

Background. The Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) is currently implemented in Austin Independent School District (AISD) within the LBJ, Travis, and Lanier vertical teams.¹ The purpose of TLI is to improve school readiness and success in the areas of language and literacy for students in AISD. To do this, AISD uses the Literacy Lines model, which provides instructional and programming alignment for language, pre-literacy, and literacy development to ease the transition for children across their entire learning careers. A Literacy Line is a vertical collaborative among feeder-pattern campuses within the district, and partners eligible educational organizations (e.g., prekindergarten [pre-K], elementary, middle, and high schools) with their , associated early childhood education (ECE) providers, who may include Early Head Start, Head Start, public or private or nonprofit licensed child care providers, and public pre-K programs. In Spring 2014, staff in AISD’s Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) worked with TLI grant management staff to create and administer a survey to principals, teachers, and TLI reading specialists/coaches at all TLI campuses. This report summarizes responses from reading specialists/coaches at TLI campuses.

Respondents. An electronic survey was sent to 51 coaches/specialists within the TLI vertical teams. Of the 29 coaches/specialists who responded (57% response rate), the majority (83%) worked with students in kindergarten through 2nd grade, the next greatest percentage (14%) of respondents worked with 6th- through 8th-grade students, and 10% of respondents worked with students from birth to 4-years-old.

Coaches/specialists’ ratings. Coaches/specialists’ responses to questions related to the TLI grant are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Coaches/Specialists’ Ratings of the Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) (n = 29)

Statement	% Strongly agree	% Agree	% Disagree	%Strongly disagree	% Not sure/NA
I have been supported by the principal of my campus.	38	55	3	3	0
Teachers on my campus are willing to work with me and implement my suggestions.	21	76	3	0	0
I receive the support I need from TLI central office staff.	55	41	0	0	3
I feel supported by the state literacy partners at the Vaughn Gross Center.	59	41	0	0	0
I have enough time to complete my current job duties.	10	55	31	3	0

Source. TLI Spring 2014 Staff Survey

Coach/specialist activities. Coaches/specialists were asked to indicate all types of activities they typically completed each week during the school year. Table 2 summarizes their responses. Staff could select more than one activity. The most common activity reported was providing intervention to students (90%).

¹ Vertical teams refer to the elementary and middle schools that feed into a particular high school.

Table 2. Typical Weekly Activities by Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) Reading Coaches/Specialists (n = 29)

Weekly activity type	% Coaches/specialists
Providing intervention to students	90
Planning instruction with teachers	86
Accessing student data (e.g., test results, benchmarks)	86
Communicating with campus administration about your work	79
Doing administrative paper work, data entry, etc.	79
Managing campus-based literacy teams (Project Share)	72
Observing instruction and providing feedback to teachers	69
Modeling effective instructional strategies for teachers	69
Providing professional development to teachers	66
Leading data meetings with teachers	48
Co-teaching in a classroom	41

Source. TLI Spring 2014 Survey

Support. Coaches/specialists were asked to answer several questions regarding the support they have received throughout the school year. Tables 3 through 5 show coaches/specialists' responses to questions related to support.

Table 3: What specific support from Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) central office staff has been beneficial? The three types of support that coaches/specialists cited most often were professional development trainings, responding quickly to emails or phone calls, and workshops.

Types of support	% Coaches/specialists (n = 29)
Professional development trainings	83
Responding quickly to emails or phone calls	76
Support during data analysis meetings	62
Materials	59
Workshops	59
Program implementation	48
Walk throughs	38
Technical support	38
Other (please specify)	3

Source. TLI Spring 2014 Survey

Coaches were also asked to indicate types of additional support they would like to receive from TLI central office staff. Table 4 displays their responses. Coaches/specialists were allowed to select more than one type of support. The most common additional support requested by staff was opportunities for teachers to observe one another.

Table 4. Additional Support Needed from Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) Central Office Staff (n = 29)

Types of additional support needed	% Coaches/specialists
Opportunities for teachers to observe one another	69
Strategies for making lesson planning meetings more effective	62
Training on facilitating vertical and horizontal alignment	55
Communicate the expectation of the roles of TLI staff to campus specialists and administration	45
Treasures and Tesoros training	38
Ensure that all coaches are part of a workgroup	14
Other	3

Source. TLI Spring 2014 Survey

Coaches/specialists were asked to select the additional professional development activities or training they would like to receive. Table 5 shows their responses. Staff members were able to select more than one option. The majority of coaches/specialists (69%) said they would like more training on coaching strategies.

