

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation of Elementary Teachers

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this research paper was to answer the question "Does an intrinsic drive or extrinsic rewards motivate elementary teachers?" The design of this study utilized quantitative methods through an anonymous Likert scale 10 question survey, 5 intrinsic and 5 extrinsic, given to elementary teachers at Harmony School of Science - Austin. The overall trend in the results was a split between the two motivators; 86% intrinsic and 75% extrinsic were both effective for elementary teachers. However, the average intrinsic motivation was 11% higher making a significant jump. In fact, there were two intrinsic questions that yielded 100% results whereas, extrinsic factors did not yield any unanimous replies. In conclusion, the results of this research have the potential to help school administrators become more aware of the factors that affect teacher motivation and recommends practices such as hiring intrinsically motivated individuals and providing extrinsic rewards.

### **Introduction**

Finding ways to maintain and increase teacher motivation is a challenge for most school leaders. In general, the teaching profession has many factors that impact job satisfaction. The role of teaching is not just the passing of knowledge from one human to another. Teachers also work harder than ever to teach social skills, appropriate behaviors, and meet the requirements of learners with unique needs; doing more and more with decreasing resources provided by the state. The need to address teacher motivation is in part due to the teacher shortage reported by many Western countries including the United States, Australia, and European nations such as the United Kingdom, Germany and Norway (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007). Texas in particular is experiencing a dramatic shortage of certified teachers, and this assertion is consistently supported by the NCLB highly qualified teacher data.

Teacher motivation is the foundation for every great school. If all the staff is excited to be there, they have a common goal and can work together to ensure student achievement. Motivated teachers create classroom environments that use situational motivation to directly impact student learning. This is important because a motivated teacher goes hand in hand with student success, which is the ultimate goal of every school. Motivation is defined as the willingness of someone to do something, however, since everyone is unique, not everyone will be motivated in the same way or to the same degree. Therefore, it's imperative to untangle the web of human behavior to understand how best to motivate each teacher, and this is what this research study will attempt to reveal.

Are teachers motivated by an intrinsic drive or extrinsic rewards? Intrinsic motivation is defined as the undertaking of an activity, as a hobby, without external incentive; and also

personal satisfaction derived through self-initiated achievement. Extrinsic motivation refers to behavior that is driven by external rewards such as money and praise.

The hypothesis is that teachers are intrinsically motivated, because teaching is a calling and the extrinsic reward of a high salary does not exist. Veteran teachers often speak with great passion for their profession, considering the joys in seeing a student learn and the students' desire to learn more as some of their best rewards. They do not put much value on accolades such as trophies, job titles, or time off, because even during their time off, they are still spending their time working in some form of teaching. Finding ways to motivate, engage, and increase teacher productivity is essential to retaining teachers in a profession that is progressively declining in numbers.

## **Literature Review**

### **Teacher Motivation**

A plethora of research affirms the importance of keeping teachers motivated so they in turn will keep our precious future leaders, our students, on track and striving for greatness. What exactly motivates our teachers though, is it an intrinsic drive or extrinsic rewards? The literature was split in their findings.

### **Intrinsic**

The following first five of ten sources point to an intrinsic source. Employees with diminished motivation need to "name the real problem" (p. 21) and "look below the surface" (p. 22). Hence, this is an intrinsic cure according to Loehr and Kaye (2011). Principal Nadia Lopez (2016) thinks extrinsic rewards will never be enough to create a great teacher. In fact she tells her staff, "If you're counting how many hours you're supposed to work and are more concerned about your check than you are about children, you gotta go. You just have to go" (p.

46). Pink (2009) does not mince words when he states the three elements of true motivation are "autonomy, mastery, and purpose" none of which can be given extrinsically (p. 1).

