components of an effective professional development program. PR2 felt that fidelity to the program mandates and goals were one of his top priorities in any program. PR2 exclaimed, “You can’t do a piece of this and not a piece of that, because by the time you get done it doesn’t look like what they were originally trying to do or what the original actual program should be.” Similarly, PR4 spoke of the need to look at data to determine program effectiveness.

**Interview question 3. What position did your organization take when the Missouri state government was deciding whether to cut the Missouri Career Ladder Program? Why?**

All professional representatives voiced their organizations support for the career ladder program and were discouraged when the state government cut program funding. According to PR1, his organization fought hard to advocate for the organization’s stance on funding cuts. PR1 states, “We fought against the cause to cut the career ladder and did some lobbying of legislators and worked the capitol pretty hard.” Similarly, PR3 shared, “Our association really stands in agreement with teachers in supporting their professional growth. So our position was to support teachers being able to have that professional development.”

PR2 and PR4 also supported maintaining funding for the career ladder program and included reasons; such as incentive pay and increased compensation for teachers; student tutoring, which resulted in interventions and student achievement; and professional development opportunities. PR4 espoused:

I had a personal bias because I was principal in a rural community and we sat near larger schools that offered more salary but we could use the career ladder as incentive pay and it was extra duty pay for tutoring or professional development or working with a second tier student whether it be academics or other areas that would give them the ability to develop strength and self-confidence.

PR2 defined his organization's reasons behind supporting the career ladder program by stating:

We did not support that cut in the career ladder program for a couple of reasons. First of all, we felt that there were a lot of good things going on around the state that the career ladder program had funded, such as after-school tutoring, special assistance, targeted interventions for students, and also the career ladder program had become an important part of the district compensation program. Also, many school districts have a serious economic impact on those teachers, especially if a husband and wife were both working in the same district, and all of a sudden they lose their career ladder funding.

**Interview question 4. Do you feel the career ladder program was an effective professional development program? Why? Why not?**

Even though all professional representatives supported the continuation of state funding for the career ladder program, none of the representatives whole-heartily felt the program was an effective professional development method. PR4 described a focus on student achievement needs and teacher professional growth as the only indicators of effectiveness of the program. She went on to explain the need to look at the effectiveness of the program on a district by district case.

PR1 and PR3 agreed that the program lacked implementation fidelity and accountability. PR3 stated, “It largely became an individual teacher driven decision whether it was effective or not.” PR1 pointed to arbitrary administration as a program weakness. PR3 espoused, “There was no uniformity to it and it would even change from individual to individual in some cases.” PR2 felt strongly that the career ladder program was not effective as a professional development program and conveyed similar reasons as the other representatives:

I don’t think it was an effective professional development program. I don’t think there was a cohesive structure to the career-ladder program, and no targeted emphasis in the career-ladder program, and it was too broad. It left too many different ways that it could be used or not used, and I just don’t think that it had the focus that a professional development program should have.

**Interview question 5. Do you feel student academic achievement increased because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?**

The representatives’ answers were varied, but no one responded with overwhelming support of increased academic achievement. Student tutoring hours, which led to improved student achievement, was a common theme among the respondents. PR2 declares, “The career ladder program was probably doing some good work with kids across the state as far as after-school tutoring.” Similarly, PR4 stated, “I think that if it was focused on academic achievement, and I know a lot of it was the tutoring, this could increase student achievement.”

PR3 associated the lack of data of increased student achievement as a weakness in the effectiveness of the program. PR3 explained:

You didn't have to show data plans and results. I know there were times where there wasn't an increase. You had to have so many tutoring hours but yet there was no proof of a cohort growth in those tutoring hours and there was no adjustment..

According to PR4, the program did not negatively affect students, and most likely resulted in some effective moments; however, the increase in student achievement was "probably marginal, if any."

**Interview question 6. Do you feel school districts retained high quality and effective teachers because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?**

All respondents agreed that the career ladder program did have an impact on districts' ability to retain high quality and effective teachers. PR1 frankly stated, "I think anytime you provide extra compensation for teachers, you are more likely to retain high quality and good teachers." PR2 agreed, "I think it gave them some supplemental salary money so that they could compete better with the other districts."

According to PR4, districts retain high quality and effective teachers for a variety of reasons, such as proximity to their home, school climate, and salary and benefits. PR3 perceived the career ladder program as a way to compensate teachers for their extra time and positive influence on students which resulted in the teacher feeling valued by the district. He felt that teachers who feel valued by their district are less likely to look for jobs elsewhere. PR3 shared, "I think it is to compensate and reward teachers for that competency and that character to put in the extra time."



**Interview question 7. What is your organization's current stance on incentive pay for educators? Why?**

PR1 and PR2 shared strong and opposing stances on behalf of their organizations, while PR3 and PR4 were unaware of their organization's current platform on the topic of incentive pay for educators. PR1 announced that his organization is currently working to promote incentive pay opportunities for educators. He was quick to point out the need to avoid the link to student performance on standardized test scores. PR1 stated:

Student performance is an important element in any teachers' professional life, and every teacher I have ever met cares about it deeply, but if you start linking standardized test scores to whether or not you get a raise, that changes the whole playing field. I think it brings in an element that would be competitive and counterproductive.

PR1 went on to espouse the support to provide incentive pay opportunities to teachers who are willing to work in high poverty schools:

We have had some serious talks about providing incentive pay for teachers who work in very challenging neighborhood schools, particularly high poverty neighborhood schools. I think we would favor providing additional pay to people as an incentive to come and do the good work that needs to be done in these really challenging buildings.

Contrarily, PR2 opposed incentive pay opportunities for educators and felt it would discourage educators from working in high poverty schools. PR2 declared:

We don't see any research whatsoever that shows that incentive pay has any impact on student achievement. Also, we think that it would discourage

individuals from going into high-needs areas or schools that have high incidence of poverty or are struggling.

According to PR3, his organization has yet to take a stance on incentive pay opportunities for educators, but would like to see the recognition of schools instead of individual teachers to lessen competition. PR3 stated, “It is more the question of how to increase teacher pay or how do we reward whole schools rather than individual teachers. Then you are not having individual teachers competing against one another for a select pool of money.” PR4 felt that her organization would soon review the issue. She also shared the organization’s former concern of incentive pay programs and the fairness of educator evaluations.

**Interview question 8. Do you feel incentive pay programs increase student academic achievement? Why? Why not?**

PR1, PR3, and PR4 conditionally agreed incentive pay programs can increase student achievement, while PR2 did not feel incentive pay programs led to an increase in student achievement. Conditions shared among those in agreement included high quality teaching, accountability, data analysis, consistent and fair teacher effectiveness evaluations, and stakeholder buy-in. PR1 linked retention of high quality teachers to increased student achievement. According to PR1:

If you pay teachers more you are going to get a higher quality of teachers and people wanting to go into the profession. The higher quality of teachers you get, I would expect student academic achievement would also be affected in a positive way.”

PR3 identified teacher accountability and use of data to determine effectiveness of the program as a determining factor. PR3 surmised, “If there is a level of accountability and using data to show how we are making gains in improvement and adjust what we are doing over long-term, then I think you could point to it and say yes.”

