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## education

### Salary system luring faculty

Applications are up with DPS's incentive strategy

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Article Last Updated: 06/18/2007 12:19:56 AM MDT

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Hundreds more teachers sought difficult positions in Denver's toughest schools in the first year of a nationally watched teacher pay-for-performance system - an early sign that the \$25 million program is achieving one of its goals.

In its first year, 586 more teachers filled out applications for jobs in "hard to serve" schools - those with the city's most impoverished students and greatest needs.

Principals with "hard to staff" positions available saw about 10 percent more teachers apply for them in the 2006-07 school year than the year before. Those posts include middle-school math teachers and those qualified to teach special education.

But experts caution that it's too early to tell whether incentive plans are helping students do better at school - despite heightened national enthusiasm and tens of millions of dollars invested in the effort.

"If we find something that works for student learning, great. If not, then we can move on," said Matthew Springer, director of the National Center on Performance at Vanderbilt University, which is studying these plans across the country. "There's no definitive evidence on whether pay-for-performance is effective."

Denver's teacher merit-pay plan - dubbed ProComp - is one of the most radical departures in the country from 86-year-old traditional teacher salary scales.

It has drawn in about 1,800 of about 4,000 city teachers. Those who have been hired since 2006 are automatically enrolled, and veteran teachers can opt in whenever they want.

People ranging from big-money national education reformers to those in the White House are closely watching to see whether it could be a model for encouraging changes nationally in the teacher pay system.

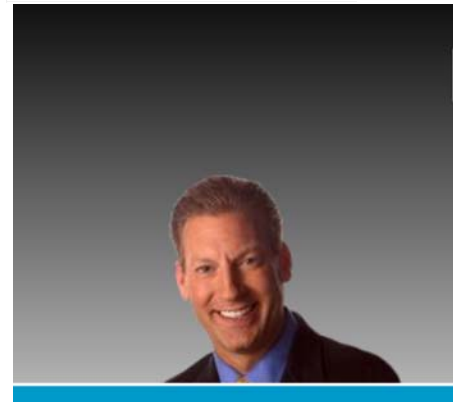
The Bush administration devoted \$99 million in 2006 to strengthen teacher pay-for-performance plans nationally. Denver reaped \$22 million of that money in its first year to expand a version of ProComp to principals.

And Eli Broad and Bill Gates - two of the most notable national donors in education reform - are launching a \$60 million effort to, in part, burnish teacher quality through incentive pay.

Many details still need to be worked out in Denver's plan, including exactly how the district will measure growth on Colorado Student Assessment Program tests for participating teachers to get their \$1,026 bonus.

Denver Public Schools officials hope to look at individual classroom growth on the tests, not the school's overall performance.

"Scores for an entire school can potentially mask what an individual teacher at that school is doing," said Henry Roman, a former elementary teacher, who is now on the



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