Table 5. Coaches/Specialists' Additional Professional Development Activity/Training Needs (n = 29)

Additional professional development needs	% Coaches/specialists
Coaching strategies	69
Incorporation of writing into the curriculum	62
Workstations/centers	45
Guided reading	41
Phonics/graphophonemic knowledge	34
Vocabulary	34
Six syllable types	21
Other	3

Source. Texas Literacy Initiative Spring 2014 Survey

Benefits as a result of TLI. Coaches/specialists (n = 29) also shared the benefits they have seen as a result of the TLI grant. Some of their responses are listed below:

- “I have noticed an increased awareness on the importance of primary education from teachers and administration. I have also seen primary teachers become more responsive to their student data.”
- The TLI grant creates opportunities to share a balanced literacy model with teachers and scholars. The grant allows me to model balanced literacy for teachers, pull small groups of at-risk scholars, and develop professional development sessions that are beneficial to the overall needs of our teachers.
- “Scholars from kinder[garten] to 2nd grade are closing the instructional gap. Our data is showing that students are acquiring the skills and understanding the concepts that are being taught.”
- “The data analysis meetings helped us coordinate our intervention group focus and also moved students toward mastery for each step in the literacy continuum.”

- “Teachers are implementing the five components of reading now with more fidelity. As a result the scores have gone up tremendously.”
- “The administrators use the lessons for the CIP [Campus Improvement Plan]. Literacy has become a focus!”
- “Our K–2 [kindergarten through grade 2] teachers are more data-driven and doing more progress monitoring than before the grant initiatives were implemented.”
- “Teachers are more aware of their data and able to reflect on their teaching. The professional development [training] has been great and I see teachers excited to participate in discussions as they learn more about their profession.”
- “The TLI grant allows teachers to improve their craft through data driven, professional development. The teachers that are interested in getting better have more opportunity to grow and more support from TLI staff, coaches, administrators, through the organization of the grant.”
- “The TLI grant has enabled [our campus] to focus on literacy development campus wide. Funding allows for a TLI person to keep literacy at the forefront through our monthly department meetings as well as through staff development for the entire campus. The TLI grant has given our campus additional support for initiatives we developed to strengthen skills.”

Suggestions for TLI grant improvement. TLI coaches/specialists (n = 29) provided suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the TLI grant:

- “I think a greater emphasis on targeted teacher PD [professional development training] would be beneficial.”
- “I understand that grants have a shelf life. I do believe that my position with teachers and scholars is critical to overall success. We have formed a strong working relationship that is built on trust. The grant would be improved if its life were extended past the initial five years. It is an amazing opportunity for teachers and leadership to work together to create strong standards aligned lesson plans while implementing balanced literacy.”
- “All administrators and specialist need to be informed of the purpose of the person in the position and the potential effectiveness of the implementation of the program.”
- “Funds in order for teachers to have more time to plan (especially after data meetings) well developed lessons as well as to observe peers who are teaching literacy well.”
- “There should be more “promotions” from the district about the benefits that TLI Grant provides to the school, teachers and scholars. Many teachers and administrators mention that they do not know about the grant and its benefits. The supervision from the district should help more to implement the different programs in the schools. Once a month, especially at the beginning of the year, teachers should be trained in specific skills that their respective campus needs to improve and follow up with results.”
- “Keep the TLI course work to a minimum. Our TLI Leadership team was able to implement all of the course lesson within our campus. However, sometimes the weekly meetings could have been biweekly.”
- “Have principals attend a meeting early on in the year (with the coaches) to talk about the importance of the grant, etc.”
- “Need more support and to inform teachers what our roles are.”

- “Videos of effective team planning, guided reading/skills based lesson instructions”
- “I do think it would help to get the middle school principals together to remind them of what TLI is all about and of the responsibilities for pretesting and post testing of the coach. Perhaps providing them with a couple of different models for how the TLI coach might work on their campus. I think providing a couple of job descriptions for a typical TLI coach would be helpful to the principals.”

Suggestions for improving campuses’ reading and writing. TLI coaches/specialists (n = 29) provided suggestions for improving reading and writing skills at their campuses:

- “PD [professional development training] in writing across content areas.”
- “Writing across all content areas would help improve our reading and writing skills. We are focusing on writing specifically in math and science at a greater level.”
- “More PD [professional development training] on how to teach reading and writing well. PD [professional development] opportunities to include phonics/spelling instruction, vocabulary, student engagement and centers/workstations.”
- “I need to be available to regularly give PD [professional development training] and meet with teachers to plan... the best suggestion would be to ensure that coaches have flexible schedules to appropriately respond to and best address campus needs as they arise throughout the year.”
- “Our schools need more books for the lower grade grades. If our scholars improve their reading and they have a rich vocabulary, they will be better prepared to write better. Scholars should be [provided] with adequate time for them to write. There is not specific time for writing in the lower grades for them to develop their writing skills.”
- “Professional development [training] regarding the different types of writing (interactive, shared, modeled) and how to use it with Treasures/Tesoros.”
- “Coaching in the classroom with modeling, observation, and feedback.”
- “We need continued focus on how to teach students to read closely and how to teach students how to figure out word meanings from context. We might examine our instructional menu, which is a guide for the minute by minute use of time in a blocked ELA [English language arts] class, and think about the best days and times for silent sustained reading and the best practices for getting students to quick write on what they've read. I think all subject area teachers need to understand that teaching reading and writing are everyone's business!”
- “More PD [professional development training] for our teachers, help them understand and see the whole picture. Observe model classrooms and talk to model teachers for them to share what they are doing to be successful.”
- “I feel more PD [professional development training] on vocabulary will improve reading skills at my school.”

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