According to PR4, increased student achievement indicators should be based on teacher evaluations. PR4 states, “Yes, if the incentive pay focuses on student achievement and if there are consistent and fair evaluations. I think evaluation is a big issue. We have basically been opposed to evaluation being determined by test scores.” She went on to theorize the importance of stake holder buy-in, “Student achievement could be increased if the teachers buy into it I think you have to have involvement of parents, teachers, and students as well as building and district leaders of course.

Opposing the notion of incentive pay programs increasing student achievement, PR2 stated, “I’ve seen some studies that said that incentive-pay programs have no impact on academic achievement. It’s more about the motivation of the teacher and social economic issues and other things that affect academic achievement.” He went on to assert, “I don’t think that paying teachers more is going to make Johnny learn more.”

**Interview question 9. Do you feel incentive pay programs serve to help school districts retain high quality and effective teachers? Why? Why not?**

Responses were split with PR3 and PR4 asserting incentive pay programs do serve to retain high quality and effective teachers, while PR1 felt the retention would be limited at best, and PR2 believed incentive pay programs could discourage teacher retention. PR3 expressed his viewpoint by stating,

Who wouldn’t want to work in an environment where you are being patted on the

back for a job well done and are shown gratitude and thanksgiving for working hard and devising innovative approaches with kids? So, you provide an environment that honors teachers which includes pay, then, yes retention is obviously a bonus and a big plus.

PR4 agreed, “If the teacher wants to stay in the district, it increases the likelihood they will. A top notch, quality teacher would appreciate incentive pay.”

PR1 referred to other factors as indicators of whether or not incentive pay programs retain high quality and effective teachers:

Any incentive pay program is going to be limited in its success if the base pay that it's working from is already low. I don't think an incentive pay program in a district that pays very low wages to their teachers will have the desired effect, argued PR1.

He went on to caution the connection between student test scores and teacher evaluations to incentive pay programs.

According to PR1:

You cannot get into the area of teacher evaluations linked to student test scores and incentive pay linked to teacher evaluations. I think that is going to be a big problem if they try and do that. It won't have the desired effect. It will make teaching into even more of a competitive colleague against colleague, and the tests have to be looked at for being valid if that is going to be a measure.

PR2 ascertained incentive pay programs could have a negative affect on the retention of high quality and effective teachers:

It probably would discourage retention of high quality and effective teachers. If

you have an effective teacher and they're working with a group of kids and putting their heart into that job but they're having a high turn over or high mobility or some other issue and they're not getting the results that a teacher has in a high social economic area, I think it would be very discouraging.

He also questioned how the state or district would define high quality and effective teachers. PR2 asserted, "If you're basing it on one test on one day then I don't believe that is relevant. I just don't think that is a fair reflection of the school, the teacher, the principal, the superintendent, the school district." He ended his thoughts with, "I see a lot of court challenges to the method by which teachers are paid on an incentive-pay plan."

### **Quantitative Data**

Teacher perceptions of the Missouri Career Ladder Program and incentive pay opportunities were gathered and analyzed through a Likert scale survey. The survey was created using an online survey program, SurveyMonkey. Once permission to participate in the study was received via the district superintendent, the survey link was emailed to the superintendent. The district superintendent forwarded the research study information, including the survey link, to the staff of certified teachers.

The superintendents of each of the four participating school districts were asked to send the survey link to their teachers at least twice in an attempt to increase survey participation. The total number of certified staff who had the opportunity to respond to the survey was 787 teachers from four school districts. Of the 787 teachers, 83 teachers participated in the survey for a total of 9.5%. The survey responses were not disaggregated by the current incentive pay participation of the district.

An analysis of the survey responses yielded 57.8% of respondents believed their district did not currently offer incentive pay programs, and 73.4% were not participating in any form of incentive pay program within their districts. When asked their opinions of teacher effectiveness of those who participated in the career ladder program, 29.6% agreed teachers were more effective because of the program, while 25.9% disagreed, and 44.4% responded neutrally. Forty-two percent of teachers surveyed felt the career ladder program aided their district in retaining high quality and effective teachers, while 44.4% were neutral, and 13.6% disagreed. Similarly, 41.9% of teachers agreed the career ladder program increased student academic achievement, while 16% disagreed.

In the area of professional development, 35% of teachers believed their school's professional development program was more effective because of the career ladder program, while 43.8% responded neutrally. Thirty-four percent of teachers agreed their district's professional development programs changed significantly following the state's funding cuts for the career ladder program, and 21% disagreed. Seventy-seven percent of teachers responded with an interest in participating in incentive pay programs within their district (see Figure 1).

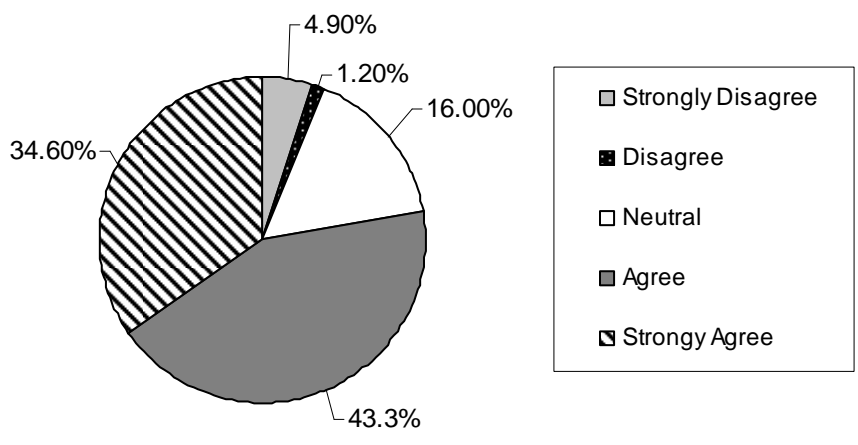


Figure 1. Teacher interest in incentive pay opportunities.

Similarly, 82.7% of teachers surveyed felt their colleagues respond positively to incentive pay opportunities (see Figure 2), and 86.6% of teachers would be interested in participating in the career ladder program if funding were renewed and their district participated in the program (see Figure 3).

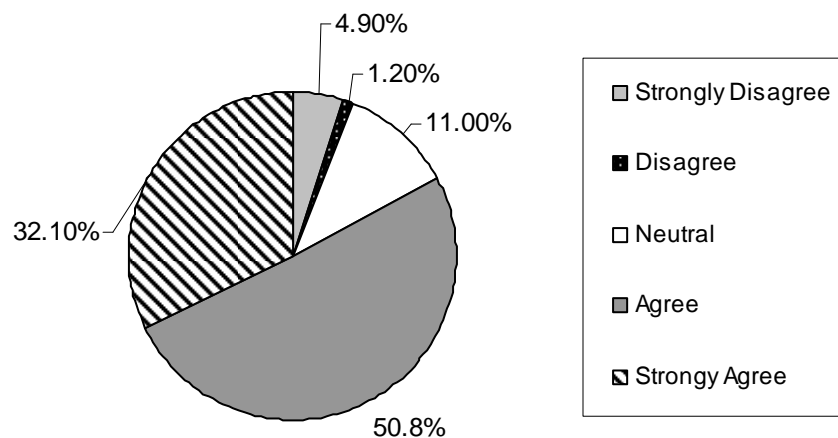


Figure 2. Positive response to incentive pay opportunities.

