

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dallas Independent School District (ISD) allocated grant funds to the District Wide Curriculum Enhancement project to provide teachers with physical and digital curriculum resources, assist with lesson planning and implementation, and provide personal support through grant-funded specialist positions.

The purpose of the Dallas ISD Curriculum Enhancement project evaluation was to provide context and implementation data so that program managers could assess the implementation of grant components and perceptions of staff that participated in grant-funded activities. Data for this report were obtained from interviews with the program staff, a review of internal documents, and analyses of available survey data.

On March 13, 2020, in alignment with federal recommendations, the Governor of Texas issued a disaster proclamation certifying that the novel coronavirus COVID-19 posed an imminent threat of disaster for all counties in the state of Texas. On March 19, 2020, all schools in the state were temporarily closed to slow the spread of the pandemic. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dallas ISD transitioned students to at-home learning from March 23, 2020 (following spring break) to the end of the school year. As a result, the curriculum units planned for the fifth and sixth six-weeks were significantly modified.

The 2019-20 Language, Literacy, and Social Studies Curriculum Enhancement project was funded through Title I, Part A at \$1,438,532. The budget included \$438,382 for the Language, Literacy, and Social Studies Manager; Curriculum Coordinator; Curriculum Specialist; and three other specialist positions. Other funding was used to cover supplemental pay to curriculum writers, supplies and materials, and employee travel. In 2018-19, district Curriculum Design Programs were funded through Title I, Part A at \$1,271,730 (Watson, 2019).

EVALUATION QUESTIONS/OUTCOMES

How was the Dallas ISD Curriculum Enhancement Project implemented?

A districtwide curriculum was created during the 2018-19 school year for designated courses in both Reading

Language Arts, Dual Language, English as a Second Language and Social Studies. The district designed and published a supplemental kindergarten through grade 12 Reading Language Arts and Social Studies curriculum package to create greater cohesion in planning daily instruction for teachers. The curriculum is housed on a digital platform, PowerSchool Learning¹, and includes key components essential to instructional design as included in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) Resource System². The new curriculum's implementation was supported through professional learning communities (PLCs) and ongoing teacher observations and coaching. The curriculum package was rolled out incrementally, with two six-week instructional periods of content released at a time. The first two six-weeks' units were available in August 2018, and the remaining four six-weeks' units were available in December of 2018. The district hired teams of teacher writers who authored the curriculum content, which was then vetted by Teaching and Learning staff members in collaboration with campus representatives.

A feedback survey was completed on an ongoing basis through the 2018-19 school year. These data indicated that the district curriculum needed to be updated to represent the new TEKS and Instructional Materials released in 2019-20 as well as refined to enhance the experience of the user. Changes to previously created curricula were guided by end user feedback included in the departmental needs assessment, along with curriculum user feedback in the form of surveys and interviews with teachers and campus administrators. The focus for the 2019-20 school year was on the continuous improvement of the curriculum units.

Due to safety concerns surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to shifting to at-home learning, district departments worked remotely after spring break through the end of the school year. As a result, PowerSchool Learning use was greatly reduced. At-home learning lessons were simplified for parent use, comparable to a novice teaching level. Due to the shift to remote work, the responsibilities of curriculum writers changed little for the 2020-21 school year. Teachers were hired as consultants to assess curriculum improvements and test and troubleshoot existing units. Since much of the work of writing is easily completed online, the cancelation of in-person curriculum writing for the

¹PowerSchool Learning is a cloud-based digital learning management system for teachers and students. Teacher level accounts in PowerSchool Learning may belong to teachers or other professional staff who require access to the curriculum units.

²The TEKS Resource System is a comprehensive curriculum management system developed by Texas Curriculum Management Program Cooperative (TCMPC) and a team of content experts. Its focus is to provide districts and teachers tightly aligned high quality curriculum documents based on the state mandated TEKS.

summer is not expected to negatively impact the quality or timeliness of the 2020-21 curriculum.

How were professional learning opportunities implemented?

The Language and Literacy and Social Studies departments provided school-based and districtwide curriculum training to teachers, instructional coaches, and academic facilitators. In addition, staff members conducted classroom walk-throughs to support implementation of content learned in the professional development sessions and facilitated PLCs to build teacher capacity at the school and feeder pattern level. Between June 2019 and March 2020, Language and Literacy and Social Studies staff members conducted a total of 588 training sessions, serving 6,684 total participants (Table 1).

Table 1: 2019-20 Language and Literacy and Social Studies District Curriculum Professional Development Session Attendance

Date	Sessions N	Participants N
World Languages	62	583
Social Studies	159	699
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support	77	2,062
Reading Language Arts	290	3,340
Total	588	6,684

Source: Language and Literacy department internal documents dated 01/15/20.

Note: Some participants attended multiple sessions.

Due to inconsistent sharing of the professional development feedback survey with session participants, data collected were insufficient for meaningful analysis.

What were teacher perceptions of the district curriculum?

Curriculum Feedback Survey

On the curriculum feedback survey, results were positive, with most respondents reporting that they found the units and their components useful. Overall satisfaction ratings were reported on a scale from one through four, with one being "Not Useful" and four being "Very Useful." Because the district transitioned to at home learning after spring break, the planned curriculum for the fifth and sixth six-weeks was significantly modified. The evaluator suspended the feedback survey at the end of the fourth six-weeks. For units one through four, a total of 1,926 teacher responses were collected.

