



## ANNOUNCEMENT - April 1, 2008

### A Reminder of Great News

On October 29, 2006, we received the great news that Eagle County Schools (ECS) had been selected by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) to receive a \$6.8 million Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant. This grant was designed to support programs that develop and implement performance-based teacher compensation systems, based primarily on increases in student achievement. We were one of only 16 grants awarded nation-wide. The TIF grant positions ECS to further develop a truly exemplary method for "rewarding excellence in teaching." All teachers will benefit from *some* components of the grant, but not all teachers will benefit from *all* components. To date, 32 grants have been awarded, with 4 in Colorado, including Eagle County Schools, Denver Public Schools, Harrison School District Two in Colorado Springs and Weld County.

### Our Grant

We asked for funding to expand our efforts to provide even greater rewards for excellence in teaching. More specifically, we wrote our grant for funding to be used to:

- Increase incentives for teachers in our highest-poverty schools;
- Increase performance awards for teachers demonstrating the greatest sustained student achievement gains;
- Expand the number of teachers able to be rewarded for individual classroom achievement;
- Differentiate contracts for core subject teachers to increase training and instructional planning time;
- Increase training and support for teachers;
- Increase training and support for Master and Mentor teachers and Principals to improve overall quality of leadership;
- Increase Master and Mentor teacher stipends; and
- Improve the effectiveness of student assessments and data collection and analysis at the district, building and classroom levels.

### TIF "Superstar" Monetary Awards

Our grant contained a provision and budget allocation for teacher "superstar" cash bonus awards. These awards were to be paid to the top teaching talent in ECS based solely on student achievement scores. Roughly \$300,000 was available to teachers for the 2006-07 school year. With the turnover in leadership at the district office, coupled with serious concerns the new administration had about the method specified in the grant for making payments (which would have excluded all teachers except grades 3-8 core content teachers), we did not award this money.

ECS faced a serious choice with the money, developed as we either had to get it into teachers' hands in a performance-based way, or send it back to Washington. The solution was a result of work of the Performance Compensation Committee\*. After meetings with several groups within ECS, it was decided to award this money to teachers who were teaching in ECS during the 2006-07 school year and returned to work this year in any capacity. The \$300,000 will be distributed in relative amounts to Master, Mentor and Career teachers. In other words, 75% of our teachers are Career teachers, so \$225,000 is designated for Career teachers. Individual amounts will be based on 2006-07 performance awards. We will make these awards as part of the May or June paychecks, depending on capacity to process these bonuses. These calculations have not been done, so exact amounts are not available.

Teachers who are in their first year with ECS are not eligible for this award, due to the fact that this money was tied to 2006-07. However, a similar method will be used for paying out this year's teachers who return for 2008-09. Also, we are considering creating a "Superstar Teacher" program for 2008-09 where teachers can apply to demonstrate mastery in teaching through evaluation data, student work, videos of teaching, etc. Teachers identified through this process next year could be eligible for up to a \$10,000 bonus award.

We are making efforts to identify and reward excellent teaching throughout ECS, **regardless of content area or grade level**. We value staff who are loyal to ECS and demonstrate this through continued employment. Please contact Jason Glass at [jason.glass@eagleschools.net](mailto:jason.glass@eagleschools.net) with questions.

\*Members of the Performance Compensation Committee are Jason Glass (Chair), Mark Conlin, Meredith Deem, Erika Donahue, Kirk Drager, Heather Eberts, Mitch Forsberg, Mike Gass, Janet Hester, Wade Hill, John Kuglin, Tim LyBarger, Greg Moch, Ruth Moroney, Amy Niswanger, Phil Onofrio, Kristen Schiedegger and Traci Wodlinger.

### The Center for Educator Compensation Reform

In September 2006, the U.S. DOE established the Center for Educator Compensation Reform (CECR). The primary purpose of CERC is to support the TIF grantees with their implementation efforts through the provision of ongoing technical assistance and the development and dissemination of timely resources. In June 2007, three representatives from CECR, James W. Guthrie (Vanderbilt University), Patrick J. Schuermann (Vanderbilt University) and Jeffrey Watson (University of Wisconsin), spent an entire day with ECS TIF officials. While the representatives agreed with ECS that the complexity of the current plan needed to be made more transparent to teachers and the public, the Center was extremely impressed by the progress that this TIF project had made over the course of the previous school year. "In the national move toward reform in the domain of educator compensation, Eagle County is clearly a front runner," said Patrick J. Schuermann. "While often overlooked at other sites implementing pay for performance, ECS has made notable progress to its data infrastructure and information technology capacities that will allow this program to work in tandem with the broader district goals of elevating student performance."

