Understanding the Effects of Cincinnati Preschool Promise Teacher Promise Grants

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Executive summary

Cincinnati Preschool Promise: Teacher Promise Grants Program
In 2016, taxpayers approved a 5-year Cincinnati Public Schools levy that provided $15 million per year to expand access to quality preschool. This levy led to the formation of the non-profit organization, Cincinnati Preschool Promise (CPP). In 2020, Cincinnati taxpayers renewed the levy. One goal of CPP is to raise community-based preschool teachers’ earnings, intending to promote teachers’ retention, recruitment, and professional development. To achieve this goal, CPP contracted with Cincinnati Union Co-Op Initiative to explore strategies to move toward wage equity in early childhood education. These potential strategies included both direct contracting approaches and wage stipends. In the interest of both time and budget constraints, CPP piloted Teacher Promise Grants (TPG), a wage stipend program. In early 2019, lead teachers at a 3-, 4-, or 5-star-rated Tuition Assistance preschools were eligible to apply for wage supplements of up to $2,000 per year, plus bonuses for professional development or educational advancements. Three cohorts of teachers were enrolled in this pilot program.

Goals of evaluation report
In the summer of 2020, teachers in the pilot program received an invitation to complete a survey about their TPG program experiences. Surveys were distributed electronically to 69 teachers, one of whom later informed us that she had never participated in the program. Of the 68 participating teachers, 50 completed the survey, giving us a response rate of 74%. The goals of this report are:

1. To examine teachers’ perceptions of the TPG program.
2. To investigate the frequency of job leaving and consideration of leaving by TPG participants.
3. To characterize the economic, housing, and food security of teachers who received Teacher Promise Grants, prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key findings and future implications:
- **Teacher Promise Grants provided a critical economic resource to preschool teachers in Cincinnati.** Fewer teachers reported trouble making ends meet after receiving the wage supplements provided through the grant. Additionally, teachers felt more financially secure because of the program. Continuing and potentially expanding the program can help alleviate economic insecurity among preschool teachers in Cincinnati.
- **Most recipients of Teacher Promise Grants stayed in the field of early childhood education.** Of survey respondents, 82% were still working at a childcare center. Although it is impossible to know if these teachers would have stayed in the field without the grants, respondents indicated that the wage supplements made it easier to stay in their career. However, identifying other ways to keep teachers in the field is an important step moving forward.
- **A subset of TPG teachers are still struggling economically, especially after the COVID-19 Pandemic.** For example, 11% of participating teachers still had trouble
making ends meet and this rate went up to 18% after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This struggle is troubling, but not shocking, given that some teachers reported wages as low as $11 per hour. This outcome suggests that the wage supplement is not high enough to raise all teachers into a place of economic security. Other structural solutions must be put in place in the early childhood field.

Introduction

A primary activity of CPP is the provision of Tuition Assistance (TA) to income-eligible families. At the time of this pilot, families were eligible for TA if they:

1. Had a preschool-aged child.
2. Lived in the Cincinnati Public School District boundaries.
3. Had a household income that was 300% of the federal poverty line or below.

Families who receive TA can enroll their child in any community-based or Cincinnati Public Schools preschool program rated as 3-star or above by Ohio’s Step Up to Quality rating system. In early 2019, CPP piloted TPG to promote teachers’ retention, well-being, and professional and educational training. Lead teachers at a 3-, 4-, or 5-star-rated Tuition Assistance preschool were eligible to apply for wage supplements of up to $2,000 per year, plus bonuses for professional development or educational advancements.

This survey provides information reported by teachers who participated in each of the first three cohorts of the TPG program. Teachers in Cohorts 1 and 2 finished their initial year of benefits, but may have re-applied to continue receiving funds. Teachers in the third cohort were finishing their first year in the program at the time of survey distribution. Much of this report focuses on responses from all 50 teachers who responded to our survey. However, we also narrow our focus to 28 teachers from Cohort 1. We have data on these teachers at baseline (the weeks before they began receiving TPG benefits). We focus on this group to compare teachers’ feelings about their careers and their economic situation before receiving TPG benefits and after receiving these benefits.

