Texas Title I Priority Schools Grant: 2012-2013

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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 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. Franklin D. Roosevelt, H. Grady Spruce, and North Dallas agreed to the Transformation model and A. Maceo Smith New Tech agreed to the Turnaround model. 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 two 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 (CSFs):

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.

In the summer of 2010, TEA awarded Smith New Tech, Roosevelt, and Spruce high schools with the TTIPS grant. Smith New Tech received permission for a delayed implementation of the grant for the 2011-12 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. Roosevelt and Spruce were in their last year of implementation, while Smith New Tech and North Dallas potentially had one more year of TTIPS granted funding.

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 was a comprehensive research-based reform model that provided differentiated compensation for teachers and principals based on teachers’ performance in the classroom and the academic performance of their students. The TAP program was a teacher development and evaluation program that was 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.

TAP participation was optional for teachers. If they chose to participate they were then separated into three categories: career, mentor, and master teachers. This was done to distribute instructional leadership and fulfill TAP’s goal of providing multiple career paths to teachers that keep them in the classroom. Every TTIPS campus had a leadership team that consisted of administrators and teachers to conduct SKR observations for the instructionally focused accountability component. SKR observations were to be completed several times throughout the school year by a member of the leadership team. At the end of each school year, results of SKR observations would be one component of the performance based compensation (PBC) that was calculated by the
National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET). The other half of the PBC was based on student achievement value-added growth, which is based on two parts: 20% on school-wide value-added growth and 30% based on value-added growth of an individual classroom teacher’s students. If the teacher does not teach a TAKS/STAAR tested course, such as art or physical education, the 50% value-added PBC is based solely on the school-wide growth.

Implementation

The implementation of the TTIPS grant allowed each campus to obtain needed updates to technology. Several changes in staff at the campus and district levels made it difficult for coordinators to implement the grant to its maximum potential, though most coordinators expressed appreciation for the TAP program and the ongoing professional development for staff through cluster meetings. SKR observations were more difficult to implement this school year with the lack of support from the TAP office at the beginning of the school year coupled with the introduction of the Superintendent’s spot observations, a completely separate assessment from TAP. Early in the year the Texas based TAP office closed and was replaced with a traveling representative to support several schools across the state of Texas. A representative from TAP made a visit to North Dallas and Smith New Tech in the spring. North Dallas was in its first year of implementation with the TAP program and misinterpreted the implementation of the SKR observations. In the spring, the TAP representative met with the North Dallas leadership team to clarify misinterpretations, and subsequently required observations to be conducted over again. The coordinator at Smith New Tech stated that staff found it difficult to use data to change teacher instruction during the school day. Instead, there was a reliance on extending the school day with after school tutoring and learning labs.

CSF 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.

North Dallas was the only campus that exceeded the 70 points required, exceeding the goal by nearly 12 points. For a second year, Spruce was unable to make the 70 point requirement and was deficient by nine points. Roosevelt and Smith New Tech were also unable to make the 70 point requirement and missed it by two and six points respectively. There is a possibility that these campuses could make the 70 point requirement when CEI/SEI results become available in the fall of 2013. Roosevelt would have to meet only one of the low scoring goals to achieve the 70 point requirement, while Smith New Tech would have to meet three. Spruce would have to meet all four goals to achieve the 70 point requirement.

Recommendations

Secure Leadership – TTIPS funding is a temporary grant and has been through three District Shepherds in the last three years. The District Shepherd must be knowledgeable of district procedures and well trained on the TAP program to provide adequate support. The Shepherd must insure each campus has access to the C.O.D.E. database to track performance more appropriately. The evaluation team would recommend that the District Shepherd be an independent contract employee to secure effective leadership throughout each school year, and provide the support needed at each TTIPS campus, especially with the limited resources available from the TAP office.

Develop Sustainability Plan – Roosevelt and Spruce completed their last year of the TTIPS grant in 2012-2013. Smith New Tech and North Dallas potentially had one more year of funding. Campuses should have a long-term strategy that considers the impact of stopping these grant funded activities, and how the district and campuses can moderate that impact. The new District Shepherd should meet with the new principals at Roosevelt and Spruce to discuss the effects of the TTIPS grant activities on each campus to help provide focus and improve planning to overcome the loss of TTIPS funding and oversight.

TAP SKR Observations and professional development – The TAP system was designed to improve the teaching profession and reward teachers for their improvements. The evaluation team recommended that members of the leadership team conduct observations in pairs by observer type. For instance, mentor teachers should pair with other mentor teachers to conduct observations, master teachers should pair with master teachers, and administrators should pair with administrators. At the end of each observation round, the pair should agree on one score for that teacher for each observation round. This agreement would also allow pairs to use the data to develop methods that change the teacher’s instruction where indicators are found to be low performing. Observers should also provide feedback to the teacher observed accordingly.

For more information, please refer to the full report EA13-148-2 found at www.dallasisd.org/Page/888.