*\$6.8 million,  
wow!*

*It's a great  
package!*

*\$300,000 to  
teachers!*

*Impressive  
progress!*



## Year 2 – A Lengthy Delay in Funding Appropriations

Year 2 of our 5-year TIF grant began October 1, 2007, and ends September 30, 2008. In the proposal, the Year 2 funding request was for \$1,427,150. However, in early October, we received information from the DOE that only \$427,150 was definitely available; that amount of money was already committed for Year 2 projects. Lacking confirmation of the additional \$1,000,000, we chose not to announce or move forward with additional aspects of the grant, fearing that the funding would be reduced significantly or in full. On March 10 (five and a half months into Year 2!), we received, in writing, confirmation of the \$1,000,000, and we are now confident about moving forward. Briefly, the reason for the delay is because the TIF program makes multi-year grant commitments to grantees, but the actual dollars must be appropriated each year by Congress in annual spending bills that are voted on by the Congress and signed into law by the President. A delay in the approval of annual spending bills can delay funds flowing to grantees in any particular year. Spending bills are generally approved before the start of the next federal fiscal year (October 1). However recent year disputes over funding levels and resulting delays in passage of spending bills have delayed these bills past October 1 into the next fiscal year, resulting in delays in funds flowing to grantees. It is possible, although unlikely, that in any particular year Congress may decide not to fund a particular program even if grantees are expecting funds. For this reason, advocates of various programs make the case for continued funding for that program each year. In addition, the TIF program has not yet been “authorized” by the Congress. Each program or initiative is authorized by the Congress through legislation (such as NCLB) and then the Appropriations Committee allocates funds for that program in the annual spending bills. TIF has received appropriations, although it is not yet authorized. Until it is authorized by the Congress in legislation, funding for TIF is more vulnerable to being reduced or eliminated each year.

*We are now able to move forward with additional aspects of our grant.*

## From Kirk Drager, Math Teacher, Battle Mountain High School

On February 28-29, Andy Arnold, Mike Gass, Heather Eberts, Jason Glass and I attended a conference, *Performance Incentives: Their Growing Impact on American K-12 Education*, at Vanderbilt University. My primary impression was that ECS is way ahead of the curve on implementation of performance-based pay. While most others are only in the initial stages of planning, we have been implementing it for years and are currently working on refining the system. As the scholars presented their views and warned of potential pitfalls, we were able to confirm that the challenges mentioned were real because we have already faced them. Some of the major topics for discussion included: to what degree is performance pay effective in increasing student achievement, what are the best methodologies for assessing student achievement and how do these systems effect teacher motivation, morale, retention and recruitment. There were varied research conclusions and strong opinions on all topics. The discussion also revealed that there is no consensus on what an effective performance-based system looks like and that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each district needs to find what will work for its own unique culture. The one point that everyone could agree on is that no system will be perfect and that we should all look at the development of a performance pay scheme as an on going process requiring continued revision.

## The Search for the Director of Research and Evaluation

TIF monies allowed us to hire a Director of Research and Evaluation with all of the salary and benefits paid by our grant. On April 2, 2007, Jason Glass was hired as our Director of Research and Evaluation. He then moved to Director of Human Resources August 1. The search began again, and we have hired Andrej Birjulin. Andrej obtained his Doctorate in Applied Social Psychology from Colorado State University in 1997 and has over 18 years of experience conducting applied research with a heavy emphasis on field research and evaluation. Andrej has led projects in a wide variety of domains, including educational reform, special education, reduction of school-based violence, youth development, informational learning and health and prevention. Prior to coming to ECS, Andrej worked for the Colorado Department of Education on developing and implementing Colorado’s State Performance Plan for improving services and outcomes for students with disabilities. He also provided research and evaluation support for a number of statewide initiatives, such as Response to Intervention, Positive Behavior Supports, the Rural Secondary Literacy Project and the Gifted/Talented program. Andrej brings a strong background in measurement, statistics and quantitative and qualitative research methods, as well as experience working with a diverse set of federal, state and local governmental and non-governmental organizations.

*“Bringing data together so that the District can implement effective changes that benefit a target audience.”*

## From Andrej Birjulin

My focus as the Director of Research and Evaluation is on evaluating facets of programs, interventions and teaching practices at various points in time and bringing multiple sources of data together so that the District can implement effective changes that benefit a target audience (e.g., improve learning outcomes among students, increase perceived safety among students, increase job satisfaction among teaching staff, etc.). Obviously, the District’s assessment data is a primary source of information, but to the extent that is feasible given time and other resource constraints, there should be an evaluation component imbedded in all initiatives that the District embarks on, whether it be implementation of RtI, a teacher professional development workshop, or a student drug and alcohol prevention program.

## Upcoming News

Look for another TIF announcement in May, which will include:

- Signing bonuses for high-poverty schools
- TIF technology update
- Elementary and secondary assessment development
- Training opportunities

Look for TIF information, including our complete list of frequently asked questions, at [www.eagleschools.net](http://www.eagleschools.net) by clicking on Staff Resources/TIF Grant Information. Please email Traci Wodlinger, Director of Professional Development and TIF Project Director, at [traci.wodlinger@eagleschools.net](mailto:traci.wodlinger@eagleschools.net) with any questions and thoughts.

*Thank you for your commitment to increasing student achievement.*