

Introduction

AISD REACH, the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) strategic compensation initiative, supports and rewards success in the classroom. Educators are supported with novice teacher mentoring and enhanced professional development opportunities, and are rewarded for teaching in high needs schools, for achieving student learning objectives (SLOs), and for achieving schoolwide growth. This report highlights program successes since it began in 2007-2008.



Student Learning Objectives

Establishing SLOs. SLOs are targets for student growth that teachers¹ set and strive to achieve by the end of the semester or school year. They are designed to assist teachers in focusing instruction on a particular area of student need, tying instructional practices to that area of need, and monitoring students' progress to inform adjustments in practice. SLOs are based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and are established and implemented through a multi-step process. From 2007-2008 through 2009-2010, teachers set two SLOs for their own students. Starting in 2010-2011, teachers work toward one SLO for their own students and one for the students served by a group of teachers (e.g., grade level team).

"[The team SLO] does help you kind of watch out for your teammates. Because, let's say there's someone who's maybe struggling ...it's for your own benefit also to help that teacher be successful. Because in the end, it's going to help everyone."

"You actually see the kids that are low and not passing TAKS...are making improvements, and that's definitely worth it."

Key Findings. Some evidence suggests students of teachers who met individual SLOs outperformed students of teachers who did not meet their individual SLOs, though results are inconsistent. Results for team SLOs also are mixed, but secondary teachers who met team SLOs outperformed teachers at comparison schools and teachers who did not meet team SLOs. See Figure 1 for the percentage of teachers who met SLOs each year. Many teachers believe SLOs have improved their teaching (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Percentage of REACH participants who met 0, 1, or 2 SLOs each year since 2007-2008. The percentage of participants meeting SLOs has remained stable over time, despite the addition of new schools to the REACH program each year.

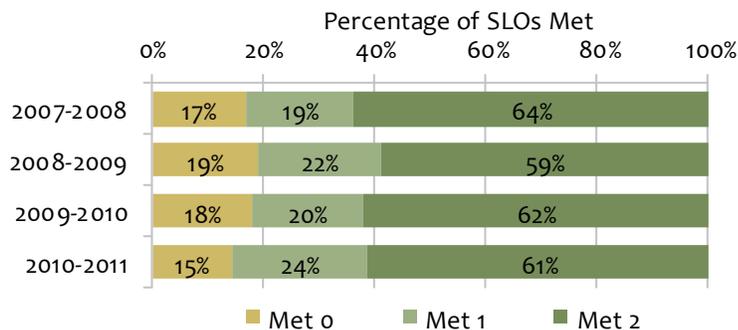
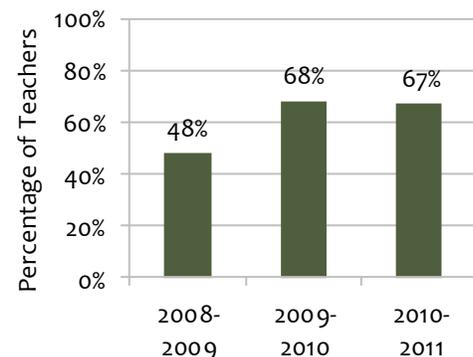


Figure 2. Percentage of teachers who agree or strongly agree that "using SLOs has improved my teaching."



¹Other educators (e.g., counselors, assistant principals, librarians, and instructional specialists) also implement SLOs and are eligible for stipends.