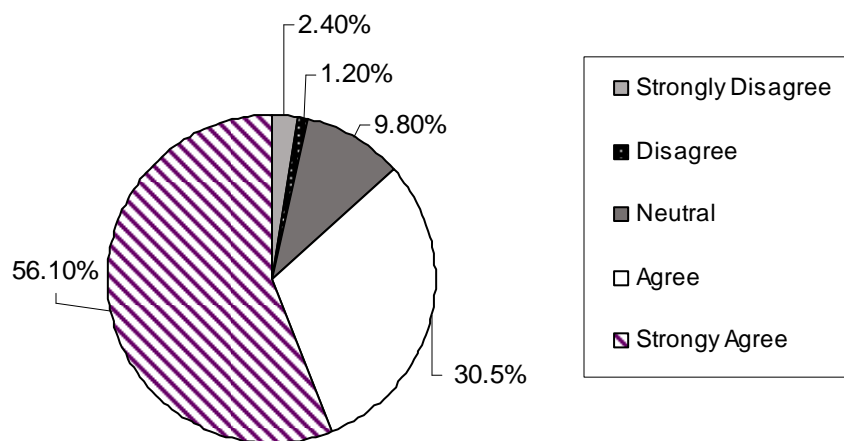


Figure 3. Participation if career ladder were renewed.



## Summary

Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to examine the effectiveness, as determined by perceptions of educational leaders and teachers, of incentive pay programs including Missouri's Career Ladder Program, as related to increasing student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers. In an attempt to understand the perceptions of four superintendents, four professional development chairs, four school board presidents, and four educational organization leaders, qualitative data in the form of interviews were obtained.

A coding system was created to refer to research participants in order to assure confidentiality and anonymity. Four school districts were represented in the qualitative data and each set of numbered superintendents, professional development chairs, and school board presidents were from the same district. Interview questions and responses for each of the superintendent, professional development chairs, school board presidents, and professional organization leader groups were presented.

Quantitative data were gathered through a Likert scale survey of teacher perceptions of the Missouri Career Ladder Program and incentive pay opportunities. Teachers from the four school districts participating in the research study had the opportunity to participate in the survey. A total of 83 out of 787 certified teachers chose to participate in the online survey. Survey responses were not disaggregated by the current incentive pay participation of the district. An analysis of survey responses was presented and figures were provided as a visual representation.

In Chapter Five, the findings from the data were discussed. Conclusions were revealed for the research questions. Additionally, implications for practice and recommendations for future research were presented.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness, as determined by perceptions of educational leaders and teachers, of incentive pay programs including Missouri's Career Ladder Program, as related to increasing student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers.

### **Findings from Qualitative Data**

Interview responses were obtained to understand perceptions of educational leaders surrounding incentive pay programs including Missouri's Career Ladder Program. Four school board presidents, four superintendents, four professional development chairs, and four educational organization representatives participated in this phase of the research. The participants represented four school districts and were coded within the same numbered set. Code names and district incentive pay programming distinctions are contained in Table 2.

Table 2.

*Incentive Pay Distinctions*


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Participating Districts	Type of Program	Board President	Superintendent	Professional Development Chair
D1	Using CL	BP1	S1	PD1
D2	No incentive pay	BP2	S2	PD2
D3	New incentive pay	BP3	S3	PD3
D4	Variation	BP4	S4	PD4

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*Note.* Type of Program: Using Career Ladder (CL). The district is still using the career ladder program. No incentive pay, the district formerly used the career ladder program and now offers no form of incentive pay programs. New incentive pay, the district formerly used the career ladder program and currently using a new form of an incentive pay program. Variation, the district formerly used the career ladder program, and now uses a variation of the career ladder program.

The school districts were selected based on their previous participation in the Missouri Career Ladder Program and their current use of incentive pay opportunities. Through analysis of interview transcripts, categories and themes emerged. Then, emerging themes were viewed through the lens of one of Marzano's (2009) three general factors that influence student academic achievement: teacher level factors, as related to

student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of highly qualified and effective teachers. Four themes were evident from the data:

1. The effectiveness of Missouri's Career Ladder program as related to increasing student achievement and the retention of high quality and effective teachers.
2. The effectiveness of alternative pay incentive pay programs as related to student academic achievement and the retention of high quality and effective teachers.
3. Necessary components of an effective professional development program.
4. Motivation for teachers.

The process to address each theme was two-fold: pertinent information contained in the review of literature followed by the findings from the qualitative and quantitative data.

**Theme one. The effectiveness of Missouri's Career Ladder program as related to student academic achievement and the retention of high quality and effective teachers.** All of the four school districts that were part of the study previously participated in the Missouri Career Ladder Program until state funding for the program was eliminated in 2010. According to Silman and Glazerman (2009), the purpose of Missouri's Career Ladder Program was to improve student achievement and retrain high quality and effective teachers. Responses from school board presidents, superintendents, and professional development chairs as to their perception of whether or not the career ladder program increased student academic achievement and retained high quality and effective teachers, were divided.

D1 maintained the Missouri Career Ladder program with local funding, D4 maintained a variation of the Missouri Career Ladder program, while D2 and D3 no

longer participate in any version of the program. The interview responses mirrored the current level of participation in the career ladder program. Parallel findings were reported in the study by Silman and Glazerman (2009), in which;

Career Ladder had considerable benefits for students. The main perceived benefit was improved student achievement. Their comments suggested that the program can raise student achievement through a combination of at least two possible routes. The most direct route is through Career Ladder activities themselves, principally tutoring, helping students learn. Regardless of whether the content of the tutoring promotes learning during the sessions, teachers reported that the time they spent with students outside of regular classroom hours was a useful way to become better acquainted with student needs and interests, making participant-teachers more effective with those students during the regular school day.(p. 9)

S3 felt the career ladder program was not a powerful instructional tool, while BP4 expressed his support of the program due to increased student contact time beyond the regular school day. PD2 touted her thoughts with, “I think teachers would have done many of what was asked of them to fulfill career ladder requirements, whether they got paid or not.” S1 suggested that anytime teachers were working with students one-on-one or in small groups, such as the model of the career ladder program, student academic performance increases.

The majority of respondents maintained the position that the career ladder program did aid in retaining high quality and effective teachers. PD2 shared, “We could compete with larger districts because teachers would not have to leave to find better pay.” According to S1, the career ladder monies were not the only factor in retaining high

quality and effective teachers, but did play a role. BP3 asserted, “We all have to have a certain amount of money to survive, and those that are very driven will be speaking out for the best thing for their personal family.” The study conducted by Silman and Glazerman (2009) also reported teacher retention as an effect of the career ladder program due to increased teacher satisfaction. Additionally, in 2012, Fulbeck contended, “Increases in compensation may increase job satisfaction and improve teacher retention.” (pg. 5).

