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Federal Grant Brings Merit Pay To Some Schools

By ELIZABETH GREEN
Staff Reporter of the Sun
June 6, 2007

Merit-based teacher pay will come to some city schools as part of a \$10.5 million federal grant to be announced today, several sources said. The grant, which will be split among several charter schools, comes from a [U.S. Department of Education](#) fund designed to tie teacher salaries to student test scores.

Schools Chancellor [Joel Klein](#), who will be on hand to applaud the announcement, has championed bringing merit pay to city schools. But facing opposition from the teachers union, the [United Federation of Teachers](#), Mr. Klein's advocacy has so far failed to bring change.

The [New York City Department of Education](#) had applied for the same federal grant last summer, but the application was denied; the current contract with the teachers union makes a merit-pay system

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The UFT president, [Randi Weingarten](#), has said in the past that using test scores to set salaries or determine tenure is like "telling an oncologist that the only way to keep your job is for your cancer patients to survive." A spokesman for the union said Ms. Weingarten had no comment on the grant.

The charter schools that will receive the federal money are public but are not subject to UFT contract. A nonprofit group that works with dozens of city schools, the Center for Educational Innovation — Public Education Association, would implement the grant. The group works with a network of 30 charter schools, at least one of which, the Hellenic Classical Charter School, would participate in the program. The board chairman at Hellenic, Charles Capetanakis, called the news "tremendous."

The money comes from the Teacher Incentive Fund, which was initiated by the Bush administration and financed by Congress last year. In addition to test scores, the fund pushes for tying teacher pay to factors such as the subject they teach — hard-to-staff subjects such as math, science, or special education get financial bonuses — and whether they work in schools with many minority or low-income students.

The details of how the charter schools involved would adjust salary scales were not immediately clear yesterday, but the federal program encourages rewards systems for teachers and principals.

Though Mr. Klein has failed to implement financial rewards for teachers in traditional public schools, he has won such a system for principals. A new contract signed this year created two \$25,000 bonuses for principals, one for those who agree to lead a struggling school for three years and another for those whose schools show strong performance results.

Districts across the country have taken on similar programs for teachers, with mixed results. Though some say tests scores have risen as a result, many teachers have complained that rewards are arbitrary.

A spokesman at the federal Department of Education could not confirm the grant.

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