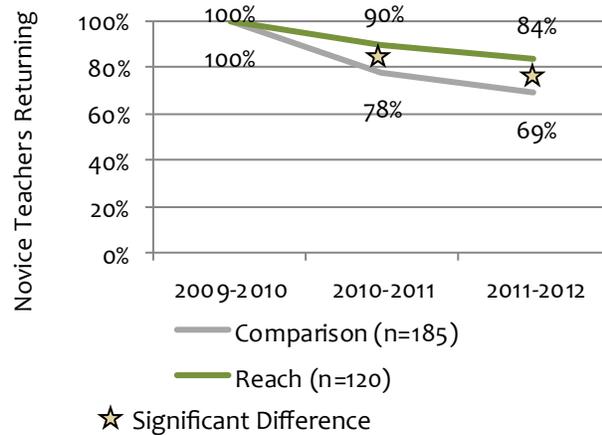
Recruitment and Retention

Program Intent. AISD REACH aims to improve student achievement through increased campus staff stability. Staff stability may be accomplished in three ways. First, educators are awarded \$500 or \$1,500 stipends for coming to or returning to a REACH campus in the fall (for 1 to 3 or 4+ years at the campus, respectively), and a second stipend of the same amount is awarded the following summer for remaining on the campus the entire school year. Second, stipends for all teachers and intensive mentoring for novice teachers receive should bolster school climate and improve job satisfaction, ultimately improving retention. Third, the professional development and mentoring teachers receive should increase their self-efficacy and effectiveness, thus increasing the likelihood they will stay on their campus.

"I know when I started teaching the idea of having a mentor whose sole job was to be a mentor for new teachers was definitely a draw. When I was applying for a job, I was looking at REACH campuses." ~ Novice teacher

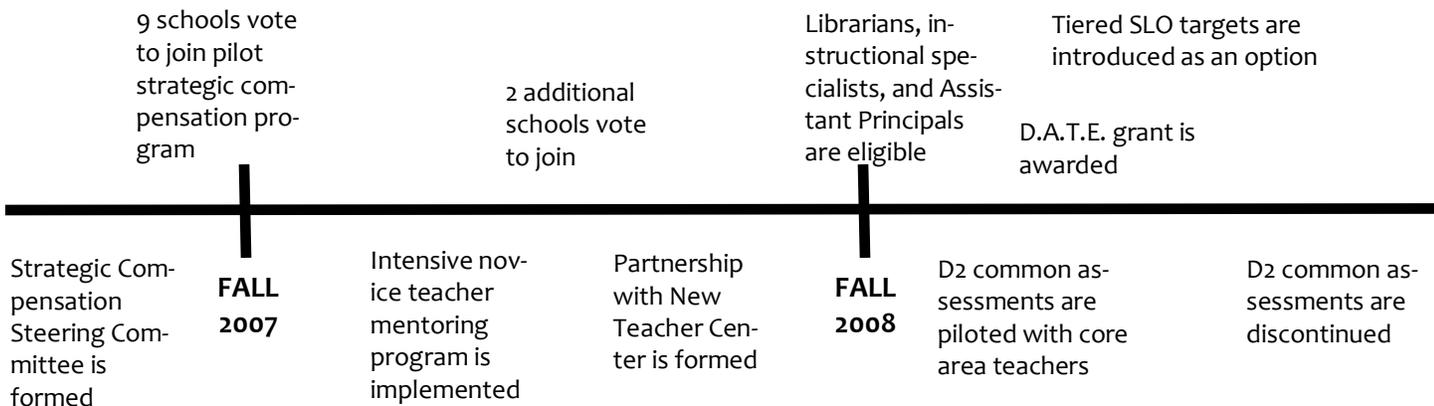
"I don't know if I would have survived my first year without my mentor." ~ Novice teacher

Figure 3. Percentage of 2009-2010 novice REACH and comparison teachers returning each year.



Key Findings. In Fall 2010, the rate of improvement in retention rates was significantly greater for REACH novice teachers than for teachers at comparison schools. However, teacher retention at both REACH and comparison schools dipped in Fall 2011.¹ Examining data separately by mentoring cohort reveals some important patterns. Novice teachers in the 2009-2010 cohort showed significantly greater retention than their comparison peers in both Fall 2010 and Fall 2011 (Figure 3), and novice teachers in the 2010-2011 mentoring cohort showed a trend toward significantly greater retention in Fall 2011 than their peers who did not receive the intensive REACH mentoring.¹ This suggests that the program's impact may be increasing as the mentoring program evolves.