**Theme two. The effectiveness of alternative pay incentive programs as related to student academic achievement and the retention of high quality and effective teachers.** In a 2007 study conducted by Figlio and Kenny, individual teacher incentive pay opportunities were associated with student achievement. The researchers, however, could not fully determine if the association was the result of the effectiveness of teacher incentives eliciting more effort from teachers, or if there were other difficult-to-measure factors included. The unclear results of Figlio and Kenny’s (2007) study parallel the conclusions from respondent interviews in this study.

When asked whether or not incentive pay programs increase student achievement, all four school board presidents responded positively. Similarly, all four of the professional development chairs and all superintendents, with the exception of S3, agreed teachers respond positively to incentive pay opportunities. According to S3, “Sometimes pay is not the best incentive. I think it depends on what the incentive is.”

The majority of participants interviewed supported incentive pay opportunities as a means to increased student academic achievement. Their viewpoints are supported with current district participation. D2 is the only participating district not offering incentive

pay opportunities of any kind. BP2 shared his desire to re-implement an incentive pay program if state funding were once again available.

The professional education organization representatives overwhelmingly cautioned against the use of incentive pay programs. PR1 expounded on his organizations stance:

What we are careful to avoid in talking about is that we don't want incentive pay for teachers linked to how students do on standardized tests. Student performance is an important element in any teacher's professional life, and every teacher I have ever met cares about it deeply, but if you start linking standardized test scores to whether or not you get a raise, that changes the whole playing field, and I think it brings in an element that would be competitive and counterproductive.

PR2 shared the same organizational viewpoint due to lack of supporting evidence. PR3 and PR4 both indicated their organizations have not yet taken a stance on incentive pay programs.

When asked their perceptions of incentive pay opportunities aiding in teacher retention, the responses from the professional educational organization representatives were divided. PR1 felt incentive pay programs would be limited in their ability to retain high quality and effective teachers, while PR2 felt the program could be discouraging to educators and difficult to define the characteristics of a high quality and effective teacher. PR4 shared, "If the teacher is wanting to stay in the district, incentive pay increases the likelihood they will." Similarly, PR3 felt an environment that honors teachers with incentive pay would increase retention.



The four school board presidents agreed there was a correlation between incentive pay opportunities and teacher retention. Not only does incentive pay programs allow smaller schools to compete financially with larger districts (S1), but according to S4, incentive pay opportunities allow teachers to bring home extra money for pursuing their passion in a career that is not known for its high salaries.

Contrary to the findings in this study, a 2011 research project conducted by Jones, found stress levels increase and enthusiasm decreases with merit pay. The study did find that teachers involved in an incentive pay program were less likely to respond “until a more desirable job opportunity comes along” or “definitely plan to leave as soon as I can” when asked, “How long do you plan to remain in teaching?” (p. 3). Results also indicated the retention of teachers due to incentive pay programs was stronger in males than females and with experienced teachers.

**Theme three. Necessary components of an effective professional development program.** Throughout the participant interviews, several crucial components of an effective professional development program were illuminated. Relevancy, sustainability, and teacher buy-in were descriptions that were commonly used by respondents when discussing effective professional development programs. Likewise, Archibold, Coggshall, Croft, and Goe (2011) reported, “Aligning professional learning activities with data analysis, student goal setting, implementation strategies, and monitoring and evaluating improvement also can be highly beneficial to administrators, teachers, and students.” (p. 2).

When asked about effective components of professional development program for educators, all four of the professional education organizations representatives spoke of

relevancy as a crucial factor. PR1 stated, "Professional development needs to be relevant to what the teachers want and what they need." Similarly, PR2 asserted, "Relevancy needs to be of the factors for a professional development program to be effective. It has to be determined if the program is relevant to the teacher and the situation they are in." PR3 spoke of the alignment of best practices with curriculum, while PR4 touted improving instruction and meeting educator needs as components of relevancy within an effective professional development program.

Sustainability in all areas was also determined to be an imperative component of a professional development program. According to Archibold et al. (2011), "Follow-up and feedback support sustained change in teacher practice." (p. 4). D1 chose to sustain and locally fund the career ladder program after the state eliminated funding. S1 shared many successes of the program within his district, "When the state dropped funding, we had a long discussion about career ladder and decided it was a worthwhile program and we would continue to fund our portion of it"

Similarly, D4 chose to sustain the career ladder program, with some slight modifications, following the state discharge of allotted funding. BP4 shared, "We just picked up where the Career Ladder Program fell off." PR4 validated the need for financial sustainability, and stated, "Professional development has to be funded properly, not on the backs of the teachers, or out of their pockets. That is an area we have had some concern in. Professional development money is not always there."

Teacher buy-in also emerged as a necessary component of an effective professional development program. According to Zaslow, Tout, Halle, Whittaker, and Lavelle, (2010),

A common thread among studies is the explicit intent to have the teachers as collaborators in the professional development intervention and to have the teachers and the educational institutions take ownership of their reform efforts. (p. 6).

D3 began new incentive pay opportunities when career ladder funding was terminated. According to S3, his district felt there would be more teacher buy-in if teachers were allowed to have input on their professional development opportunities.

Likewise, PR1 stated, “I think a lot of professional development programs fall flat when they are dictated in a top-down kind of presentation.” Additionally, PR3’s organization strives to find professional development opportunities that will make an impression on educators, which will, in turn, create teacher buy-in. When career ladder funding was eliminated, D2 created a committee to decide the path for their professional development program. He states, “We took all our curriculum directors, administrators, and professional development committee teachers and came up with a plan, and that’s what we’re doing right now. The committee approach, according to BP2, allowed input and buy-in from stakeholders.

**Theme four. Motivation for teachers.** Throughout the interviews of all respondents, teacher motivation was at the heart of incentive pay programs, both new and old. Motivations were categorized within appreciation, geography, and school type, but overwhelmingly, financial motivators. Even though responses never specifically indicated incentive pay programs should be based solely as a financial means of motivating teachers, it was clear that many respondents felt monetary incentives were an effective method for producing desired results.

According to Hattie (2012), reasons teachers stay in the profession of teaching and their school include teach autonomy, leadership, staff relations, the nature of the students, facilities, and safety. Not included in Hattie's (2012) list was financial motivators. However; according to several of the respondents participating in this study, appreciation of teachers can be shown monetarily. When asked if teachers respond positively to incentive pay opportunities, PD2 shared, "Yes, they know we are showing appreciation to them for their time."

Similarly, S1 offered a two-fold benefit of incentive pay opportunities with a tutoring component, "It shows teachers we do support and appreciate them, and it gives that direct relation with the students that need the tutoring and extra assistance." Also in agreement was PR3, "I think more than anything, incentive pay opportunities say, 'thank you, job well done,' and 'thank you for your hard work, you are doing great things.' I think it is important to compensate and reward teachers for that competency, and character to put in extra time."

Geography and type of school also emerged as motivators for teachers in various interview responses. In a 2006 study, Blazer determined, "Among teachers changing schools, the highest percentage rated an opportunity for a better teaching assignment (39.8 percent) as very important or extremely important in their decision to move to another school.(p. 15). Even though it is difficult to define "a better teaching assignment," some respondents considered geography and type of school as contributors to the definition. PR4 asserted, "Sometimes people stay because of geographics or sometimes they move because of geographics," asserted PR4. She went on to share an experience of a colleague whose wife was recently motivated to move her employment to

a parochial school where she felt she would encounter less parent issues, but would also be driving an hour and a half less each day.

