

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teachers are the most impactful school-related factor for improving student achievement (Hanover Research, 2019; Oppen, 2019), and holistic teacher evaluation systems are needed to identify and develop effective teachers (Marzano, 2012; Steinberg & Sartain, 2015). To address this issue, the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) replaced the traditional tenure-based compensation system with the Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI) in 2014-15. The goal of TEI is to improve student learning and quality of instruction by providing a fair, accurate, and rigorous system for assessing teacher effectiveness (Dallas ISD, 2021).¹ TEI evaluates Dallas ISD teachers based on performance (e.g., spot observations), student achievement (e.g., state assessments), and student experience (e.g., district surveys). By aligning compensation with overall effectiveness, TEI provides effective teachers with the opportunity to significantly increase their salaries in a shorter period compared to a tenure-based compensation system.

The purpose of this evaluation is to examine the nature of the 2020-21 TEI system, including the impact of COVID-19 on the TEI system and teacher performance data.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS/OUTCOMES

How was TEI funded in 2020-21?

During the 2020-21 school year, TEI was funded by General Operating funds, which supported seven positions in Human Capital Management for a total 2020-21 TEI administrative budget of \$600,000 excluding benefits. In addition, the teacher salary cost totaled \$621,700,000, the teacher benefit cost totaled \$49,736,000, the TEI Expert Stipend cost totaled \$225,000, and the performance-based stipends for high priority campuses and Accelerating Campus Excellence campuses totaled \$5,700,000.

¹ TEI was developed based on the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project, which found that 1) teacher evaluation systems should measure effective teaching by setting expectations, using multiple measures, and balancing weights; 2) high-quality data should be collected by monitoring validity, ensuring reliability, and assuring accuracy; and 3) [districts should] invest in improvement by making meaningful distinctions, prioritizing support and feedback, and using data for decisions at all levels.

² In 2020, TEI also partnered with School Leadership and Teaching and Learning to produce the Teacher Performance Rubric for Online Learning, which was a supplemental resource for evaluating online instruction.

³ The four domains included 1) designing clear, targeted, appropriately rigorous lessons for diverse learners; 2) developing and executing highly effective, rigorous instruction; 3) building supportive, rigorous learning environments; and 4) consummate professionals pursuing rigorous, continual improvement.

How was the TEI system affected by COVID-19 in 2020-21?

Defining Excellence

For TEI, teachers are traditionally classified into one of four categories (i.e., Category A, B, C, or D) based on which components were available for each teacher.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all Dallas ISD teachers were classified into the same category in 2020-21, with 80% of the score based on results for the Teacher Performance component and 20% of the score based on results for the Student Achievement component (Student Learning Objectives; SLOs).

Teacher Performance

For the Teacher Performance component, certified TEI evaluators used the Teacher Performance Rubric (TPR), which provided a detailed explanation of essential teacher skills and actions, student behaviors, and performance levels.² The rubric included 18 indicators of teacher practice across four domains (Table 1).³ The domains are assessed by TEI evaluators using data from classroom observations of in-person or virtual instruction, teacher and/or student artifacts, and other relevant professional practices.⁴

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dallas ISD teachers continued to receive spot observations (10-15 minutes),⁵ an extended observation (at least 45 minutes), and a summative appraisal in 2020-21 in accordance with established TEI regulations and guidance. In addition, teachers received a summative conference in 2020-21 that, in accordance with the TPR, included consideration of the teachers' implementation of discipline management procedures and the performance of teachers' students.⁶

⁴ The TEI certification system required principals and assistant principals (i.e., TEI evaluators) to demonstrate accurate scoring through video-based calibration exercises. Evaluators were required to re-certify annually. More information about TEI evaluators can be found at <http://tei.dallasisd.org/home/resources/>.

⁵ While a teacher's current TEI Effectiveness Level determined how many annual spot observations that they received in 2020-21, the total number of required spot observations was modified in November 2020. More information can be found in the 2020-21 TEI Teacher Guidebook at <http://tei.dalsisd.org/home/resources/>.

⁶ The evaluator scored each teacher from zero to three (0 = Unsatisfactory, 1 = Progressing, 2 = Proficient, 3 = Exemplary) on 18 different indicators across four domains. The indicator scores were weighted and combined to calculate a final summative performance evaluation score ranging from one to 100. TEI evaluators considered all evidence including spot, extended, and informal observations.

However, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the TEI system in 2020-21, these findings should be viewed with caution and should not be compared to previous years.