Teachers received an e-mail with a link to a Qualtrics survey. They were able to complete the survey anywhere the internet was accessible. E-mail reminders were sent at least once per week and multiple phone call reminders were conducted. Teachers could answer the survey at any time over several weeks. To thank teachers for their participation, we provided a gift card to Amazon. In total, 50 of 68 program participants responded which equals a response rate of 74%. There were no significant differences between teachers who participated and those who did not in terms of initial wages, race/ethnicity, or education level. However, please note that our findings may or may not generalize to teachers who did not respond to our survey.
Teacher experiences in the TPG program

To understand how teachers experienced the TPG program, we asked a series of questions where teachers directly compared how they felt currently with how they felt prior to receiving Promise Grant supplements.

The first set of these questions focused on how teachers felt about their job. As shown in Figure 1, over 60% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more satisfied with their job.

As shown in Figure 2, 68% of teachers also felt more appreciated and recognized for their work. Beneath that, in Figure 3, you can see that 64% were more willing to stay employed at their current childcare program. This is a key finding as one of the goals of the TPG program is to reduce teacher turnover and these results suggest that the wage supplements did change their likelihood of staying in the profession.

**Figure 1.** Level of agreement with the statement, “**Compared to before receiving the CPP Promise Grant wage supplement, I am more satisfied with my job.**”  (n = 50)

As shown in Figure 2, 68% of teachers also felt more appreciated and recognized for their work. Beneath that, in Figure 3, you can see that 64% were more willing to stay employed at their current childcare program. This is a key finding as one of the goals of the TPG program is to reduce teacher turnover and these results suggest that the wage supplements did change their likelihood of staying in the profession.
Figure 2. Level of agreement with the statement, “Compared to before receiving the CPP Promise Grant wage supplement, I feel more appreciated and recognized for my work.” (n = 50)

Figure 3. Level of agreement with the statement, “Compared to before receiving the CPP Promise Grant wage supplement, I am more willing to stay employed at my current childcare program.” (n = 50)
Over 60% of respondents also reported that they had better relationships with the children and families they work with after receipt of the wage supplements. A large body of research has established that when preschool teachers are stressed, including wages, the quality of their interactions with children is lower. Children in their classrooms are more likely to show problematic behaviors (c.f., Jeon et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2019; Whitaker et al., 2014). The results suggest that the benefits of the wage supplements went beyond individual teachers and may have improved preschool experiences for children and families in Cincinnati more broadly.

Figure 4. Level of agreement with the statement, “Compared to before receiving the CPP Promise Grant wage supplement, I have better relationships with the children and families with whom I work.” (n=48)

We also asked teachers to rate the impacts of the program on other aspects of their life; 43% of responding teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they had fewer financial worries and less stress in their personal lives after receiving TPG supplements. It is important to note that this survey took place the summer after COVID-19 began, which may have also shaped participant responses. Because these questions’ subjective nature, we did not choose to ask these questions in relation to both pre- and post-COVID 19 time periods as we did for more objective economic indicators described later in the report.

It is also important to note that only 8% of respondents reported noticing no benefits of the program. In open-ended questions, two participants noted challenges related to the program that included burdens to enroll, inconsistent receipt of funds, and stress associated with the program’s execution. These factors may contribute to the “no benefit” responses.
Figure 5. Level of agreement with the statement, “Compared to before receiving the CPP Promise Grant wage supplement, I have less financial worries in my life.” (n = 49)

Figure 6. Level of agreement with the statement, “Compared to before receiving the CPP Promise Grant wage supplement, I feel less stress in my personal life.” (n = 49)
How did TPG wage supplements affect the lives of participating teachers?