AISD REACH Timeline of Events, Fall 2007 through Fall 2011

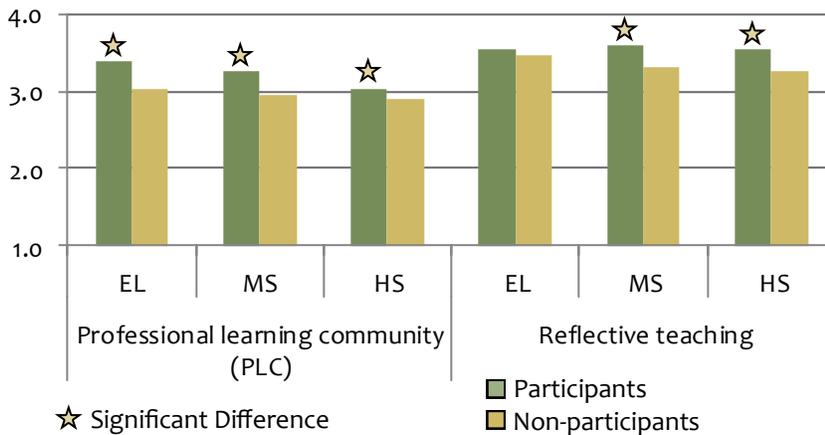


¹ See DRE Publication 10.85RB, Results for Teacher Retention, Fall 2011

Professional Development Units

Participants in Professional Development Units (PDUs). In the 2010-2011 school year, the AISD REACH strategic compensation program staff implemented a new program element, Professional Development Units (PDUs).² PDUs provide educators the opportunity to participate with a group of colleagues in a job-embedded research study of teaching practice, and to experience the student performance that results from enhanced instructional strategies. PDU participation was greatest at the middle school level and lowest at the high school level (34% and 13%, respectively). The majority of PDUs focused on English language learners (ELLs); however, many elementary PDUs addressed core content, while middle school PDUs addressed general teaching methods.

Figure 4. Professional learning community (PLC) and reflective teaching ratings of PDU participants and non-participants.

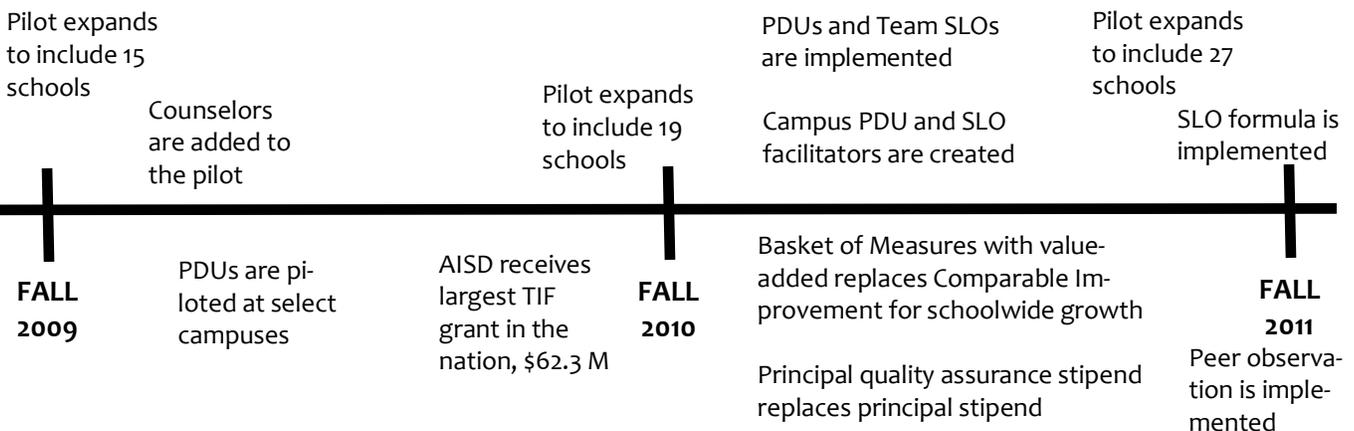


“The PDU process allowed me to focus my teaching and reflect upon what was working and not working in the classroom using data.” ~ PDU participant