According to PR2, his organization fears incentive pay opportunities diminish the motivation for teachers to work in a high poverty or struggling school. In addition, type of school can also be defined as the size of the school. According to PD2, smaller districts, such as hers, found it difficult to “level the playing field” with larger districts in regard to benefits.

Financial motivation was consistently mentioned during the interview process as a motivator for teachers. According to PR1, teachers are underpaid with current salary scales. With that same mentality, BP4 reported, “It is important to have a mechanism to compensate teachers for the work above and beyond the normal classroom time.”

Students can also benefit from content teachers shared S2:

I think, in order to get good teachers, you’re going to have to give them good pay.

There are a lot of things out there that they can do for incentive pay. If your teachers are getting paid well, if they have incentive to do a good job, the kids are going to benefit from that.

PD1 and PD2 agreed incentive pay opportunities increased the participation in professional development opportunities due to compensation for teachers’ time outside the classroom. BP3 predicted, “I also think that over time, incentive pay opportunities will attract better performing teachers.”

Even with the majority of respondents commenting positively as to the relationship of financial incentives and teacher motivation, there was some dissention among the responses. According to S2:

Most people did get into education because they have the passion for teaching and working with students. I've always told teachers that if you don't get outside of that classroom setting and get involved with kids in some way, shape or form, whether it be tutoring, whether it be coaching, whether it be sponsorship of a club or science fair, whatever that might be, you really miss out on the aspect of dealing with kids. I feel like that it is extremely important whether you get paid or you don't get paid. That's part of the job.

S3 also shared his experience of incentive pay opportunities not always centering around instruction. He went on to argue the effects of incentive pay opportunities depend on the amount of financial gain as well as the types of activities allowable. He states, "Sometimes pay is not the best incentive." A 2009 study of merit pay opportunities by Faulk agree with SR3, "The individual changes their level of effort according to the value they place on the outcome and the perception of the link between the effort and the outcome. (p. 4).

### **Findings from Quantitative Data**

Quantitative data were gathered through an online survey presented to teachers within the four participating school districts. A total of 83 teachers out of a possible 787 teachers participated in the survey. The themes which emerged from the qualitative data were considered when analyzing the findings of the quantitative data.

Survey questions focused on the perceptions of the effectiveness of the Missouri Career Ladder Program in regard to effective teaching and learning, and retention of teachers, and teacher perceptions of current incentive pay opportunities. While 29.6% of teachers surveyed felt teachers who participated in the Missouri Career Ladder program

were more effective, 41.9% of teachers surveyed felt student academic achievement increased because of the program. Additionally, 35% of survey respondents felt their district's professional development programs were more effective because of the Missouri Career Ladder Program, and 42% felt the program attributed to district retention of high quality and effective teachers. Each survey question pertaining to the Missouri Career Ladder program resulted in a range of 42% to 44.4% of respondents indicating a neutral response.

Survey results indicated teachers who did not respond neutrally, felt positively about the effects of the Missouri Career Ladder Program in regard to both increased student achievement and the retention of high quality and effective teachers. Due to termination of the Missouri Career Ladder funding, over three years ago, it is possible that some respondents were not in the teaching field during the implementation of the program and thus have no knowledge of the effectiveness.

When asked if teachers respond positively to incentive pay opportunities, an overwhelming 82.7% of respondents felt the response was positive. Only 42.7% of respondents reported incentive pay opportunities are available in their district, and of those, only 26.6% indicated their participation in available incentive pay opportunities. However, 77.8% of respondents are interested in participating in incentive pay opportunities if they were made available, and a staggering 86.6% of respondents would be interested in participating in the Missouri Career Ladder program if it were once again funded by the state and their district chose to participate.

## Conclusions

Through analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, themes emerged and research questions were considered. The process to address each of the research questions was two-fold: pertinent information contained in the review of literature along with a summary of data from Chapter Four.

### **RQ1. What are the perceptions of Missouri public school superintendents, teachers, and district professional development chairs of alternative pay incentives to replace the career ladder program?**

Even though Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2007) found little evidence of benefits of alternative pay incentive programs, such as the Missouri Career Ladder program, two of the four school districts represented in this study continue to offer and locally fund incentive pay opportunities which closely resemble the career ladder program. The same two school districts are also interested in once again participating in the career ladder program if it were once again funded by the state. According to S1, his district would participate in the career ladder program but would want to keep district specific regulations.

According to PD1 and PD4, teachers are motivated by incentive pay opportunities just as they were the career ladder program. PD1 stated, "Once we started paying teachers for professional development opportunities, more teachers were willing to participate." PD3, however, maintained the professional development in her district is more focused following the dissolution of the career ladder program. S2 felt his district's professional development offerings were vaster with the career ladder program, but also felt the program left room for loopholes. Contrary to the view of other participating



superintendents, S3 did not feel his teachers were more effective because of the career ladder program. He argued, “I don’t think it was really powerful instructionally.”

Survey data from teachers revealed 29.6% felt teachers who participated in the career ladder program were more effective because of the program; however, 77.8% were interested in participating in incentive pay programs. Eighty-six percent of surveyed teachers were interested in participating in the career ladder program if it was once again funded by the state and their district chose to participate. Responses from teachers indicated a high interest in incentive pay program, even the Missouri Career Ladder program, even though less than 30% of surveyed teachers felt the career ladder program created more effective teachers.

Responses from superintendents, teachers, and professional development chairs revealed a significant interest in incentive pay programs, but illuminated program issues with the Missouri Career Ladder program. Perceptions indicated incentive pay opportunities are highly valued among superintendents, teachers, and professional development chairs, but consideration to the pros and cons of the effectiveness of the career ladder program should be largely examined before reinstatement of the program were to occur. Incentive pay opportunities, born from the needs of individual districts, whether modeled after the career ladder program or not, were perceived as the best method for offering alternative pay opportunities.

**RQ2. What are the perceptions of Missouri public school superintendents, teachers, and district professional development chairs of alternative pay incentives as related to student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers?**

Little research has been conducted to determine a direct link between incentive pay opportunities for educators and increased student achievement. In his 2010 study, n; however, did find a correlation that could suggest incentive pay opportunities for educators does have a positive effect on math, science, and reading scores. Likewise, research participants in this study concurred with such suggestions.

S1 espoused, “Anytime teachers are working with students one on one, I think the students’ academic performance increases.” Similarly, S2 shared, “We definitely offered more before and after school tutoring programs for kids, and it gave teachers a tool to be able to stay longer with them.” Forty-one percent of teachers surveyed also felt student academic achievement increased due to alternative pay incentives.

According to Temperly (2008), professional development is the process from which teachers improve and learn which ultimately leads to improved student achievement. PD3 shared, “Professional development which improves teachers’ professionalism in any way has a positive effect on students.” S2 also believed alternative pay incentives provided incentives and opportunities for teachers to expand their learning more than they would have done in the past without financial incentives.

