



Demystifying the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) Autumn 2011

About Chalkboard and CLASS

The Chalkboard Project exists to help elevate student achievement in Oregon to among the top ten states in the Nation. We work in the areas of quality, accountability and finance in K-12 public education and the majority of our time is spent helping districts strengthen teacher and leader effectiveness.

Chalkboard launched the CLASS pilot project to support local school districts with designing support and leadership programs for their educators that would raise the bar on student outcomes. Our pioneering CLASS districts have contributed strong models of enhanced teaching and learning to the state. The results they are achieving reinforces our resolve that the best solutions for students come from teacher involvement in designing innovative and creative new models.

Demand for the CLASS Project has exceeded our supply of philanthropic resources, which is why we have pursued both federal and state funds to continue the journey towards Oregon being one of the best places to teach in the country.

About the Teacher Incentive Fund

A lot of questions come to mind when people are introduced to TIF, the federal Teacher Incentive Fund focused on new models for performance-based compensation. Oregon is part of this nationwide action research project through seven school districts that applied for and were awarded TIF funding in 2010 in partnership with Chalkboard.

According to federal grant requirements, all new models must include multiple measures of student achievement. They also must incorporate the use of a value-added model (VAM) of assessing impact on student outcomes. With increased measurement sophistication, however, comes new layers of complexity.

The following list of 18 concerns surfaced when teachers were first learning about TIF. The answers below reflect Chalkboard's perspective on the value and opportunity inherent in teacher-driven reform. Several responses also provide

clarification about federal grant requirements. This is designed as a companion document to the comprehensive Q&A about TIF prepared in Spring 2011.

“This is about merit pay.”

FALSE. Neither TIF, nor CLASS is about paying educators based solely on singular test scores. CLASS integrates four components: performance evaluation, professional development, career paths and compensation. Compensation is one component and should recognize and reward educators for their professional contributions and raising student achievement. In no CLASS or TIF districts is money being taken away from educators; new compensation and bonuses are in addition to base pay. The incentives in TIF could be seen as similar to “extra duties” pay or other salary adders.

“Individual compensation takes away from the team approach and discourages collaboration.”

FALSE. Compensation for individual educators in the TIF districts actually *rewards* collaboration. The TIF districts are using school-level value-added models, which means that eligible teachers in an entire school are recognized and rewarded for their efforts. Additionally, compensation for excellence on performance evaluation encourages all educators to learn and grow, not compete with one another. The models are being designed by teachers, for teachers and the design process itself hinges on team work and collaborative problem solving.

“Bonus pay is intended to make teachers work harder than they already do.”

FALSE. Bonus pay recognizes and rewards excellence. Educators are already working hard, but are rarely formally recognized for their efforts. Additionally, bonus compensation is just one of four components of the CLASS Project, and is integrated with the other three: evaluation, professional development and career opportunities.

“Teachers will be motivated to teach to the test.”

FALSE. Teachers are motivated to do their best work for students. The CLASS and TIF focus on quality instruction and clear performance standards will help educators continually improve their practice and grow as professionals.

“TIF pits teachers against teachers.”

FALSE. The TIF districts have created models that encourage collaboration, not competition. Using a school-level value-added model, as the TIF districts are, puts emphasis on the performance of the school as a whole and encourages all educators to work together for the success of all children.

“TIF reinforces a subjective evaluation system that will change based on administrators whims.”

FALSE. TIF emphasizes an evaluation system that has strong inter-rater reliability, meaning that evaluation is consistent across a district regardless of the specific individual conducting the evaluation. Administrators are being trained in the new

evaluation rubrics in order to make the process much more objective than it has been in the past.

“Measuring teacher effectiveness using student achievement scores is too limiting. It doesn’t tell the whole story.”

TRUE. Student achievement scores are just one measure and should not be used on their own to evaluate effectiveness. The TIF districts are all putting into place new evaluation systems with robust rubrics that clearly describe strong performance and they are training their evaluators to use the rubrics in a consistent manner.

“Student achievement measures don’t take into account the factors beyond teachers’ control.”

FALSE. What makes a value-added model unique is that it *takes into account factors beyond a teacher or school’s control*. From The Education Trust¹:

“...value-added is a way of measuring a student against himself and against his student peers. The calculation looks at a student in a teacher’s class and then looks at how similar students — those with comparable performance histories and background characteristics — have performed in the past. Based on this information, the model predicts how the student should perform on an assessment, and then compares the predicted result with the actual result.”

