

A Study to Determine Whether Ethnicity is Related to Attitudes toward Teacher Compensation

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Paper Abstract

Purpose of the Study

The role of the social and political contexts in education is immense. The community and the larger society shape educational policy and practice. A study was conducted by the Center for Educational Development Evaluation and Research (CEDER) Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi to determine the opinion of Texas citizens about the qualifications, preparation, and compensation of public school teachers in Texas. The study was designed to solicit the opinions of Texans about a number of issues, including problems in Texas public schools, teacher qualifications, and attitudes about the overall quality of public schools in Texas. The study was proposed through the Texas Teacher Recruitment and Retention Project, funded by the Washington Mutual Insurance Company's Office of Community Relations, and augmented by the Commissioner's Educational Research Initiative. Timely and accurate public opinion data is crucial in providing information for politicians and school officials as they attempt to improve schools and cope with teacher shortages.

Research Design and Methodology

The target population for the overall study was the general public in the State of Texas. A stratified random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample that was representative of the Hispanic, African-American, and White populations in Texas. The sample for the study consisted of 1,039 randomly selected households in Texas. The final sample consisted of 15.9% African-American, 43.5% White, 35.5% Hispanic, and 1.1% other. Six percent of the sample declined to identify their ethnicity. These percentages are similar to the actual population demographics for Texas.

A cross-sectional survey research design was used for the study. A telephone interview was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was a structured interview questionnaire consisting of 35 general questions. The questionnaire was designed by Louis Harris and David Haselkorn

and has been used in two previous studies: a nationwide study in August 2000 and a California study in September 2000. The data for the Texas survey were collected between October 6 and November 28, 2001.

Five contingency table analyses were conducted to evaluate whether particular ethnic groups were more likely to favor a variety of strategies concerning teacher compensation. The first two variables were perception of compensation (overpaid, well paid, just adequately paid, inadequately paid, or not sure) and ethnicity (African-American, White, or Hispanic). The second pair of variables was agreement with teacher compensation criteria (agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, and disagree strongly) and ethnicity (African-American, White, or Hispanic). Due to sample characteristics, the category of other was not included in the analysis. Respondents indicated how they perceived teacher compensation currently, and the level to which they agreed with different criteria on which to base teacher compensation. A Chi-square test for independence was used to test the null hypothesis that the perception of compensation and ethnicity, as well as attitudes about teacher compensation strategies and ethnicity were independent.

Results

Attitudes about teacher compensation and ethnicity were significantly related for all five of the contingency tables ($p < .05$). The survey items for which independence was rejected was *perception of local teacher compensation, perception of national teacher compensation, rewarding master teachers with higher pay, paying teachers according to what they know and job performance, and paying according to students' performance on standardized tests.*

Educational Importance of the Study

The theme of the overall study is the public's desire for quality education for all children. Texas public schools face a number of crucial challenges in the coming years. Texas leadership must deal quickly and decisively with the public's concerns about the quality of the teacher workforce, public school problems, and financial disparities, even as they move to rectify the teacher shortage. Education remains mostly a state and local responsibility, and it is for this reason that public opinion plays a crucial role in influencing political decisions in education that ultimately determine education policy.