Likewise, 35% of teachers surveyed agreed their districts’ professional development program was more effective because of incentive pay opportunities. S3 did share a contrary perspective as he observed teachers not taking incentive pay

opportunities as seriously as he would have liked and not always centering the opportunities around improved instruction.

Honawar and Olson (2008) reported teachers may respond to incentive pay opportunities, and since teachers are the best source to improve student academic achievement, retaining high quality and effective teachers might best be accomplished through incentive pay programs. Teachers seemed to agree, as 42% of survey responses indicated districts retained high quality and effective teachers because of incentive pay opportunities.

According to S4, incentive pay opportunities allowed his district to provide a competitive financial package for teachers:

Obviously pay is one of the reasons teachers are in their profession. It is not the only reason, but anytime there is incentive pay for teachers to increase their salaries it allows us to retain and recruit teachers.

PD4 thought incentive pay opportunities allowed her district to attract and retain good teachers, while PD1 agreed, but also felt there were many other factors involved in teachers' decisions to remain within a district.

Interview responses and survey results of superintendents, teachers, and professional development chairs illuminated distinct positive perceptions of alternative pay opportunities as related to student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers. Like most programs and initiatives, alternative pay opportunities are perceived as effective on varying scales. Motivation for teachers in the form of financial support and appreciation was one constant perception of incentive pay opportunities.

Superintendents, teachers, and professional development chairs all maintained exceptions to the norm, but overall, perceived alternative pay opportunities as a means to allow teachers to be compensated for some of the work above and beyond the scope of their contract. This, therefore, results in increased student achievement by way of increased student contact time, a greater investment in professional development opportunities, and job contentment which leads to retention of high quality and effective teachers.

**RQ 3. What are the perceptions of state and national professional educational organizations of alternative pay incentives as related to student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers?**

Even though state and national professional educational organizations defend their stance of appropriate pay for the job done, all four of the professional organizations interviewed for this study maintained their support of the Missouri Career Ladder Program and were disappointed when state funding was cut to support the program. Two of the professional organization representatives spoke specifically about the Missouri Career Ladder's impact on student achievement. PR4 acknowledged, "The Career Ladder Program gave teachers the opportunity to become a second tier of intervention in the way of after school tutoring."

PR2 also shared his organization's focus on student achievement through the Missouri Career Ladder Program. He states, "The Career Ladder Program funded a lot of good things going on around the state, such as after school tutoring, special assistance, and targeted intervention for students." According to Pollock (2007), most students can

improve their academic performance if they receive prompt feedback and individual instruction.

According to PD3, his organization supported the Missouri Career Ladder Program as a means of professional development for educators. Daily imbedded professional development is key to strong application in the classroom (Fogarty & Pete, 2007). In contrast, PD2 did not advocate for the Missouri Career Ladder Program as an effective means for professional development. He argued, "I don't think there was a cohesive structure to the program, no targeted emphasis. It was too broad."

PD4 split her opinion of the Missouri Career Ladder Program as an effective means of professional development. She stated, "I think you have to look at it by individual districts." PD4 pointed out, "In some cases, teachers were writing curriculum or meeting student needs through summer school. Other districts used the Career Ladder Program to provide equity monetarily." PD1 also shared the notion of PD2 that the Career Ladder Program was arbitrarily administered. He went on to advocate for the program as a means for teachers to add to their income.

Professional organization representatives were split in their opinions of whether or not the Missouri Career Ladder Program and alternative incentive pay programs serve to retain high quality and effective teachers. PD1 touted, "Anytime you provide extra compensation for teachers you are more likely to retain high quality and effective teachers." "Who wouldn't want to work in an environment that honors teachers which includes addition pay," exclaimed PD3. Contrarily, PD2 responded:

I think incentive pay programs work to discourage retention of high quality and effective teachers. If you have an effective teacher and they are working with a

group of kids and put their heart into that job, but are still experiencing issues, such as high mobility rate among students, or lower academic results, or other issues that teachers in higher socioeconomic areas don't experience, I think that would be discouraging.

PD4 did not feel alternative pay opportunities has an effect either way. PD4 related, "If the teacher wants to stay, it increases the likelihood they will. If they want to move out of the area and the opportunity occurs, it won't have much of an effect."

The overall message from the professional organization representatives in this study provided an insight into the need for increased financial support for teachers. Opinions of the Missouri Career Ladder program and alternative pay programs were varied from the positive impact on student achievement and professional development to the negative or undecided relationship to the retention of high quality and effective teachers. It is clear, state and national professional organizations value student achievement as the overall purpose for teachers. The means to increasing student achievement, however, continues to be debated.

The professional organization representatives interviewed for this research study were passionate about the teaching profession and its impact on society. Collectively, the representatives supported the betterment of the quality of the teaching profession in order to not only support the craft of teaching but to ultimately increase student achievement.

**RQ4. What are the motivators for Missouri public school board presidents to approve allocation of funds for district sponsored alternative pay incentives?**

Attracting and retaining quality teachers, increased student achievement, improved assessment scores, and overall positive student impact were identified

motivators of Missouri school board presidents to support incentive pay programs. According to Hattie (2012), school systems, including boards of education, need to be consistently aware of the effects they are having on their students. Marzano (2003) retorted the catastrophic impact individual teachers have on student achievement, as well as the influences the school district has on teachers.

The research findings from this study suggested school board presidents specifically, all members of the board of education, are acutely aware of the impact teachers have on student achievement, and likewise, the impact the board of education and administrators have on teachers. BP1 stated, "If teachers have incentives to do well, our kids are going to benefit from that." Similarly, BP2 associated incentive pay opportunities with increased teacher accountability which in turn resulted in increased teacher production.

In order to retain high quality and effective teachers, the educational field must constantly evaluate the conditions under which teachers train, work, and remain in the field, and see themselves as true professionals (Heller, 2004). BP2 referred to teaching as an art that most teachers were born to do. He went on to say, "The bottom line is, you want to get paid for your art. BP3 declared, "We all have to have a certain amount of money to survive." BP4 shared, "Effective and quality teaching in itself can also be motivation for teacher retention."

Student achievement and whatever is needed to increase student achievement is the strongest motivator for school board presidents, and all research participants, to support incentive pay opportunities. According to Marzano (2003), effective teachers have more effective instructional strategies at their disposal. Knowledge of effective

instructional strategies often comes from professional development (Marzano, 2007).

Professional development is commonly pursued by teachers through incentive pay opportunities (Silman & Glazerman, 2009). BP4 stated, “Our district’s incentive pay program compensates teachers for the work they do above and beyond the normal classroom time, both in the professional development and student contact arenas.”

Similarly, BP1 shared, “We support incentive pay programs as a benefit for the teachers that will have a direct benefit for all of our students.”

### **Implications for Practice**

The goal of education is to continue to improve student academic achievement. Educators and researchers alike strive to discover strategies that will not only increase teacher effectiveness, but also ensure the retention of high quality and effective teachers. It was clear from interview and survey responses that educators favor incentive pay opportunities that not only increase student achievement but also motivate teachers, which, in turn, lead to retention of high quality and effective teachers. Details of incentive pay opportunities seem to vary greatly among districts, and little data to determine effectiveness are currently available.