Table 1: Teacher Performance Rubric Indicators

Indicator	Description
1.1	Demonstrates knowledge of content, concepts, and skills
1.2	Uses formal and informal student data to align instructional practices
1.3	Plans and selects varied, aligned formative and summative assessments
1.4	Selects and plans for use of appropriate resources to support instructional outcomes
1.5	Designs appropriate standards-based lessons that address prerequisites and advance relationships among concepts and skills
2.1	Structures well-organized, objective-driven lessons and content appropriate to standards for subject, grade, and level
2.2	Ensures student mastery of learning objective appropriate to standards for subject and grade
2.3	Facilitates clear, cohesive, and purposeful learning experiences
2.4	Engages students in rigorous content that elicits a productive struggle
2.5	Embeds collaborative and independent tasks that allow for focused practice
3.1	Organizes classroom procedures, physical space, and resources to allow for optimal instruction
3.2	Establishes, communicates, and reinforces clear expectations for student behavior
3.3	Establishes a culture of academic accountability steeped in mutual respect and rapport
4.1	Models a commitment to attendance that ensures fidelity of continuous rigorous instruction
4.2	Follows policies and procedures and maintains accurate student records
4.3	Exhibits a commitment to professional growth by pursuing, implementing, and sharing new learnings
4.4	Engages in collaborative, productive relationships with colleagues to improve individual and team practices
4.5	Establishes culturally appropriate relationships with families and communities through meaningful ongoing communication

Source: Human Capital Management.

When examining the 18 different indicators used for the summative performance evaluation ratings, the percentage of teachers who received two (Proficient) or three (Exemplary) points varied by indicator (see Table 2). The lowest percentage of teachers who earned Proficient or above ratings was for 2.4 *Engages students in rigorous content that elicits a productive struggle* (86%), and the highest percentage was for 3.3 *Establishes a culture of academic accountability steeped in mutual respect and rapport* (97%).

Table 2: 2020-21 Percentage of Teachers Receiving a Proficient (2.0) or Exemplary (3.0) Rating by Summative Evaluation Indicator

Indicator	%
1.1	93.5
1.2	91.6
1.3	92.6
1.4	94.9
1.5	93.8
2.1	96.0
2.2	90.0
2.3	93.6
2.4	85.6
2.5	92.8
3.1	95.7
3.2	95.8
3.3	96.9
4.1	90.1
4.2	95.4
4.3	94.4
4.4	96.3
4.5	95.2

Source: Data file from Human Capital Management dated 11/10/21.

Note: N = 9,822 Dallas ISD teachers.

In 2020-21, there was a statistically and practically significant increase in teacher spot observation scores from the beginning of the school year (1.79-2.26) to the end of the school year (2.06-2.49; Table 3). In addition, Cohen's *d* effect sizes ranged from .41 to .50. These effect sizes indicate small-to-medium practical significance.

Table 3: 2020-21 Change between First and Last Average Spot Observation Scores

Indicator	Average First Observation Score	Average Last Observation Score	Diff.	p-value	Cohen's <i>d</i>
2.1	1.97	2.21	0.23	<.01	0.44
2.2	1.88	2.14	0.25	<.01	0.47
2.3	1.97	2.21	0.25	<.01	0.48
2.4	1.79	2.06	0.27	<.01	0.50
2.5	1.93	2.16	0.24	<.01	0.46
3.1	2.19	2.43	0.24	<.01	0.42
3.2	2.23	2.48	0.24	<.01	0.43
3.3	2.26	2.49	0.23	<.01	0.41

Source: Data file from Human Capital Management dated 11/10/21.

Note: Diff. = Difference between the average first observation score and the average last observation score for each indicator. Cohen's *d* values of .20, .50, and .80 are considered small, medium, and large, respectively (Cohen, 1992). Maximum possible spot observation score was 3.0.

As shown in Table 4, summative performance evaluation scores and spot observation scores were highly correlated. The Pearson *r* correlations between each summative performance evaluation score and spot observation indicator ranged between .73 and .79. While these findings indicated summative scores provided by TEI evaluators were aligned with what was observed in the classroom, TEI program staff members should consider how much these scores were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4: 2020-21 Correlations between Summative Performance Evaluation Scores and Average Spot Observation Scores

Indicator	Pearson <i>r</i> Correlation	<i>p</i> -value
2.1	.73*	<.01
2.2	.76*	<.01
2.3	.79*	<.01
2.4	.75*	<.01
2.5	.75*	<.01
3.1	.76*	<.01
3.2	.74*	<.01
3.3	.73*	<.01

Source: Data file from Human Capital Management on 11/10/21.

Note: *n* = 9,587 Dallas ISD teachers. Effect sizes: .10 = small, .30 = medium, .50 = large. * = Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Student Achievement

The Student Achievement component of TEI is traditionally measured using three separate measures: teacher-level student achievement [e.g., *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)*], a school-level STAAR score, and SLOs.⁷

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher- and school-level standardized local, state, and national assessment measures were not calculated or considered as part of teachers' TEI evaluations in 2020-21 because sufficient data were not available. In 2020-21, teachers' SLO score⁸ was the only measure used to calculate the Student Achievement component of TEI evaluations, and 69% of 9,726 teachers earned the maximum number of SLO points.