Covey (2008) lists the most important motivating factors for teachers. "Teachers want to enjoy a sense of dignity and pride in their profession. They want to be treated with respect. They want good collegial relationships. They want to be organized and to feel some semblance of control over their time and what happens in their classroom. They want their talents utilized and developed" (p. 36). Also, Hewertson (2014) believes we need to identify personal values which are "intrinsically most important" because these are our "greatest source of joy when you are living them, and your greatest source of unease when you are not" (p. 110). Friedman's (2014) answer is slightly mixed but starts out extrinsic by acknowledging workers do respond to raises in pay but ultimately it's the recognition specifically "the respect that comes along with it" which is the true key to motivation (p. 158).

### **Extrinsic**

Now for the opposing viewpoint, these authors believe teachers are motivated mostly by extrinsic rewards. Daniels (1994) has an entire section dedicated to the "astonishing power of positive reinforcement" (p. 25) as well as the strength of "compensation as reward" (p. 148). "Hold contests, host teacher appreciation events, and give praise" are wholly extrinsic suggestions to increase motivation by Granata (2016, para. 2, 4, & 5). Hosler (2013) thinks if teachers are paid "what they deserve" (para. 6) it would increase motivation. Lastly, Roberts (2014) says teachers need to stay motivated by taking care of themselves by learning something new as well as having down time, exercising, eating healthy, meditating, and my favorite, "do some action research" all to avoid burnout (para. 9).

The literature was chosen because it addressed the topic of teacher motivation, however, I found it fascinating that the research literature was almost split in half as to whether it is due to extrinsic or intrinsic means. This puts even more focus on my research to determine how best to serve our teachers who in turn keep that spark of inquiry lit in our student's eyes!

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

The researcher developed and administered an anonymous ten-question closed-ended survey sent to all teachers on the campus, Harmony School of Science - Austin. Twenty-two teachers completed the online survey out of all thirty teachers who are employed here. Surveys were distributed electronically; it opened May 22nd and closed on June 19th via Survey Monkey.

#### **Materials**

A 10 question Likert scale survey was designed to elicit responses regarding teachers' perspectives on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Participants had the option of answering the surveys ten questions with one of the following choices; strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree. Half of the questions were indicative of intrinsic motivators and the other half extrinsic (See survey in Appendix A).

#### **Procedure**

This action research study utilized quantitative methods through a closed-ended Likert survey to find out if teachers are motivated by an intrinsic drive or extrinsic rewards. The anonymous surveyed was administered via school email with a link to Survey Monkey, which then alerted me on the due date. The surveys were collected by logging in and viewing the final results. Confidentiality was secured several ways through the options in Survey Monkey

software; Anonymous Response Choice was on, Track IP Address was off, Track Email Invitations was off and it was sent over a secure SSL encrypted connection.