Kindergarten through grade two Reading Language Arts and Social Studies teachers rated the Reading Block component of the units the highest (3.3 out of 4.0, $n = 622$) overall. For grades three through eight, Reading Language

Arts teachers rated the Unit Outlines highest (2.9, $n = 386$), while Social Studies teachers rated the Guiding to Consensus Questions and TEKS Aligned Questions the highest (2.9, $n = 62$) overall.

Teachers shared valuable insights through open-ended items on which parts of the curriculum were most useful, suggested improvements, and which parts of the curriculum they felt benefited students most. Additionally, teachers reported the aspects of their teaching practice in which they felt they needed support or help from the Language and Literacy Department. Overall, teachers who responded to these items most appreciated instructional planning calendars, wanted to see improvements in alignment to standardized tests, and requested help with lesson pacing and lesson planning.

Reading Language Arts teachers reported that anchor charts³, the presentation of old and new TEKS side by side, and unit exemplars were helpful for consistency, and especially as support for newer teachers. The most frequently suggested improvements to the Reading Language Arts curriculum included an improved alignment of the curriculum to the *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)*, more videos and visual resources, and improved organization of the site. Teachers reported that students benefitted most from comprehension and character contrasting activities. Teachers reported that they needed help with lesson pacing and needed more Spanish language resources.

Social Studies teachers reported that unit outlines, instructional planning calendars, and example *Assessment of Course Performance (ACP)* questions were the most helpful resources. The most frequently suggested improvements were improved alignment to STAAR, improved organization of the site, more resources, and more student activities. Teachers also requested the ability to send worksheets to students through Google Classroom. Teachers reported that students benefitted the most from learning about cultures and their impact on current life, colonization, slavery, and race relations. Teachers reported the need for help with lesson pacing and lesson planning.

Curriculum Usage Survey

PowerSchool Learning system usage statistics showed 51,089 unique visitors with teacher accounts between June 1, 2019 and May 29, 2020. Teachers visited the online system a total of 1,204,376 times, spending a total of 103,084 hours on the online system.

In order to explore the reasons why some teachers were not taking full advantage of the curriculum resources available on PowerSchool Learning, the evaluator invited 3,611 teachers with below average total minutes of system usage for the school year to participate in the survey. The overall

³ Anchor charts are created during the instruction of the lesson. As the teacher models the lesson or strategy, the lesson reinforcement or strategy tool is written on chart paper. Once the lesson is complete, the chart is

placed in a convenient student-friendly location that the students can access it independently. This is another vehicle for academic support, especially for the visual learner.

mean total minutes was 215 per teacher. Teachers invited had total system usage of 214.8 minutes or fewer. Questions explored barriers to PowerSchool Learning system usage, training on the district curriculum, and resources available on PowerSchool Learning, including: instructional planning calendars and recommended texts, high leverage tasks (HLT) and “Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate” (5E) model tasks.

A total of 340 invitees responded (out of 3,498 invited, or a 9.5% response rate). Of the 340 respondents, 10 indicated that they were not teachers and had been misclassified in PowerSchool Learning. Of the remaining 330 respondents, 142 indicated that they were specials (e.g. art, music, physical education) or other non-core subject area ⁴ teachers (43.4%). Therefore, the following results are based on responses of the remaining 188 teachers.

A total of 167 teachers responded to the survey item asking why they had not used the curriculum more. The most frequent responses included, “I haven’t had adequate training to use it” (*n* = 38), “The curriculum materials I already have include everything that I need” (*n* = 38), “The layout of the curriculum content is difficult to navigate” (*n* = 37), and “Other” (*n* = 37). Of the 37 teachers who selected “other,” nearly all (*n* = 35) indicated a lack of specialized materials for their specific course or campus type (Advanced Placement, or AP, courses; Special Education; ACE ⁵ curriculum; or Pre-Kindergarten materials) as a barrier.

When asked about training, a total of 104 out of the 166 teachers who responded to the item stated that they had received training on the curriculum (63%). However, while 79.9 percent (*n* = 83) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they received adequate training on how to access or log in to the

curriculum, 58.7 percent (*n* = 61) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they had received adequate training on how to use the curriculum to plan lessons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the key findings, the following recommendations are offered for stakeholders.

Improve methods for collecting feedback on professional development and training. Teacher feedback from both the curriculum feedback and usage surveys revealed issues with training on the system’s use. Post training feedback surveys administered were not distributed to all who were trained this year, leaving major holes in the current knowledge of training practices.

Consider updating the layout of the PowerSchool Learning curriculum materials. Feedback from teachers indicated that the current site layout may lead to confusion for users. A redesign with emphasis on ease of navigation and streamlining resources by lesson may improve the user experience.

Continue seeking continuous direct feedback and partnership with classroom teachers. Communication with teachers will be the most productive way to improve the PowerSchool Learning System curriculum and ultimately have the biggest impact on student success.

REFERENCE

Watson, C. E. (2019). 2018-19 Evaluation of Title I Curriculum Design, Resources, and Specialists Program. Dallas, TX. Dallas Independent School District.

⁴ Core subject areas include Reading Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Science.
⁵ The Dallas ISD Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE) initiative incentivizes top teachers and principals to voluntarily work at the district’s

highest-need schools, ensuring the best educators are in classrooms where they are needed the most. ACE schools combine effective instruction, additional learning time, and social and academic skill-building for continuous improvement.