Respondents also had the opportunity to write about how the Promise Grants affected their lives. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, with 44 teachers writing in positive comments. Comments tended to fall into three categories. The first was assistance with financial needs. Teachers responded that the wage supplements, “gave me extra income to help during a time of need,” “helped get groceries and helped me pay other bills,” and “helped me a tremendous amount with getting by on my bills and having food in the fridge and gas to go to work.” Multiple teachers mentioned that getting the supplements in the middle of the month was particularly helpful for them, especially since some of them only received regular paychecks at the beginning of the month.

The second theme was related to the first and highlighted the stress reduction brought about through the wage supplements. Numerous participants noted that the wage supplements reduced their stress and worry, especially worries related to bills. One respondent noted: “When I was receiving the Promise Grant, I had a little more security. I wasn't worried about needing to find a job that paid better because I needed bills paid.”

The third and fourth themes were more directly related to their jobs in childcare centers. Numerous respondents reported that the Promise Grants allowed them to provide more resources for their classrooms and children at their center. And lastly, respondents noted that the TPG program made them feel more appreciated and respected in their careers. For example, one teacher noted, “It does make me feel appreciated for the working that I am doing with these children.”

"The supplement has made living easier. I am able to afford more and am able to stress less about working in my low paying job, especially for the amount of work I do and time I contribute.”—TPG Recipient

There were very few negative or neutral comments received. One teacher did note that the amount was not enough to help low-income families meet all of their needs. Other teachers noted administrative challenges or losing eligibility for the supplement when they switched to working in an infant/toddler classroom.

How did recipients spend their TPG wage supplements?

We asked teachers to report all of the ways they had used their Promise Grant wage supplements in the prior six months. As shown in Figure 7, groceries (53%) were the most common way that wage supplements were spent, with household utilities (43%) and gas (41%) being the next two more frequently reported.
Figure 7. Percentage of recipients who reported using Promise Grant wage supplements for each of the above spending categories (n=49).

"It has helped with the daily functions as a single mom. It helped get groceries when we needed it and it helped me pay other bills. “—Recipient of TPG

TPG, teacher turnover, satisfaction, and wages

One goal of the TPG program was to reduce preschool teacher turnover. To assess this, we collected data on actual teacher turnover, teachers’ intention to stay or leave their position, teachers’ satisfaction with their job, and teacher wages.

Teacher turnover

Of the 50 teachers who responded to our survey, 82% were still employed at a childcare center at survey completion, which was at least 12 months after program entry. Depending on which cohort teachers were in, there may have been up to 18 months between program entry and time of survey. Across these teachers, 92% were at the same center that they were at when they enrolled in TPG. 94% of those still employed in childcare were in the same role they were in when they first started in TPG. Given the high levels of teacher turnover in this field, and the challenges encountered due to COVID-19, these numbers reflect high stability among TPG recipients. It is difficult to contextualize these numbers but data from 2018 shows that Ohio’s childcare workers, as well as childcare workers nationally) had a yearly turnover rate of 25% (Center for Economic Development, 2019; Groundwork Ohio, 2020). This is substantially higher than the 18% turnover rate of TPG teachers, many of whom were reporting on a time period longer than 12 months.
Teachers who were no longer in their position were asked to list the reasons they left. The most frequent response was “had a better opportunity,” followed by “too much stress,” and “low wages.”

We also asked teachers about their intentions to leave their current job. Note, we asked these questions about their intentions before the COVID-19 pandemic: 32% of teachers responded that they had done things to look for a new job. However, the overwhelming majority (93%) reported trying to find an additional job to supplement their current employment, instead of trying to leave their current position. Of the few that reported making efforts to leave their current position, the majority reported that their motivation was to advance professionally within the field of early childhood.

Teacher job satisfaction

Overall, teachers who received Promise Grants reported very high levels of job satisfaction. Of those still teaching in preschool settings, 86% agreed or strongly agreed that they “really enjoy my present teaching job.” Similarly, 95% agreed or strongly agreed that they “are certain I am making a difference in the lives of the children I teach.” Furthermore, 82% reported agreed that if they could start over, they would choose teaching again as their career.