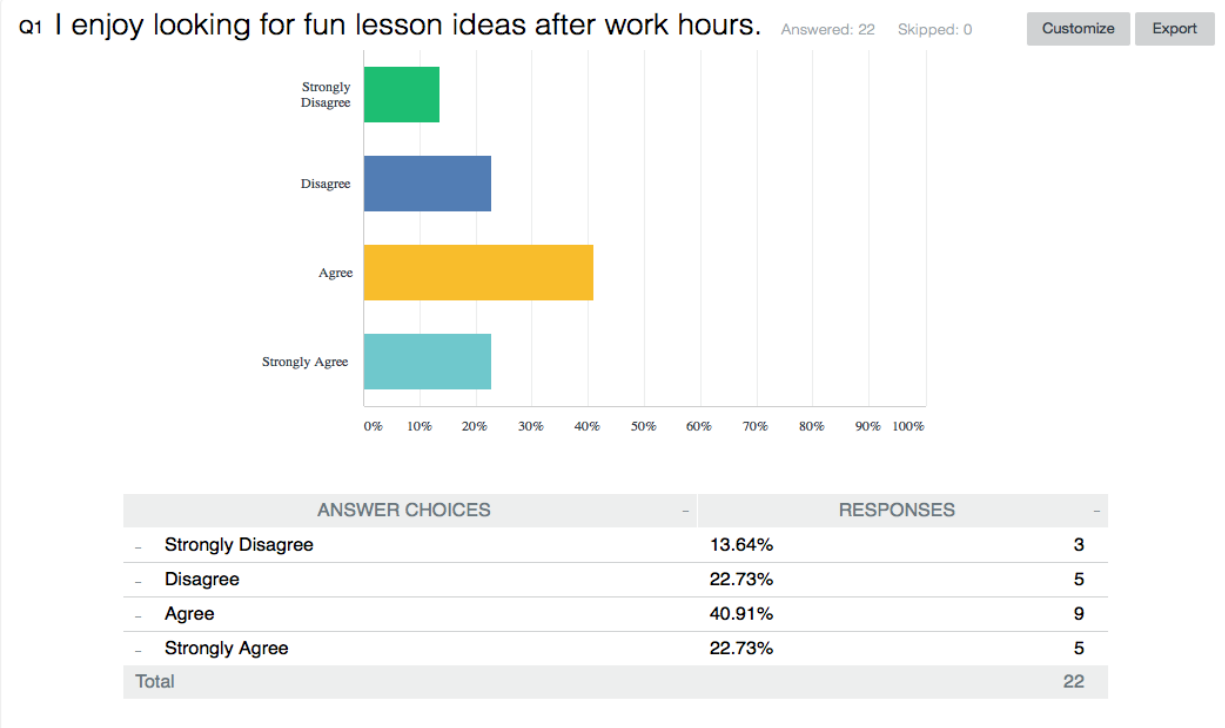
### **Analysis of Data**

This research study was conducted in the Spring of 2017 by anonymously surveying teachers at Harmony School of Science - Austin, a Kindergarten through 5th grade campus. Of the 30 teachers employed on the campus, 22 (73%) completed the survey in Appendix A. These surveys ascertained teachers' views on intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. The results were tabulated and percentages calculated in response to the survey questions.

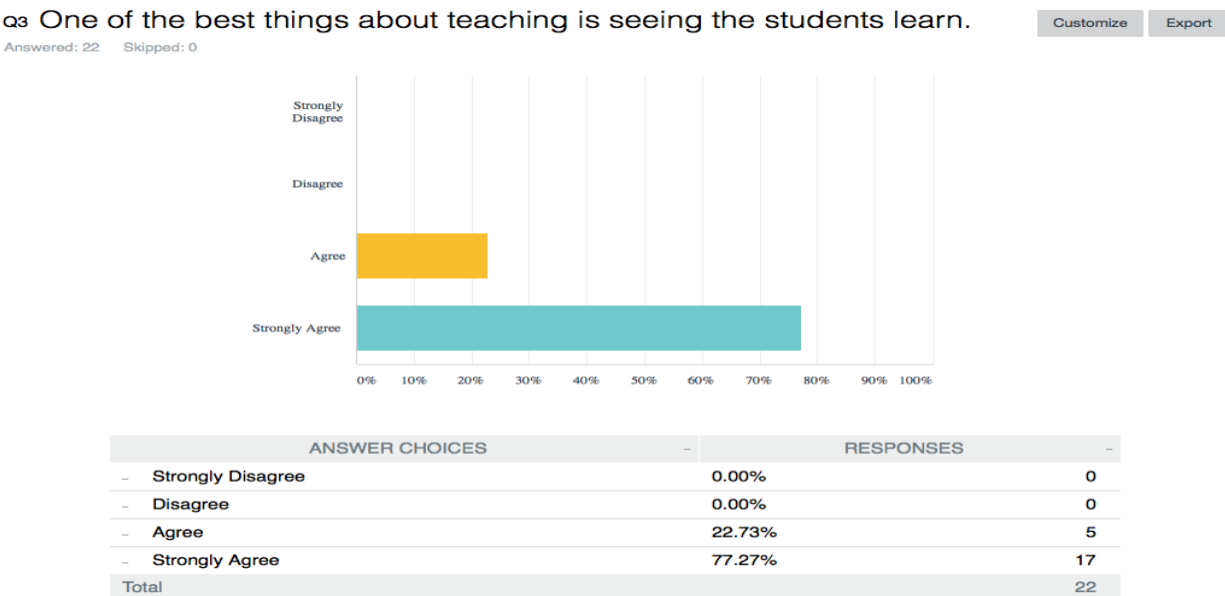
### **Results**

The survey was designed so that the first question was an intrinsic motivator and the second extrinsic; each question alternated like this for the entire survey. For all the intrinsic motivation questions it was a landslide of two questions with 100% agreement, others with 86%, 82%, and 63%. Regarding extrinsic motivation questions the results were 95%, 86%, two with 73%, and a split of 50%.

