

2017-18 Texas Priority and Focus Schools Program

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EA18-605-4

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. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) became law on December 10, 2015, replacing the No Child Left Behind Act on July 1, 2017. Under the provisions of Texas Education Code (TEC), Chapter 39, the state is required to provide interventions to improve low-performing schools. The ESSA statute increases the flexibility and decision-making authority afforded to states, encourages states and schools to be innovative, and holds states accountable for results. Section 1003(a) of the ESEA authorizes state education agencies to issue funds to local education agencies 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. As the state prepared to implement the requirements under ESSA for school year 2018-19, TEA utilized school year 2017-18 as a transition year. During the transition year, the agency identified new priority and focus campuses, continued to develop an aligned system of state and federal identification and interventions, and provided technical assistance and resources.

Using data obtained from the 2016 Accountability Reports released in August 2016, the agency generated a list of priority and focus schools based on statewide reading and mathematics assessments and graduation rates.

Priority schools include a combination of former Texas Title I Priority Schools (TTIPS), Title I schools with graduation rates less than 60 percent, and the lowest achieving Title I campuses. This Title I selection is based on a state accountability identification of Improvement Required and low reading/math safeguard performance.

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 low performance. Most campuses 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.

Focus schools include ten percent of the lowest performing Title I schools (not already identified as priority schools) based on a state accountability identification of Improvement Required and low reading/math safeguard performance.

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.

For 2017-18, Dallas ISD had 20 campuses identified as priority schools and 38 identified as focus schools. Funding allocations per district were calculated based on the number of eligible priority and focus schools within the district and included the number of students who were enrolled on the campus during the 2016-17 school year. The district received a total of \$2,710,000 across all 58 campuses.

2017-18 Expenditures

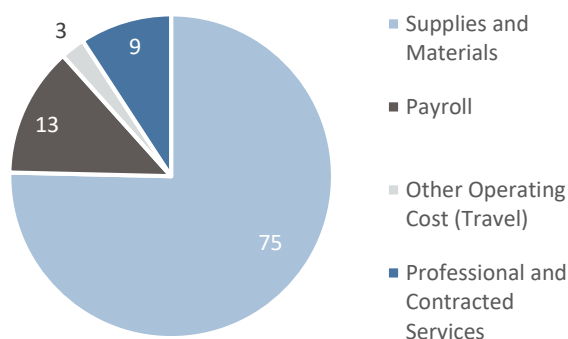
As of June 30, 2018, \$2,207,337 of the grant funds had been spent. Most of priority and focus campuses' grant funds were spent on supplies and materials, which included technology, software, supplemental instructional materials and supplies, literacy library construction, professional development book studies, assessment preparation workbooks, and other supplemental supplies for professional development. Expenditures from this category totaled \$1,663,590, or 75 percent of total spending.

The second largest category of expenditure from the priority and focus school grant was payroll, comprising 13 percent of the total spending, at \$286,670. 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 nine percent of expenditures, at \$203,312.

Three percent of the grant funds, \$53,765, 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: 2017-18 Overall Priority and Focus Grant Expenditures



Source: Data extracted from district grants files dated June 30, 2018.

Schools have until October 1, 2018 to spend any remaining funds before the grant closes. At the time of

this report, schools were in the process of spending these funds to compensate teachers for any outstanding professional development hours and to process any remaining travel reimbursements.

The Future of Priority and Focus Grants

The Priority and Focus grant program ended with school year 2017-18. Under ESSA, TEA will administer a new system of comprehensive and targeted support and improvement to eligible schools. These new interventions begin in school year 2018-19 with comprehensive support and improvement.

The Closing the Gaps domain scaled score of the state accountability system is used to identify schools for comprehensive support and improvement. TEA ranks the scaled domain score for all campuses. The lowest five percent of campuses that receive Title I, Part A funds are identified for comprehensive support and improvement. Also, if a campus does not attain a 67 percent four-year graduation rate for the all students group, the campus is automatically identified for comprehensive support and improvement.

TEA will annually identify campuses for comprehensive support and improvement beginning with the August 2018 accountability release, which is based on school year 2017-18 performance data.

Districts with identified schools must work with a professional service provider (PSP) to develop plans with stakeholders, based on all indicators. Plans must include evidence-based strategies and a resource equity component; must be approved by the district and the state; and must be monitored and reviewed by the state.

TEA will release funding amounts for these interventions in September of 2018. The District has only one campus (John Leslie Patton, Jr. Academic Center) which qualifies for these new interventions.

Recommendation

Ensure campuses have a long-term sustainability plan in place. This is especially critical regarding personnel as the grant funds end.

An electronic version of this report can be found at www.dallasisd.org/Page/888. For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at evaluation@dallasisd.org.

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