We also compared job satisfaction before receiving Promise Grants and after for those Cohort 1 teachers for whom we had data at both time points and were still currently teaching. As shown in Figure 8, there were no differences in job satisfaction across time points. This result is likely due to two reasons: 1) teachers reported high job satisfaction even before TPG receipt and 2) the second timepoint was during a time of change and additional stress in the profession due to COVID-19.

It is important to note that although teachers were equally committed to and satisfied with their job before and after receipt of Promise Grants, their written answers to other questions indicated that they felt more respected and appreciated due to receipt of the grants.
Figure 8. Percentage of recipients who strongly agree/agree and strongly disagree/disagree with the statement, “I really enjoy my present teaching job” before and after receiving Promise Grants (n=21).

Figure 9. Percentage of recipients who strongly agree/agree and strongly disagree/disagree with the statement, “I am certain I am making a difference in the lives of children I teach” before and after receiving Promise Grants (n=21).
Figure 10. Percentage of recipients who strongly agree/agree and strongly disagree/disagree with the statement, "If I could start over, I would choose teaching again as my career" before and after receiving Promise Grants (n=21).

Changes in teacher wages
Although the TPG program provided wage supplements, an additional goal was to increase wages teachers received at their preschool teaching job by incentivizing professional development and expanding the field’s status. Indeed, 40% of survey participants reported making more than they did when they started the TPG program. However, 50% reported receiving the same amount, and 10% reported earning less, although this may have been due to COVID-19.

The average hourly wage reported by TPG teachers in the final survey was $16.08, although the range spanned from $11.00 to $30.00. Note that one teacher reported earning $30.00; the next highest earner reported an hourly wage of $22.50 and in total, only four teachers reported earning over $20.00 per hour. On average, teachers reported working 42 hours per week at their childcare center. They taught in one to four classrooms (mean=1.42).

A primary goal of the TPG program was to bring teachers’ hourly wages to $15 per hour. We calculated this by dividing up the full $2,000 benefit by 12 months, four weeks, and 40 hours to generate an average hourly wage that the wage supplement provided. This average hourly wage increase, contingent on these assumptions, is $1.04.

We then looked at how many teachers would be above the $15 wage line, using the information provided when teachers entered the TPG program. Note that hourly wage information is only available for teachers in center-based programs. Of these 43 teachers, 22 were already earning more than $15. Of the 21 earning less than $15, five earned over $15 once the TPG supplement was included

It is important to note that the currently implemented version of TPG provides $4000 wage supplements. If the current cohort received this amount, 10 of the 21 teachers would move above the $15 threshold.

How are TPG recipients doing? Characterizing teachers’ economic, housing, and food security prior to COVID-19

Because COVID-19 had the potential to seriously impact the economic well-being of TPG recipients, we asked teachers to describe their economic well-being in the three months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (January-beginning of March 2020) and those responses are reported here. We also asked about their economic situation during the pandemic; this information will be provided in a later section.
Teachers’ economic stability
We asked teachers a number of questions that reflect their economic stability. When participants were asked how challenging it was to pay their monthly bills in the three months prior to COVID-19 on a scale from “0” (not at all difficult) to “3” (very difficult), most teachers (58%) experienced at least some difficulty paying their monthly bills, although of this group, most reported only a little difficulty. In a complementary question, teachers were asked whether there is money left over at the end of the month. This question not only addresses whether teachers are financially able to make ends meet, but also whether they are able to set aside any money for the future or emergencies. As can be seen in Figure 11, 69% of teachers report having “just enough” or “not enough” money to make ends meet each month.

Figure 11. Responses to, "In general, would you say that you have more money than you need, just enough for your needs, or not enough to meet your needs?" (n = 49)

Did TPG improve economic stability?
When looking at teachers for whom we have pre- and post-test data, it is clear that participating teachers have experienced some economic improvement across time. Because of a small sample, these should be considered trends. As shown in Figure 12, almost 7% more teachers reported that paying monthly bills was not at all difficult after receiving TPG and there were no teachers who reported that paying bills was very difficult at the post-test.
Figure 12. Responses prior to and after Promise Grant receipt to, "**How difficult is to pay your monthly bills?**" (n = 24).