Thus, resulting in an average of 86% agreement for the intrinsic and 75% for the extrinsic motivators. Interestingly, the overall Strongly Agree category for intrinsic was 48% whereas, it was only 24% for extrinsic factors which implies the teachers are twice as strongly driven by intrinsic forms. When teachers were asked if they enjoyed looking for fun ideas after work hours, approximately 62% agreed or strongly agreed, whereas 38% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Making intrinsic the winner for this first question.



One hundred percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "One of the best things about teaching is seeing the students learn." Intrinsic is the unanimous winner for this question!



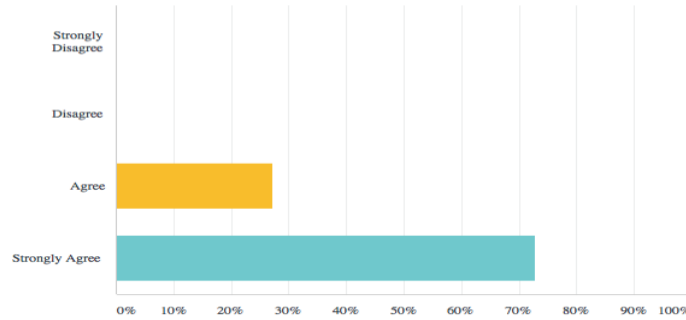


Another 100% agreement with the statement, "I want my students to learn more." Again supporting the intrinsic motivation factor.

Q5 I want my students to learn more.

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

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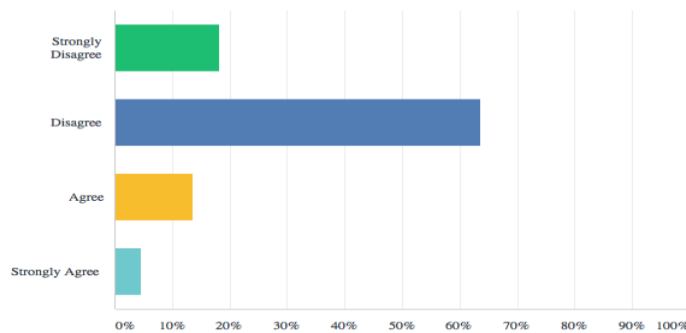
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
- Strongly Disagree	0.00% 0
- Disagree	0.00% 0
- Agree	27.27% 6
- Strongly Agree	72.73% 16
Total	22

When teachers were asked if most days they are not happy that they have to go to work, approximately 82% disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas 18% agreed or strongly agreed. Also making intrinsic the winner for this first question.

Q7 Most days I am not happy that I have to go to work.

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
- Strongly Disagree	18.18% 4
- Disagree	63.64% 14
- Agree	13.64% 3
- Strongly Agree	4.55% 1
Total	22

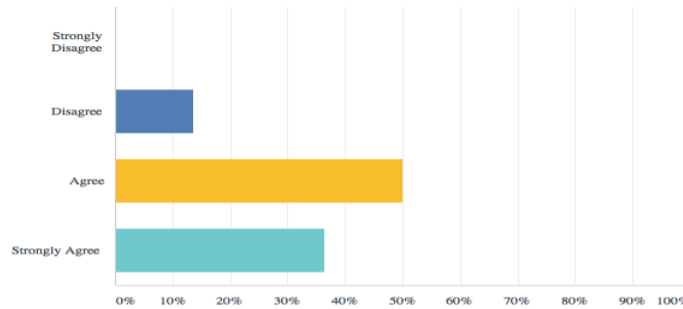
Teachers responded that they set tougher standards for themselves than the school does; approximately 86% agreed or strongly agreed, whereas 14% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Intrinsic motivation is the clear winner for this question.

