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## EDUCATION

### Austin teachers getting nearly \$1M in bonuses

Most bonuses coming this week awarded to schools that reached same levels in past years without the extra cash.

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AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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State reading and math test scores at Lanier High School have improved significantly each of the past four years. But this year, unlike in the other years, teachers there will get an extra \$4,000 in their paychecks for the improvements.

Teachers and principals at Austin schools that are in the district's pilot performance pay program will receive bonuses totaling nearly \$1 million on Friday as rewards for significant improvement in students' scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills last school year.

Of the six schools where staff will get bonuses, all but two had shown similar improvement in previous years. Half of the schools where staff will get bonuses have relatively high proportions of students from low-income families or who are learning English or have special needs.

David Lussier, director of Austin's performance pay program, said that it's worthwhile to reward staff at schools that show improvement, even if they have improved in the past without the promise of performance bonuses.

"We're incentivizing that growth," he said.

Lanier Principal Katherine Ryan said that teachers probably would have worked just as hard and test scores would have risen just as much without the extra money, but the program encouraged some teachers to improve how they taught specific topics where test scores lagged. And teachers in noncore subjects have shown more interest in integrating reading and math lessons into their classes,

knowing that if reading and math scores increase, all teachers will receive bonuses, she said.

"They made the connection," Ryan said. "The next time we had a staff development session (after the announcement that test scores had improved) on reading strategies, it was a whole different, accepting, eager atmosphere. It definitely puts an inspiration in there."

The performance pay program, which expanded from nine to 11 schools this year, awards teachers and other school employees with bonuses for mentoring other teachers, pursuing national board certification, meeting teacher-determined student performance goals and having significant improvements by students on the reading and math sections of the TAKS.

Under the program, schools are considered to have made significant improvement if their reading or math TAKS scores rose more than those of most other schools across the state with similar student body demographics. Teachers and principals at schools in the program last year will receive bonuses of \$2,000 and \$4,000, respectively, per subject for schoolwide improvement in the scores.

Five of the nine schools in the program last year were considered high-needs schools because of their relatively high proportions of students from low-income families or who are learning English or have special needs.

The three high-needs elementary schools — Sims, Sunset Valley and Rodriguez — did not make significant improvements in reading and math last year by the program's standards. Nor did any of those three schools make significant improvements in reading and math scores the past three years.

Under the program, experienced Austin teachers at schools with high-needs students can earn bonuses of as much as \$10,400.

District-wide, the average teacher salary is about \$43,000.

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