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EFP Takeaways

Teacher Incentives and Student Performance: Evidence from Brazil

Background

Despite being controversial, policies linking teacher pay to student performance have been increasingly popular, motivated by the view that teachers often face weak incentives and accountability, especially in developing countries. However, it is not clear from a theoretical perspective that incentives will have the desired effects in the context of schools, and empirical evidence on the effectiveness of such policies points to mixed findings. Andrea Lépine provides new evidence on a large-scale teacher incentive program in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Her work is published in vol. 17 issue 3 of *EFP*.

The Study

This paper examines a large-scale teacher incentive program in Brazil, which was introduced in 2008 and awarded group bonuses to teachers and school staff conditional on improvements in student performance. The author uses data from a standardized test not directly related to the incentive scheme for 5th and 9th grade students up to 7 years after the program's implementation.

Findings

The author finds that the program had positive effects on student achievement up to seven years after the program implementation for 5th grade students, while effects are much more modest for 9th grade students.

A possible explanation for these results lies in the fact that 5th grade students generally have one main teacher, while 9th grade students have different teachers for different subjects, which might make coordination more difficult in the context of a group incentive program. It may also be easier to improve the performance of younger students, while older students may have learning gaps that are more difficult to close.

The results suggest that teacher incentive programs have the potential to improve student performance but can be ineffective in specific contexts. The findings of this study can provide guidance in the design of more efficient and better-targeted teacher incentive programs in the future.

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- Summary of:
Lépine, A. (2022) Teacher Incentives and Student Performance: Evidence from Brazil. *Education Finance and Policy*, 17 (3): 541-563.