Q9 I set tougher standards for myself than the school sets for me.

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Answered: 22 Skipped: 0



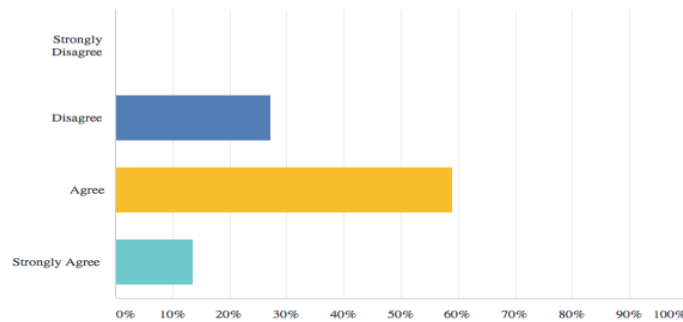
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
- Strongly Disagree	0.00% 0
- Disagree	13.64% 3
- Agree	50.00% 11
- Strongly Agree	36.36% 8
Total	22

When asked if they should receive rewards more often because they would try to earn them; approximately 73% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed, whereas 27% disagreed. Which strongly supports an extrinsic motivation.

Q2 Teachers should receive rewards more often because I would try to earn them.

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Answered: 22 Skipped: 0



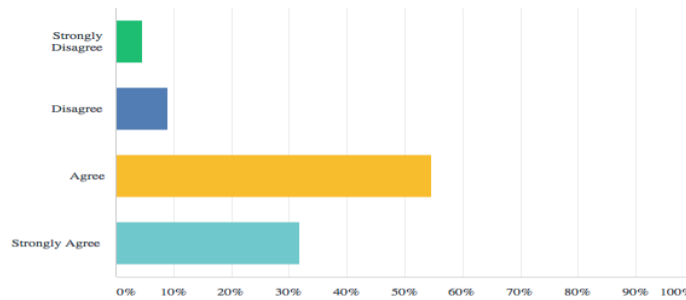
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
- Strongly Disagree	0.00% 0
- Disagree	27.27% 6
- Agree	59.09% 13
- Strongly Agree	13.64% 3
Total	22

When teachers were asked if they should be paid based on experience; approximately 86% agreed or strongly agreed, whereas 14% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Which may support an extrinsic motivation.

Q4 I think teachers should be paid based on experience.

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Answered: 22 Skipped: 0



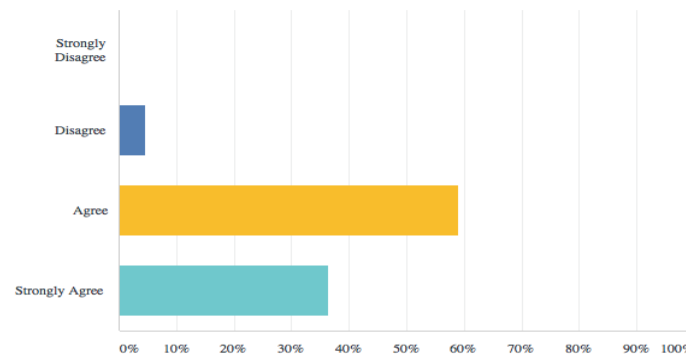
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
- Strongly Disagree	4.55% 1
- Disagree	9.09% 2
- Agree	54.55% 12
- Strongly Agree	31.82% 7
Total	22

When asked if they should be put on an improvement plan if not successful; approximately 95% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed, whereas 5% disagreed.

Q6 Teachers who are not successful should be put on an improvement plan.

