Texas Title I Priority Schools Grant: 2011-2012

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**At-a-Glance**

The Texas Title I Priority Schools (TTIPS) grant was a grant authorized under the School Improvement Grants to be given to Title I campuses and other eligible schools. The purpose of the School Improvement Grants are to assist targeted schools that demonstrate the greatest need and commitment to use funds in order to raise student achievement with corrective action, improvement to, or restructuring of the campus environment. The overall goal of the TTIPS grant was to assist some of Texas’ most underperforming schools to make the necessary changes to undergo drastic improvement. Campuses selected for the TTIPS grant received funds to be used to supplement, not supplant, current budgets, in order to make needed improvements.

**Program Description**

The TTIPS grant program, under the direction of the Texas Education Agency (TEA), described four intervention models designed to improve low performing schools. In order to receive the grant, applicants (each individual campus applying) had to agree to undergo one of the four intervention models. The Turnaround Model required the school’s principal and 50 percent of the current staff to be replaced, improvement in the use of data to guide instruction, and strengthening community- and social-supports for the students. The Transformation Model required the principal to be replaced unless the principal had been with the school less than 2 years. In addition, the school was to implement a staff evaluation system tied to student achievement and other factors such as classroom observations. The school was to also implement practices aimed at improving use of data to modify teaching and providing staff with professional development.

Campuses receiving the grant were measured by how well that campus improved across seven critical success factors:

1. Academic Performance  
2. Increase the Use of Quality Data to Drive Instruction  
3. Increase Leadership Effectiveness  
4. Increase Learning Time  
5. Increase Parent/Stakeholder Involvement  
6. Improve School Climate  
7. Increase Teacher Quality

These success factors were measured using various tests, surveys, and other district data. The schools and districts set goals for each of the three years of the grant.

The other two models that were an option were to close the school or restructure as a charter school.

In the spring of 2010, four Dallas ISD schools applied for a TTIPS grant utilizing the Transformation Model (Justin F. Kimball, Franklin D. Roosevelt, H. Grady Spruce, and Seagoville High Schools), and one school utilizing the Turnaround Model (A. Maceo Smith High School, now A. Maceo Smith New Tech High School).

In the Summer of 2010, TEA awarded A.M. Smith, Roosevelt, and Spruce high schools with the TTIPS grant. A.M. Smith received permission for a delayed implementation of the grant for the 2011-2012 school year. North Dallas High School applied for a second TTIPS grant that opened up in Spring of 2011 and was awarded the grant in August 2011. The grant awarded each school approximately $2 million dollars per year for three years.

**TAP System**

The TTIPS grant called for a system that rewarded teachers, principals, and staff who, in implementing the Transformation Model, had increased student achievement and high school graduation rates. The Turnaround Model also had the option of implementing this system. The district decided to utilize the TAP System to fulfill this requirement. The TAP system is a comprehensive research-based reform model that provides differentiated compensation for teachers and principals based on teachers’ performance in the classroom and the academic performance of their students. The TAP program is a teacher development and evaluation program that is funded with TTIPS funds. The TAP program was chosen because the program aims to improve teaching ability and implement a pay-for-performance system where rewards are based on teacher observations and value-added performance. The teaching observations are based on TAP’s Skills, Knowledge, and Responsibilities (SKR) rubric which measures teaching pedagogy.

2011-12 was the first year Smith New Tech, Roosevelt, and Spruce were able to implement the TAP program. Master teachers at each school had an overall positive impression of the TAP program, felt they were well prepared to implement the SKR
observations, and that while teacher buy-in was an ongoing issue, teachers seemed to be approving of the program. There were concerns about the lack of flexibility campuses had with the TAP program, implementing some aspects of the TAP program such as field testing, and the sense that many teachers wouldn't buy into the program due to its temporary nature. The Spruce master teachers noted a lack of buy-in from the principal at the start of the school year, but that changed in the spring, and TAP program implementation has improved since then.

**Implementation**

The campus coordinators each felt that the grant was helping their campus to improve in a variety of measures. There was some concern about the lack of flexibility and delay in TEA amending part of the grant to account for changes in the program. Campuses were able to implement a variety of programs, including tuition reimbursement, travel to professional development conferences, and capital equipment purchases for the schools.

There were some issues with implementation of the grant activities at Spruce H.S. A new principal was placed at Spruce in the summer of 2011 and grant staff noted how some staff positions responsible for certain grant activities were re-organized. Also, master teachers (as designated under the TAP program) noted a lack of by-in by the principal for the TAP program during the fall semester. In spring, however, the teachers stated the principal became more supportive of the program.

**Outcomes**

Each TTIPS campus had to set a series of goals that measured the campus’ progress in the seven critical success factors. Academic goals counted for 50 percent of a school’s final evaluation, and the other six sets of goals determined the remaining 50 percent.

Smith New Tech, North Dallas, and Roosevelt met enough goals to meet the 70 point criteria set by TEA. In general, the three campuses had a positive trend in every goal and showed improvement across the seven critical success factors. It should be considered that the main program for academic improvement, the TAP program, did not begin until this year.

Spruce was the one campus that did not meet enough of its goals to meet the 70 point criteria, and therefore will have to undergo a special review. There appears enough evidence that this is at least in part attributable to the change in administration. The administration redirected resources and personnel away from the PBIS program, dual-credit courses, and TAP program. The PBIS program was intended to lower the number of discipline referrals at TTIPS campuses and the dual-credit courses was a program that lets students earn college credit while in high school. Discipline referrals and dual-credit courses were both goals that Spruce missed. The TAP program was the major program tasked with improving teacher quality and helping students improve academic performance. Another significant reason for Spruce missing their TTIPS goals was the high level at which the goals were set: the previous administration set the levels of most of the goals, and because the goal levels were set so high, relative to the other TTIPS campuses’ goals, it was difficult for Spruce to make the needed improvement.
**Recommendations**

**Vertical Buy-In** – Once the district shepherd and school project manager positions were filled, many of the initial challenges of implementing the grant eased. However, with the change in some school’s principals and Learning Community executive directors (EDs), the TTIPS office should work to make sure that EDs and principals know the expectations of the grant at all levels (including teachers, project managers, principals, directors, district shepherd, etc.) and work together to fulfill these expectations.

**Bureaucratic Consolidation** – The evaluator recommends that the TTIPS schools be consolidated as much as possible under one hierarchy (for example, all TTIPS schools have the same HR contact to discuss HR issues with). The district shepherd needs to make sure there is coordination between EDs and Division Assistant Superintendents in terms of implementing TTIPS programs.

**TAP SKR Observations** – TTIPS schools should look into methods to empirically measure the inter-rater reliability of SKR ratings by their observers. This could involve either multiple observers rating the same teacher at the same time or videotaping a teacher and have all observers rate the teacher in a training session. In either case, afterwards, observers would compare ratings to order to determine how much agreement there is among raters. This process should go on throughout the year in order to make sure observers stay “calibrated.”

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