

2016-17 Texas Priority and Focus Schools Program

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EA17-605-4

At-a-Glance

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed by Congress in 1965. The reauthorization amending ESEA via the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) aimed to close the achievement gap between groups of students by requiring greater accountability and offering increased flexibility and choice. At the close of 2015, Congress passed and the President signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), an overhaul of federal education policy. Section 1003(a) of the ESEA authorizes state education agencies to issue funds to local education agencies in order to address the needs of schools identified for improvement, and thereby improve student performance. The Division of School Improvement and Support at the Texas Education Agency (TEA) administers school improvement programs under ESSA, including the Texas Title I 1003(a) priority and focus school grants.

Scope of Evaluation Department Services

Evaluation staff assists campuses with grant applications, especially with regard to writing evaluation components and annual goals, as well as in the completion of required annual compliance reports.

Program Description

Campuses were first identified as priority or focus in 2013-14, and remained on the list for four years. Due to transition requirements from the United States Department of Education (USDE) related to ESSA, Texas maintained this list of priority and focus campuses through 2016-17. A revised methodology is being put into place for the 2017-18 school year to identify Priority and Focus campuses, which takes portions of the prior methodology and modifies them to better fit the anticipated staging under ESSA.

Priority schools were identified as being among the lowest-ranking Title I schools in the state based on proficiency on the statewide reading and mathematics assessments, and graduation rates. Texas priority schools included Tier I or Tier II school improvement grant (SIG) schools, schools with graduation rates less than 60 percent, and the lowest achieving schools, ranked by the difference between school performance and proficiency targets. The total number of priority schools equaled five percent of Title I campuses in Texas.

Priority schools were required to engage in the Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS) continuous

improvement process in alignment with the ESEA turnaround principles and Critical Success Factors (CSFs), to prepare and implement a targeted improvement plan to address and correct areas of campus low performance, and most were assigned a Professional Service Provider (PSP). Districts also designated a leadership team, including a district coordinator of school improvement (DCSI). The PSPs and the DCSI worked together to support the campus through the improvement process and to identify interventions. Finally, the DCSI and priority campus principals were required to attend the annual Advancing Improvement in Education (AIE) conference.

Beginning in August 2015, priority schools having improved in performance and who were no longer identified as improvement required by the state accountability ratings were classified as priority-progress. All remaining schools that did not meet that criteria were identified as priority.

Priority-progress schools continued to follow all required interventions, but were not required to submit the campus' midyear progress reports of their targeted improvement plan. Priority progress schools were only required to submit an initial Targeted Improvement Plan and End-of-Year reporting on the implementation of the plan.

In 2016-17, Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) had nine campuses identified as priority schools, and seven identified as priority-progress. The campuses were eligible to receive \$121,933 and \$20,000, respectively, in order to implement the program. The grant period ran from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017.

Focus schools were Title I schools that had the widest gaps in student performance between student groups. Schools were ranked based on the largest gaps of performance between student groups and the annual measurable outcomes target of 75 percent. Ten percent of Title I schools, not otherwise identified as priority schools, were identified as focus schools using this methodology.

Focus schools implemented interventions based on seven critical success factors, which referenced the United States Department of Education turnaround principles: improving academic performance, increasing the use of quality data to drive instruction, increasing leadership effectiveness, increasing learning time, increasing parent and community involvement,

improving school climate, and increasing teacher quality. Schools were required to designate a district and campus contact for focus support and interventions, and to work with the local Educational Service Center (ESC) to assess progress and complete and submit activity documentation, as well as to participate in consultations or two focus school support services or events with their ESC.

Beginning in August 2015, focus schools having improved in performance and who were no longer identified as improvement required by the state accountability ratings were classified as focus-progress. All remaining schools that did not meet that criteria were identified as focus.

Focus-progress schools engaged in the TAIS continuous improvement process and communications with their ESC, but were not required to participate in consultation or two focus school support services or events with their ESC.

In 2016-17, Dallas ISD had 10 campuses identified as focus schools, and 16 campuses identified as focus-progress. The campuses were eligible to receive \$121,933 and \$20,000, respectively, in order to implement the program. The grant period ran from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017.