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Answered: 22 Skipped: 0



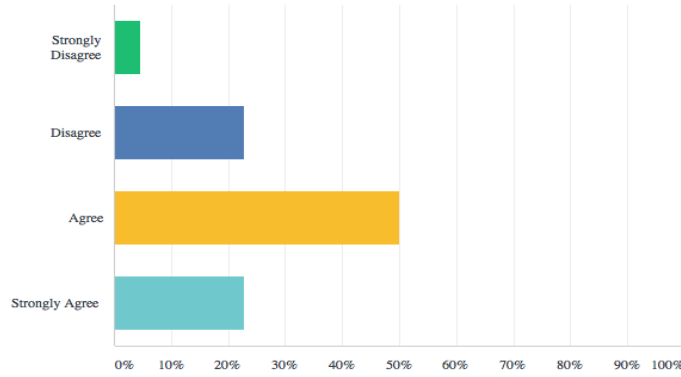
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
- Strongly Disagree	0.00% 0
- Disagree	4.55% 1
- Agree	59.09% 13
- Strongly Agree	36.36% 8
Total	22

Teachers who were asked if they would work harder if they could earn bonus pay; approximately 73% agreed or strongly agreed, whereas 27% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Q8 I would work harder if I could earn bonus pay.

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Answered: 22 Skipped: 0



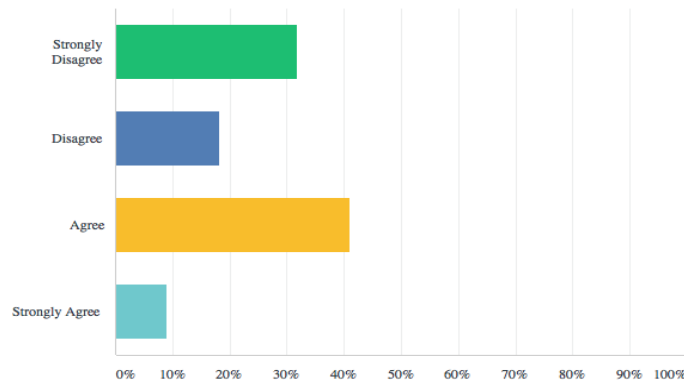
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
- Strongly Disagree	4.55% 1
- Disagree	22.73% 5
- Agree	50.00% 11
- Strongly Agree	22.73% 5
Total	22

When asked if part of the reason they became teachers was so they could have the summers off; responses were split 50/50 between the disagreements and agreements.

Q10 Part of the reason I became a teacher was so I could have my summers off.

Customize Export

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
- Strongly Disagree	31.82% 7
- Disagree	18.18% 4
- Agree	40.91% 9
- Strongly Agree	9.09% 2
Total	22

### Discussion and Conclusions

This purpose of this action research study was to understand the type of motivation for elementary teachers grades Kindergarten through fifth grade at Harmony School of Science - Austin. Although the sample was small (22) the quantitative methods (survey) produced interesting and usable data for program improvement efforts and provided new information to researchers in the field regarding teacher reports of motivation.

The findings are mostly similar to the ones mentioned in the literature review that also shows an overall trend is a split between the average of the two motivators; 86% intrinsic and 75% extrinsic are both effective for elementary teachers. However, intrinsic motivation's 11% higher average is significant. In fact, there were two intrinsic questions that yielded 100% results whereas extrinsic factors did not yield any unanimous replies. The other intrinsic questions results were quite strong with 86% and 82%.

New insights from this research are extrinsic is not as powerful a motivator; the final question only yielded a 50% agreement result. There were also two extrinsic survey results, which were barely passing both with 73%. The extrinsic survey result with the highest agreement of 95% for "teachers who are not successful should be put on an improvement plan" should be very telling to Administration that teachers deeply care about quality of instruction. Another new insight is only 40% of the extrinsic questions were above 73% compared to 80% for intrinsic questions, thus implying a much stronger push for internal motivators.

The hypothesis was correct that teachers are intrinsically motivated, because it is a calling and the extrinsic reward of a high salary does not exist. Veteran teachers often speak with great passion for their profession, considering the joys in seeing a student learn and the students' desire to learn more as some of their best rewards. They do not put much value on accolades such as trophies or job titles.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This action research project was a single case study at one charter school in Texas, which is a limitation of the study. Another limitation was the small size of the survey respondents (22), which limits the ability to generalize to other schools.