With this model no school is punished for having students who have traditionally struggled, as long as those students make gains comparable to similar students in other schools.

“TIF attributes an entire school’s performance to only a few individuals.”

FALSE. The TIF districts are using school-level value-added models which attribute student outcomes to the school as a whole, not to individual educators.

“Excluding specialists from the model unfairly penalizes them.”

FALSE. The federal regulations state that only teachers who provide direct instruction to students and meet the state definition of a teacher are eligible for bonuses. The additional compensation is all on top of base salary and does not take any money away from other educators.

“Including some schools instead of all schools in a district sends a message that some teachers have little impact on student achievement.”

FALSE. Based on federal requirements, the TIF grant is only available to schools that have large low-income student populations. Low-income students tend to be disproportionately affected by teacher turn over and therefore have less experienced educators. The federal government is specifically interested in how strengthening educator effectiveness can impact the highest need students.

¹ The Education Trust is a non-profit that promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college.

"Teachers will receive bonuses based solely on the evaluation of their individual performance."

FALSE. TIF districts can include multiple measures in determining bonuses, but must include individual performance evaluations based on classroom observation and value-added scores. The TIF districts have decided to use school-level value-added models, which means that when a VAM bonus is given it would be given to all qualified teachers in the school. Educators would therefore be receiving a bonus of the work of the entire school, not specifically their own performance.

"It is unfair that a small group of employees will benefit financially from the years of work by all other teachers – teachers in lower grades, and teachers who worked in that school before TIF implementation."

FALSE. The TIF districts have created models that reward educators for at least two components: individual performance evaluation and school-wide value-added model scores.

The individual performance evaluation component hinges on an individual educator's performance. The school-wide value-added model, however, provides a way for *all* eligible teachers at a TIF school to receive some form of additional compensation if the school meets the criteria in the district's design model.

The school-wide value-added model (VAM) is focused on students. It looks at how much growth students could be expected to make (based on previous scores and other factors) and whether they actually made those gains in the current year. While teachers in lower grades and teachers who worked in the school previously certainly had an impact on that student's abilities and achievements, it is the growth during the single year (as compared to expected growth) that determines the value-added score.

"CLASS worked better before TIF."

FALSE. CLASS is the foundation of TIF. TIF adds emphasis to the compensation component of CLASS, but it does not do away with the other three components. The districts participating in TIF would not have the opportunity or funding to design and implement new evaluation systems, career paths, professional development or new compensation models if the federal funding provided through TIF had not become available.

"The strength of CLASS is career paths, professional development and evaluation. Compensation needn't be changed."

FALSE. The strength of the CLASS Project is a comprehensive model that includes all four components. Compensation should not be the driving component. However, the conversation about how to recruit and retain the most effective educators should include a conversation about recognizing and rewarding excellence. It is also true that traditional seniority-based salary structures reward longevity and advanced degrees which research has failed to show significantly impacts student achievement. Chalkboard believes we must be willing to reexamine the assumptions

on which these pay scales have been built in light of what we know today about the impact of a quality teacher.

“TIF is too restrictive, too prescriptive and too unproven to be considered a worthwhile reform measure.”

PARTIALLY TRUE.

TIF is an action-research project, not a proven program or strategy. The federal government wants to test whether performance-based pay impacts teacher performance and student achievement. Because CLASS is the foundation for TIF and a comprehensive model that is not focused on compensation, participating districts are putting into place policies and opportunities for educators that will outlast the federal experiment. Chalkboard values the opportunity to incubate promising practices with the hope that the work will inform CLASS and future policy discussions at the state and national level.

“Districts can withdraw from TIF and still remain in CLASS.”

FALSE.

Chalkboard does not have the financial capacity to support CLASS implementation in any additional districts. Regarding the \$5 million available at the state level, it is a limited fund, it will not be able to meet every district's needs and guidelines for qualification and participation have not been established.

“Withdrawing from TIF means leaving millions of federal dollars on the table.”

TRUE. TIF funds are awarded through a competitive grant process. The level of funds TIF is bringing into Oregon cannot be replicated by Chalkboard or at the state level.

For more information about TIF and CLASS, please refer to the Teacher Incentive Fund Q&A, Spring 2011 available at <http://chalkboardproject.org/what-we-do/class-project/>.