Educational leaders should consider incentive pay opportunities as a possible conduit to teacher motivation within a well-defined professional development program. Through program data analysis, districts would have the opportunity to amend program details in order to improve student academic achievement and the retention of high quality and effective teachers.

The Missouri Career Ladder Program has left a positive legacy with veteran teachers, many of who would be interested in once again participating in the program if



the opportunity arose. Through program refinement and state financial funding, educational leaders may consider the reinstatement of the Missouri Career Ladder program as a means of effective professional development, which could lead to the ultimate goal of increased student academic achievement.

The implications for this study suggest that while incentive pay opportunities offer additional financial compensation, motivation for educators, as well as increased student contact time, there are still specific details of any incentive pay program that must be considered before implementation.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Limited research is available surrounding the effectiveness of the Missouri Career Ladder Program, as well as perceptions of educational leaders of incentive pay opportunities. Additional areas of focus and research deriving from this project include, but are not limited to the following recommendations:

1. Review and analyze perceptions of educational leaders of incentive pay programs within other demographic areas of the state of Missouri.
2. Review and analyze data to determine whether or not there was a correlation between the Missouri Career Ladder program and increased student achievement in the form of MAP scores.
3. Examine whether or not other states offer similar programs to Missouri's Career Ladder Program, and if so, explore the perceptions of the effects of such a program.

4. Research and analyze the mobility of teachers within schools when the Missouri Career Ladder Program was implemented as compared to mobility now that the program is no longer available.

5. Review and analyze student achievement data of districts with similar demographics of schools currently offering incentive pay opportunities as compared to districts not offering incentive pay opportunities.

6. Research additional motivators for teachers outside of financial factors.

7. Conduct a case study of districts that maintained a version of the Missouri Career Ladder Program and analyze the effectiveness of the programs based on state test data.

8. Review and analyze effective professional development programs across the state or country to determine necessary programming components.

### **Summary**

Whether districts choose to implement incentive pay programs or not, the Missouri Career Ladder Program has had a lasting effect on Missouri educators' perceptions of incentive pay programs and their effects. The conclusions from this study revealed a positive association with incentive pay programs, including Missouri's Career Ladder Program, student achievement, professional development, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers. Even though disagreements in programming details emerged through qualitative data, the overall opinion of the interviewees, as well as the teacher survey responses, indicated a positive perception of incentive pay opportunities and their outcomes.

As both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed, four themes emerged. Emerging themes included, the effectiveness of Missouri's Career Ladder program as related to increasing student achievement and the retention of high quality and effective teachers, the effectiveness of alternative pay incentive pay programs as related to student academic achievement and the retention of high quality and effective teachers, necessary components of an effective professional development program, and motivation for teachers. Overall responses indicated Missouri educators felt positively toward the effectiveness of both the Missouri Career Ladder program, as well as alternative incentive pay opportunities. Positive aspects of both programs were increased student achievement through the retention of high quality and effective teachers and effective professional development programs. Teacher motivation was also identified as an underlying factor in all areas connected with incentive pay programs.

Within a two-fold process of analyzing data from Chapter Four along with examining pertinent findings from Chapter Two, the research questions were considered. Perceptions of the research participants of alternative incentive pay opportunities to replace the Missouri Career Ladder Program, as well as the effects of such programs on student achievement, professional development, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers were favorable. It was clear that research participants set increased student achievement as the ultimate outcome of any incentive program. They also saw incentive pay programs as a possible means to create more effective professional development, as well as retain and motivate high quality and effective teachers, which will ultimately lead to increased student achievement. Data revealed some dissention among research participants in incentive pay programming details and mandates. The

outcome of increased student achievement, however; was a binding factor and purpose of agreement with any alternative pay program.

Even though very little data currently exists to link incentive pay programs and increased student achievement, the perceptions of educators participating in this study validate the need for district consideration of such programming options. Teacher motivation, as well as a defined professional development program could lead to retention of highly qualified and effective teachers, and ultimately, increased student achievement. It is uncertain whether or not the Missouri Career Ladder Program, or another incentive pay program, will be ever be funded by the state. What is clear, however, is that Missouri's students deserve the very best possible education, and if incentive pay programs aid that outcome, careful consideration of such programs should be given.

## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

#### Superintendents, teachers, and Professional Development Chairs

1. Please share with me your professional experiences as an educator.
2. Do you feel teachers who participated in the Missouri Career Ladder Program were more effective because of the program? Why? Why not?
3. Do you feel your professional development program was more effective because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?
4. Do you feel student academic achievement increased because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?
5. Do you feel that your district retained high quality and effective teachers because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?
6. How did your district's professional development program change after the career ladder program was no longer funded by the state?
7. What types of incentive pay opportunities does your district currently participate?
8. Do you feel teachers respond positively to incentive pay opportunities? Why? Why not?
9. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, what aspects of the incentives are non-negotiable for educators? Why?
10. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, how did your district decide which incentives to offer?
11. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, what data are you using to determine the effectiveness of the program? How did you determine these data?

12. If the career ladder program were once again funded by the state, would your district be interested in participating? Why? Why not?

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions

#### State and National Educational Organization Representatives

1. Please share with me your professional experiences as an educator and/or member of your current educational organization.
2. For a professional development program to be effective, what components must be included in the program? Why?
3. What position did your organization take when the Missouri state government was deciding whether to cut the Missouri Career Ladder Program? Why?
4. Do you feel the career ladder program was an effective professional development program? Why? Why not?
5. Do you feel student academic achievement increased because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?
6. Do you feel school districts retained high quality and effective teachers because of the career ladder program? Why? Why not?
7. What is your organization's current stance on incentive pay for educators? Why?
8. Do you feel incentive pay programs increase student academic achievement? Why? Why not?
9. Do you feel incentive pay programs serve to help school districts retain high quality and effective teachers? Why? Why not?

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions

#### Missouri Public School Board Presidents

1. Please share with me your professional experiences as school board member.
2. As the school board president, did you support the career ladder program for your district? Why? Why not?
3. What percentage of your budget are you currently allocating for professional development? What percentage is currently being allocated for incentive pay opportunities? How did your district make that determination?
4. Do you feel incentive pay programs increase student academic achievement? Why? Why not?
5. Do you feel incentive pay programs help school districts retain high quality and effective teachers? Why? Why not?
6. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, how did your district decide which incentives to offer?
7. If your district is currently offering alternative pay incentives, what data are you using to determine the effectiveness of the program?
8. If the career ladder program were once again funded by the state, would your district be interested in participating? Why? Why not?



## Appendix D

### Teacher Survey

The following statements are presented to garner your thoughts and opinions about teacher incentive pay programs. Thank you for your time.