### **Implications for Educational Leadership**

Survey data provided significant information for our campus regarding teacher motivational improvements to implement in the upcoming school year. Teachers are greatly motivated by intrinsic forces. However, since teaching is a demanding profession teachers need to also have extrinsic motivators to keep them focused. Therefore, the best hiring methods would incorporate identifying individuals who are intrinsically motivated so they will put forth their best effort on a daily basis. This might include the use of a brief online psychology test to aide in

the hiring process to determine which candidates score highest from a self motivated perspective. As well as simply asking the applicants what motivates them as part of the interview.

Administration should be mindful of supporting our teachers with numerous small monetary motivators such as weekly low-cost gift cards for teachers who have creative, interactive lessons or whatever desired action is being sought. This may further inspire those teachers to be recognized as well as motivate others to push themselves too. A few large rewards can be given such as to recognize and celebrate goals during staff meetings. Seventy-three percent of teachers said they would work harder for bonus pay; give it to them and see results soar!

We often see high spirits in the beginning of the school year which seems to wane as the time marches onward, so we need to have ongoing competitions to keep moral at a high level. This is not just for the teachers; the ultimate goal is to give our students the best possible learning environment every day of the school year in order to help students meet their goals.

### **Implications for Further Research**

There were a number of implications for future research. First, even within our Harmony school district, further research should be done with a greater number of teachers to see if these initial results are maintained with a larger group. Results might differ across number of years having taught and this might be an important factor in planning future program improvements and activities. Also, further research should look at Secondary teachers, as well as, comparing the results of the two groups. Harmony School of Science - Austin is a public school in an urban setting; it would be interesting to compare results with private schools and rural districts. Extending the data to interviews in addition to surveys to get more in depth thought on the subject would be yet another future research implication. Finally, it would be fascinating to

compare these results with those from a country where teachers are considered to be highly valued.



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**Appendix A****Teacher Motivation Survey**

1. I enjoy looking for fun lesson ideas after work hours.

- Strongly Disagree  
 Disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly Agree

2. Teachers should receive rewards more often because I would try to earn them.

- Strongly Disagree  
 Disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly Agree

3. One of the best things about teaching is seeing the students learn.

- Strongly Disagree  
 Disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly Agree

4. I think teachers should be paid based on experience.

- Strongly Disagree  
 Disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly Agree

5. I want my students to learn more.

- Strongly Disagree  
 Disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly Agree

6. Teachers who are not successful should be put on an improvement plan.

- Strongly Disagree  
 Disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly Agree

7. Most days I am not happy that I have to go to work.

- Strongly Disagree  
 Disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly Agree

8. I would work harder if I could earn bonus pay.

- Strongly Disagree  
 Disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly Agree

9. I set tougher standards for myself than the school sets for me.

- Strongly Disagree  
 Disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly Agree

10. Part of the reason I became a teacher was so I could have my summers off.

- Strongly Disagree  
 Disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly Agree

## Appendix B

### Letter to Colleagues

May 25, 2017

Dear Colleagues,

I am currently seeking a Masters of Educational Leadership and Principal Certification through the University of Texas at Tyler. A crucial component for completing this program is conducting an original educational research study. I have chosen to evaluate what keeps teachers motivated at our campus, Harmony School of Science - Austin. My goal is to improve motivation in the school by enacting procedures based on the data collected in this project. It is my belief that high faculty motivation is connected to providing the best learning environment for students.

This research will gather data from teachers on our campus. You will be asked to complete a survey that consists of questions designed to determine the extent and types of motivators. The survey will be available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QT6BV3V>. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey.

All personal information and responses for teachers is confidential as this survey is completely anonymous. No names or emails will be included in the final research report and appropriate confidentiality protocols will be followed.

Thank you for taking part in this research project. Your assistance is greatly appreciated and valued. If you have any question or concerns, please feel free to email or call. My contact information is listed below.

Thank you,  
Deborah Scott

Harmony School of Science - Austin