"**Having that extra money allows me to not have the worries about paying needed bills.**“—Recipient of TPG

A similar pattern was observed in regards to changes in having enough money to make ends meet. As shown in Figure 13, more teachers reported having **some money left over** and fewer teachers reported having **not enough money to make ends meet** after TPG receipt as compared to prior to receiving Promise Grants.

Figure 13. Responses before and TPG to, "**In general, would you say that you have more money than you need, just enough for your needs, or not enough to meet your needs?**“ (n = 28).
Teachers’ housing stability and food security
Overall, the vast majority of TPG recipients reported stable housing and food security in the months prior to COVID-19. For example, 78% reported stable or very stable housing over this time frame; however, 10% of recipients did indicate unstable or somewhat unstable housing. Food security is also still a concern as 40% of respondents reported worrying about whether food would run out in the three months prior to COVID-19 and 28% reported that they experienced situations where the food they bought didn’t last and they didn’t have money to buy more over the same time period. This suggests that for some teachers, the wage supplements were not high enough to meet all of their basic needs.

Did TPG improve housing stability and food security?
Results suggest that housing stability and food security did not change from prior to receiving Promise Grants to after receipt. Again, this suggests that the size of the supplements may not have been enough to allow participants to meet all of their basic needs.

Variation in TPG experiences

Was there variation by teacher wages?
We used wages reported in the final survey to examine whether or not teachers who earned more than $15 per hour experienced the program differently from those who earned less. Overall, these findings suggest that the program had more influence on teachers earning over $15 an hour. Teachers earning more than $15 an hour were more likely to report that after TPG they had better relationships with their co-workers and directors and that they had less stress. Not surprisingly, they were also less likely to report experiencing financial worry, housing instability and food insecurity.

Was there variation by household composition?
Cohort 1 reported on the number of adults and the number of children in the household. For this subset of participants, we reported on how TPG experiences varied by 1) whether there was more than 1 adult in the household and 2) whether there were children in the household. Participants in households with no other adults were more likely to report economic issues than their peers with at least one other adult in the household. Specifically, they were more likely to report not having enough money to meet their needs (31% vs. 10%) and that they sometimes or often worried about whether their food would run out (46% vs. 18%). Although this may not be surprising given the challenges of living on one income, there are some indications that this lack of financial security may have also influenced other aspects of this group of TPG recipients experience in the program. Specifically, TPG participants living without another adult in the household were less likely to agree that they were more satisfied with their job after receiving TPG.
TPG recipients and COVID-19

We also asked a series of questions designed to shed light on TPG recipients’ well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. We found that 48% of respondents reported that their center shutdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, although this was likely only for a brief period of time as all CPP programs received pandemic licenses that enabled them to re-open. Furthermore, 78% of teachers reported being paid (and continuing to work remotely with children and families) during the brief shutdown. However, responses indicated that teachers are clearly experiencing higher levels of financial stress during the COVID-19 pandemic than they were in the months prior. We cannot ascertain the causes of their financial troubles, but this suggests that it is not related to their employment as a preschool teacher.

Teachers’ economic stability during the COVID-19 pandemic

We asked teachers the same battery of questions about their economic situation since the pandemic began in March 2020. These responses indicated that teachers are experiencing more struggles now than before the pandemic, and in some cases, more than before they received TPG wage supplements. For example, as shown in Figure 14, almost 19% of teachers reported experiencing not having enough money to make ends meet since COVID-19.

![Figure 14](image)

**Figure 14.** Percentage of respondents who selected not having enough money to make ends meet at baseline, after TPG but before COVID-19, and after COVID-19. (n = 28).

Furthermore, 18% of respondents reported unstable or somewhat unstable housing since COVID-19, over 10% higher than was reported for the months prior to COVID-19. However, rates of food insecurity remained stable, perhaps due to increased availability of food through community sources.