Student Experience

Student surveys are a component of teachers' evaluations for those who are a teacher of record for grades 3-12. The Dallas ISD contracted with Panorama Education⁹ to administer age-appropriate surveys to students in grades three to 12 in both English and Spanish. Surveys solicited information about student perceptions regarding teacher levels of care, support, and expectations for students, as well as about instructional methods and delivery.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Student Perception component was not scored or considered as part of teachers' TEI evaluations in 2020-21 because of a lack of sufficient data. While student perception surveys were administered in May 2021, the survey results were only

used for informational purposes only and did not inform teachers' TEI evaluations.

Distinguished Teacher Review (DTR)

To receive one of the highest effectiveness levels in the TEI program (i.e., Proficient II or higher),¹⁰ teachers are required to achieve high scores in teacher performance, student achievement, and student experience. These teachers must also meet additional performance criteria assessed through a separate review process called the Distinguished Teacher Review (DTR).¹¹ Teachers completing a Distinguished Teacher Review are eligible for additional points that are added to their overall evaluation score. In 2020-21, teachers could earn up to 30 DTR points by demonstrating examples of their leadership, lifelong learning, and contributions to the profession and by working at a high priority campus in the Dallas ISD.

While no effectiveness levels were awarded in 2021-22 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers could still earn a numerical evaluation score for 2020-21. Teachers who successfully completed DTR in 2020-21 could earn up to 30 additional points toward their evaluation score that will be used to determine eligibility for next year's DTR process. In 2020-21, 33% of 9,726 Dallas ISD teachers received DTR points.

Supporting Excellence

In 2020-21, the Dallas ISD provided supports across multiple professional learning contexts; leveraged technology to support professional learning; and provided differentiated professional development options. The district's plan for supporting teachers' professional growth over the next three years included the following (<https://tei.dallasisd.org/home/resources/>):

- Building robust district content workshops
- Creating differentiated PD academies (year-long)
- Empowering teacher teams
- Enhancing one-on-one and peer coaching supports
- Fostering self-facilitated learning opportunities
- Increasing whole-group training offerings
- Personalized professional learning & development (outside school year)¹²
- Professional development plan (during school year)¹³
- Providing summer school learning labs

⁷ Teacher-level student achievement measures include standardized assessments by grade and content (e.g., STAAR). The school-level STAAR measure is meant to foster collaboration across grade levels and content areas. SLOs are a measure of student growth that do not include existing standardized assessments in an achievement template.

⁸ The intent of SLOs was to focus professional conversation on student learning to support teachers in reaching the learning targets. SLOs were established at the beginning of the year with the approval of the teacher's evaluator and assessed at the end of the year. Points were awarded for both setting and accomplishing the SLO using a rubric.

⁹ Additional information can be found at <https://www.panoramaed.com/>.

¹⁰ A teacher's effectiveness level informs compensation by using information from two consecutive years in the same TEI teacher category. There are nine effectiveness levels: Unsatisfactory, Progressing I, Progressing II, Proficient I, Proficient II, Proficient III, Exemplary I, Exemplary II, and Master.

¹¹ Additional information regarding the DTR eligibility requirements and application process can be found in the 2020-21 TEI Teacher Guidebook at <http://tei.dallasisd.org/home/resources/>.

¹² Professional development planning is guided by the teacher, principal, and campus instructional coach using end-of-year summative score or TEI Evaluator recommendations.

¹³ Each plan is differentiated depending on a teacher's needs and areas of focus for the current school year.

Rewarding Excellence

As part of TEI, salaries are differentiated to reward teachers who perform well and raise student achievement results, whereas the previous traditional system used years of service and level of education to calculate salary. TEI replaced the traditional teacher salary schedule with nine effectiveness levels to retain and recruit highly qualified teachers. To maintain the financial security of the district, the compensation plan was designed to consume approximately the same amount of the budget as the traditional salary schedule and was based on a target distribution of effectiveness levels.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were not assigned an effectiveness level for the 2021-22 school year based on their TEI evaluation for the 2020-21 school year. Returning teachers were eligible for a differentiated flat-rate increase ranging from \$1,250-\$2,000 dollars. Increases were based on the greater of their existing effectiveness level or Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) designation. The TIA provided an additional \$28 million for teacher compensation in 2020-21, which the district used to a) strengthen its ability to identify, reward, and retain highly effective teachers and b) increase equity and access to highly effective teachers at the district's 75 High Priority campuses and Accelerating Campus Excellence campuses. Additional information about the TIA can be found at: <http://tei.dallasisd.org/home/resources/>.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Determine how the TEI system should be adapted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the 2020-21 school year, many Dallas ISD teachers faced the challenge

of providing synchronous and asynchronous learning activities for students in virtual and in-person settings. Recognizing these challenges and their potential impact on several components of the teacher evaluation system, TEI program staff revised how teacher performance was evaluated. As a result of these changes, TEI program staff members should consider assessing (a) how well limited available data accurately reflected the performance of Dallas ISD teachers in 2020-21 and (b) to what extent any increases or decreases in 2020-21 scores were due to improvements in teacher performance or the impact of COVID-19 on the TEI system.

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