1. Teachers who participated in the Missouri Career Ladder Program are more effective teachers because of the program.

a.) Strongly disagree   b.) Disagree   c.) Neutral   d.) Agree   f.) Strongly agree

2. My school's professional development program was more effective because of the career ladder program.

a.) Strongly disagree   b.) Disagree   c.) Neutral   d.) Agree   f.) Strongly agree

3. Student academic achievement increased because of the career ladder program.

a.) Strongly disagree   b.) Disagree   c.) Neutral   d.) Agree   f.) Strongly agree

4. My district retained high quality and effective teachers because of the career ladder program.

a.) Strongly disagree   b.) Disagree   c.) Neutral   d.) Agree   f.) Strongly agree

5. My district's professional development program significantly changed after the state no longer funded the career ladder program.

a.) Strongly disagree   b.) Disagree   c.) Neutral   d.) Agree   f.) Strongly agree

6. My district currently offers alternative incentive pay programs.

a.) Strongly disagree   b.) Disagree   c.) Neutral   d.) Agree   f.) Strongly agree

7. I currently am participating in incentive pay programs within my district.

a.) Strongly disagree   b.) Disagree   c.) Neutral   d.) Agree   f.) Strongly agree

8. I am interested in participating in incentive pay programs within my district.

a.) Strongly disagree   b.) Disagree   c.) Neutral   d.) Agree   f.) Strongly agree

9. Teachers respond positively to incentive pay opportunities.

a.) Strongly disagree   b.) Disagree   c.) Neutral   d.) Agree   f.) Strongly agree

10. If the career ladder program was once again funded by the state and my district chose to participate, I would choose to participate in the program.

a.) Strongly disagree   b.) Disagree   c.) Neutral   d.) Agree   f.) Strongly agree

## Appendix E

### Internal Review Board Disposition Report

#### Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board Disposition Report

**To: Kena Lashel (Shelly) Worley**

**CC: Dr. Sherry DeVore**

**IRB Project Number 12-42**

**Title: Perceptions of Educational Leaders of Incentive Pay Programs**

The IRB has reviewed your application for research, and it has been approved, pending clarification. Please address the following points:

- PI must submit the letters of approval from the four school districts involved in the study when they are obtained.

*Please submit changes directly to the IRB Chair. Thank you.*

*Dana Klar*

Dana Klar

Instructional Review Board Chair

1/30/12

Date

## **Appendix F**

### Phone Script for Contacting Interview Participants

Hello, this is Shelly Worley. I am contacting you regarding the research I am conducting as part of the doctoral requirement for Lindenwood University. My study will examine the perceptions of educational leaders of incentive pay programs to determine how these programs relate to student academic achievement, professional development for educators, and the retention of high quality and effective teachers. As the primary investigator, I am requesting your participation, in the form of a personal interview, to garner perceptions about incentive pay programs. Thank you for your time and support.

**Appendix G**

## Letter of Introduction

## Interview

<Date>

<Title><First Name><Last Name>

<Position>

<School District/Organization>

<Address>

Dear <Title><First Name><Last Name>,

Thank you for participating in my research study. I look forward to talking with you on <date><time> to gather your perceptions and insights into alternative incentive pay programs.

I have allotted one hour to conduct the interview. With your permission, the interview will be audiotape to ensure your responses are transcribed accurately. Attached are the interview questions to allow time for reflection before our interview. I have also enclosed the Letter of Informed Consent Form for your review. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity are assured. If you have questions, please call (417-294-1808) or send an e-mail (worleys@branson.k12.mo.us).

Sincerely,

Shelly Worley

Doctoral Candidate

Lindenwood University

## Appendix H

### Lindenwood University

School of Education  
209 S. Kingshighway  
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

#### Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

#### **“Perceptions of Educational Leaders of Incentive Pay Programs”**

Principal Investigator: Shelly Worley Telephone: 417-294-1808

E-mail: worleys@branson.k12.mo.us

Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Contact info \_\_\_\_\_

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Shelly Worley under the guidance of Dr. Sherry DeVore. The purpose of this research is gather information about incentive pay programs in Missouri public school districts to determine how the programs relate to teacher retention, professional development, and student achievement.

2a) Your participation will involve:

- Sharing your perceptions and insights of incentive pay programs through a personal interview with the Primary Investigator.
- The interview will be audio-taped, with your permission, to assure your responses are transcribed accurately.

*I give my permission for the interview to be audio-taped* (\_\_\_\_\_)  
Participant's Initials

- The interview will take place via face-to-face, telephone, or electronic mail at your convenience.

b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be:

Approximately one (1) hour. In this study, 16 educational leaders in Missouri will be interviewed: Four public school superintendents, four public school professional development chairs, four representatives from professional organizations, and four public school board presidents.

3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about alternative incentive pay programs in Missouri public schools.
5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study, and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.
7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, would like a copy of the results, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Shelly Worley at 417-294-1808 or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Sherry DeVore at 417-881-0009.

You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs, at 636-949-4846.

**I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Primary Investigator    Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Printed Name

## Appendix I

### Permission Letter for Superintendent

<Date>

Dear Superintendent \_\_\_\_\_,

I am conducting a research project entitled, *Perceptions of Educational Leaders of Incentive Pay Programs*, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a doctoral degree in educational administration at Lindenwood University. The research gathered should assist in providing insights and perspectives into the perceptions of educational leaders of incentive pay programs. By utilizing a mixed method approach, both qualitative and quantitative data will be explored.

I am seeking your permission as the superintendent of the <Name Here> School District to conduct interviews and surveys as part of the data collection and analysis process.

Consent is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The identity of the participants, as well as the identity of the school district will remain confidential and anonymous in the dissertation or any future publications of this study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participation (phone: 417-294-1808 or electronic mail: worleys@branson.k12.mo.us). You may also contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Sherry DeVore, (phone: 417-881-0009 or electronic mail: sdevore@lindenwood.edu ). A copy of this letter and your written consent should be retained by you for future reference.

Yours truly,

Shelly Worley  
Doctoral Candidate



## Permission Letter

I, <Name of Superintendent>, grant permission for \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ as part of a research project entitled, *Perceptions of Educational Leaders of Incentive Pay Opportunities*. By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in place to protect the participants:

1. I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.
2. The identity of the participants, as well as the identity of the school district will remain confidential and anonymous in the dissertation or any future publications of this study.

I have read the information above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. Permission, as explained, is granted.

---

Superintendent's Signature

---

Date

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## Vita

Kena Lashel McCullough Worley was born July 3, 1977 in Springfield, Missouri. Following graduation from Ozark High School in Ozark, Missouri in 1995, Mrs. Worley graduated from Drury University in 1999 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education and a Minor in Global Studies. She also completed a Master of Science degree in Elementary Education from Drury University in 2004. Pursuing a Master of Administration degree, Mrs. Worley enrolled in Lindenwood University in 2005 and graduated with her second Masters degree in 2007.

Mrs. Worley has served as an educator in the southwest area of Missouri for 15 years. Professional experiences include the following: fourth grade classroom teacher, assistant principal, and principal. Mrs. Worley currently serves as the Branson Cedar Ridge Primary principal in Branson, Missouri.

Mrs. Worley is passionate about early childhood education and community partnerships in education. She currently serves as a Boys and Girls Club Auxiliary member and is an adjunct professor for Lindenwood University's satellite campus in southwest Missouri. Mrs. Worley and her husband Ryan are currently serving as foster care parents for three wonderful boys. Mrs. Worley enjoys cheering for her husband's basketball team in which he is the head coach, gardening, reading, watching movies, and spending time with family and friends.