Some respondents did mention that their TPG wage supplements were especially beneficial during the COVID-19 period. For example, one respondent said, "Lately they’ve helped me with groceries as well as things for my children at school. The money comes in handy, especially now during the Covid."
Conclusions and implications

In 2019, CPP piloted a grant program to recruit, retain, and support teachers. Our report focuses on responses from 50 teachers who are participating in the first three cohorts of this program. Additionally, we reported paired results from a subset of teachers from the first cohort to further explore the changes experienced by program participation. Overall, survey responses indicated that teachers perceived great benefits from program participation.

Our survey of 50 recipients of the Teacher Promise Grant shows that benefits to teachers spanned multiple domains. A majority of teachers reported they felt more job satisfaction and more recognition for their work after participating. Over 40% of teachers also reported less financial stress. Furthermore, teachers reported using the wage supplements for critical needs such as paying bills and purchasing groceries. Teachers also indicated that the grants enabled them to have better relationships with the children and families they work with, and that they invested some of the wage supplements they received into materials for their classroom.

The TPG program also experienced success in maintaining the preschool workforce. Overall, 80% of participations were still teaching in an early childcare center and most teachers reported a greater commitment to their job after receiving their TPG wage supplement. Furthermore, few teachers reported trying to leave their job, and those who did were primarily looking to advance within the field of early childhood education.

Promise Grant wage supplements also helped reduce some financial difficulties for participants, as fewer participants reported having trouble making ends meet after the program as opposed to before. However, there was a subset of teachers that reported financial challenges, as well as food and housing insecurities despite receiving the wage supplement. Furthermore, more participants reported these challenges after the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not surprising given that some teachers reported hourly wages as low as $11. Even with the monthly supplement provided by TPG, this is likely not enough to cover all of a family’s expenses.

Overall, our evaluation found primarily positive effects of the TPG program. However, four key recommendations for future programming also emerged:

- **CPP should continue to explore additional ways to reduce teacher turnover.** Although the majority of teachers stayed in preschool settings, 20% did leave the profession, often to explore other opportunities or to reduce stress. This rate is lower than the Ohio average for childcare workers (25%). Although some teachers experienced reduced financial stress from program participation, finding ways to tackle other stressors associated with the job, such as long hours, lack of benefits, and lack of professional recognition may also help to reduce turnover in the long-term. Continuing to tackle these issues and to identifying stronger comparisons will be key to continuing to retain the workforce.

- **Continue to consider teachers who are experiencing housing, economic, and food insecurity, especially now in the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic.**
Although wage supplements provided assistance to teachers’ economic situations, some teachers continued to experience financial struggles, as well as housing and food insecurities. Furthermore, these struggles were more common after the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Finding more ways to reduce these economic struggles, through actions such as increasing the amount of the wage supplement, increasing providers’ ability to increase wages, or connecting teachers to other economic resources may all help teachers reach greater economic stability.

- **CPP should consider expanding the program and maintaining key details of the wage supplement provision.** The overall positive impacts of the TPG program lend support for both continuing and expanding the program. In terms of expansion, one potential path may be to expand to include infant and toddler teachers, as at least one participant had to give up benefits when she switched classrooms. CPP should also pay attention to details of the program that are particularly beneficial for participants. For example, numerous respondents mentioned appreciating receiving the wage supplement at the middle of the month as this fell in between paychecks for them.

- **CPP and others should continue to build coalitions to advocate for changes to the early childhood education profession that could continue to improve teachers’ working conditions, such as salary increases and increased respect and professionalization for the workforce.** A wage supplement program provides important benefits for teachers but is not likely to solve all of the challenges preschool teachers face in today’s society.
Works cited


Author note

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Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy (CCEC)
The Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy (CCEC), in the College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University, is a multidisciplinary research center dedicated to conducting high-quality research that improves children’s learning and development at home, in school, and in the community. Our vision is to be a driving force in the intersection of research, policy and practice, as they relate to children’s well-being. The CCEC evaluation report series provides objective and evidence-based assessments for community stakeholders in the field of early childhood.

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