

**Background.** The Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) is currently implemented in Austin Independent School District (AISD) within the LBJ, Travis, and Lanier vertical teams.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of TLI is to improve school readiness and success in the areas of language and literacy for students in AISD, including associated early childhood education (ECE) providers. 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, partnering eligible educational organizations (e.g., prekindergarten [pre-K], elementary, middle, and high schools) and their associated ECE providers, which may include Early Head Start, Head Start, public or private or nonprofit licensed child care providers, and public pre-K programs. In Fall 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.** Of the 30 coaches/specialists who responded, the majority (83%) worked with students in kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade; the next greatest percentage (14%) of respondents worked with 6<sup>th</sup>- through 8<sup>th</sup>-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 (n = 30)**

Statement	% Strongly agree	% Agree	% Disagree	%Strongly disagree	% Not sure/NA
I have been supported by the principal of my campus.	50	40	7	3	0
Teachers on my campus are willing to work with me and implement my suggestions.	20	77	0	3	0
I receive the support I need from Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) central office staff.	63	33	0	0	3
I feel supported by the state literacy partners at the Vaughn Gross Center.	57	37	3	3	0
I have enough time to complete my current job duties.	0	43	40	17	0

Source. Texas Literacy Initiative Fall 2014 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

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

than one activity. The most common activity reported was doing administrative paperwork, data entry, etc. (93%).

**Table 2. Typical Weekly Activities by Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) Reading Coaches/Specialists (n = 30)**

Weekly activity type	% Coaches/specialists
Doing administrative paper work, data entry, etc.	93
Providing intervention to students	90
Planning instruction with teachers	80
Communicating with campus administration about your work	80
Managing campus-based literacy teams (Project Share)	80
Observing instruction and providing feedback to teachers	80
Accessing student data (e.g., test results, benchmarks)	77
Modeling effective instructional strategies for teachers	77
Leading data meetings with teachers	63
Providing professional development to teachers	60
Co-teaching in a classroom	53

Source. TLI Fall 2014 Survey

**Support.** Coaches/specialists were asked to answer several questions regarding the support they received throughout the school year. Tables 3 through 5 show coaches/specialists' responses to questions related to support. The three types of support that coaches/specialists cited most often as beneficial were professional development trainings, responding quickly to emails or phone calls, and materials.

**Table 3. Support From Texas Literacy Initiative (TLI) Central Office Staff That Coaches/Specialists Found Beneficial (n = 30)**

Type of support	% Coaches/specialists
Responding quickly to emails or phone calls	90
Professional development trainings	80
Materials	70
Support during data analysis meetings	50
Technical support	50
Program implementation	47
Workshops	43
Walk throughs	30
Other (please specify)	10

Source. TLI Fall 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 = 30)**

Type of additional support needed	% Coaches/specialists
Opportunities for teachers to observe one another	57
Strategies for making lesson planning meetings more effective	53
Training on facilitating vertical and horizontal alignment	53
Communicate the expectation of the roles of TLI staff to campus specialists and administration	27
Treasures and Tesoros training	23
Other	7
Ensure that all coaches are part of a workgroup	0

Source. TLI Fall 2014 Survey

Coaches/specialists were asked to select the additional professional development opportunities 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 Opportunity/Training Needs (n = 29)**

Additional professional development need	% 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 Fall 2014 Survey

**Benefits as a result of TLI.** Coaches/specialists (n = 29) shared the benefits they had 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 to 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 [Campus improvement Plan]. Literacy has become a focus!"
- "Our K [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 [training]. 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 [professional development activities] 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 5 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 posttesting 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 = 28) provided suggestions for improving reading and writing skills at their campuses:

- “Planning the writing that goes hand in hand with reading instruction is one part and it is recently been given some added focus. Yet, the more important part is walking the teachers through a preparation session of their lessons and then observing a rehearsal. It is already November, and we cannot get past the preparation to an actual lesson rehearsal meeting.”
- “I believe teachers will benefit from a [professional development activity] on how to teach the writing process to their students. I have noticed not everybody knows how to do it, how long should it take, how to help the student during the process. It will be great to have the same program or system in our campus.”
- “Systems change, such as small group, behavior/classroom management, and encouraging literacy stations/centers to encourage small group opportunities. Interventions need to happen, and the campus needs a system in place to understand how to look at data and provide prescriptive lessons for different groups of students based on needs.”
- “More opportunities for the incorporation of both skills in centers. A systematic structure implemented for vocabulary instruction.”
- “We need more [professional development activities] on writing for the primary grades. We need to continue providing reading [professional development activities] for teachers and make sure that they are implementing the different strategies that are being modeled for them. Also, videotaping some of these strategies/routines would help. Sometimes you take notes on the strategies/routines, but you need to be able to view the strategies presented by the presenter to make sure that they are being implemented correctly.”
- “We need a stronger focus on writing for 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders.”
- “Additional small group sessions of professional development [activities] for all content area, including electives.”
- “Provide ongoing professional development [training] in reading and writing for new teachers.”