2016-17 Expenditures

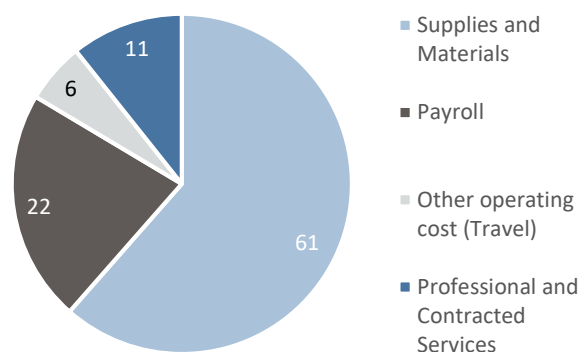
The majority of priority and focus campuses' grant funds were spent on supplies and materials, which included technology, software, supplemental instructional materials and supplies, literacy library construction, professional development book studies, assessment preparation workbooks, and other supplemental supplies for professional development. Expenditures from this category totaled \$2,648,400, or 61 percent of total spending.

The second largest category of expenditure from the priority and focus school grant was payroll, comprising 22 percent of the total spending, at \$951,367. These positions were largely teachers, campus instructional coaches, and teacher assistants who specialized in campuses' lowest performing areas (mathematics or reading). Positions were added in some cases to assist with after-school tutoring or summer programming. Four campuses hired social workers or community liaisons to address improving campus climate and increasing parent and community involvement goals.

Professional and contracted services (services purchased from other district departments such as the graphics department, transportation for after-school tutoring and enrichment programs, and contracts for consultants providing training) comprised 11 percent of expenditures, at \$460,714.

Six percent of the grant funds, \$247,470, were spent on other operating costs. This category included travel for professional development. Representatives from priority campuses attended the AIE conference as a required intervention activity. The remainder of funds in this category were used for travel and/or supplemental pay for content-driven and school climate professional development sessions.

Figure 1: 2016-17 Overall Priority and Focus Grant Expenditures



The Future of Priority and Focus Grants

Since ESSA replaced NCLB on July 1, 2017, the TEA chose to modify the methodology for the selection of priority and focus campuses. This revised methodology takes portions of the prior methodology and changes them to better fit the anticipated staging under ESSA. Using data obtained from the 2016 Accountability Reports, the TEA generated a list of priority and focus schools based on statewide reading and mathematics assessments and graduation rates.

Priority schools include a combination of Texas Title I Priority Schools (TTIPS) from cycles three, four and five, Title I schools with graduation rates less than 60 percent, and the lowest achieving Title I campuses based on state accountability ratings of Improvement Required and reading and mathematics safeguard performance in the seven federal student groups at the federal safeguard target of 87 percent. For 2017-18, Dallas ISD will have 22 campuses identified as priority schools.

Focus schools include ten percent of Title I schools not already identified as priority schools with the next lowest achieving campuses based on state accountability ratings of Improvement Required and reading and mathematics safeguard performance in the seven federal student groups at the federal safeguard target of 87 percent. For 2017-18, Dallas ISD will have 38 campuses identified as focus schools.

As in previous years, priority and focus schools will be required to designate a DCSI and to begin and/or continue engaging in the TAIS continuous improvement

framework. Schools will be unable to appeal labels of priority or focus, and will remain on the list regardless of their 2017 State Accountability ratings. However, priority schools that are rated as Met Standard in August of 2017 will see a reduction in required interventions.

Funding allocations per district will be calculated based on the number of eligible priority and focus schools within the district and the number of students enrolled on the campus during the 2016-17 school year. The estimated amounts of grantee awards campuses will be eligible to receive range from \$65,000 to \$240,000 per priority school, and \$15,000 to \$30,000 per focus school. The grant period will run from October 1, 2017 to September 30, 2018.

There will be no exit process for schools identified as priority or focus for 2017-18. The state will prepare to implement the requirements under ESSA for school year 2018–19 and utilize school year 2017–18 as a transition year. Therefore, a new list will be released for school year 2018-19.

Recommendations

Campuses and the district should have a sustainability plan in place for campuses, especially regarding personnel: Campuses should have a long-term strategy that considers what the impact will be without these grant funds, and how the district and campuses can moderate that impact.

For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at evaluation@dallasisd.org.

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