“Collaborating with my colleagues improved an already highly functional team, and I believe my students benefitted significantly from the tools we implemented.” ~ PDU participant

Key Findings. Participants generally reported great satisfaction with their experiences, especially with the collaboration, immediate reflection on practice, and student outcomes that resulted. Findings indeed suggest favorable outcomes for participants, compared with non-participants, with regard to frequency of data use, professional learning communities (PLCs), and reflective teaching behaviors (Figure 4). TAKS performance was more favorable for elementary and high school participants than for their non-participating peers; however, the reverse was found for middle school participants. This may reflect the lack of alignment between PDU topics and core content, particularly at the middle school level.

AISD REACH Timeline of Events, Fall 2007 through Fall 2011, continued



² For more information about REACH and related research results, see <http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/initiatives/compensation/index.phtml>.

Schoolwide Growth

From 2007-2008 through 2009-2010, AISD educators at REACH schools that achieved the top quartile of growth among similar schools in Texas on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge in Skills (TAKS) in reading and/or mathematics (i.e., Comparable Improvement) received stipends for schoolwide growth. Beginning in 2010-2011, schoolwide growth was replaced with a Basket of Measures containing goals in four areas: a) value-added in reading and mathematics, b) TAKS/STAAR, c) college readiness, and d) campus choice. Educators are rewarded for accomplishment of at least three of the four goals. See Figure 5 and Table 1.

Figure 5. Percentage of schools achieving schoolwide growth in reading and mathematics each year.

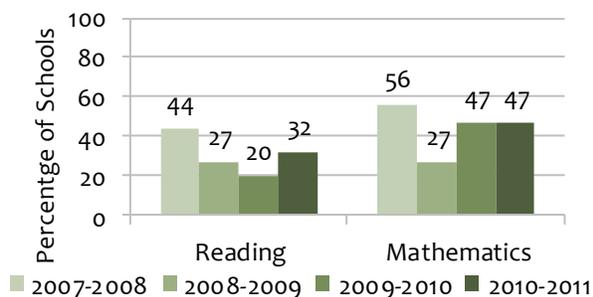


Table 1. Percentage of schools earning schoolwide growth stipends each year.

Year	Percentage of Schools
2007-2008	67%
2008-2009	27%
2009-2010	53%
2010-2011	32%

Note. Stipends were earned in 2007-2008 through 2009-2010 for growth in reading and/or math, and in 2010-2011 for meeting 3 or 4 out of 4 campus goals.

Key Findings. Participants express frustration at their lack of ability to know how to accomplish and/or track their progress toward schoolwide growth. Many also are unaware of the campus goals in their basket. This measure operates more as a reward than as an incentive.

Stipend Totals and Program Expenditures

In 2009-2010, REACH spent \$4.3 million, or approximately \$363 per student, and in 2010-2011, REACH spent \$11.3 million, or approximately \$726 per student. Table 2 shows the average teacher stipend earned for AISD REACH from 2008-2009 through 2010-2011. Teachers earned up to \$10,000 more than their base salary as a result of successfully accomplishing individual and campus goals, voluntarily engaging in professional development, and coming to or returning to their highest-needs campuses.

Table 2. Average stipend award per eligible REACH teacher in 2008-2009 through 2010-2011.

	2008-2009			2009-2010			2010-2011		
	N	Average earned	Maximum earned	N	Average earned	Maximum earned	N	Average earned	Maximum earned
Highest needs	419	\$5,174	\$10,000	803	\$4,555	\$10,000	1,204	\$5,097	\$10,000
Non-highest needs	173	\$1,503	\$2,000	74	\$1,905	\$4,500		n/a	

Key Findings. As the pilot progressed, participants increasingly expressed appreciation for the opportunity to earn more through REACH. Teacher stipends averaged between about \$4,500 and \$5,200 each year, approximately 10% of the average teacher’s salary (\$46,606 in 2011, according to the Texas Education Agency’s 2011 Snapshot). The addition of new highest needs schools and new program elements (e.g., PDUs, campus SLO facilitators) increased expenditures over time.

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